

A celebration of life

Deborah Elizabeth Smith

3rd November 1958 – 12th August 2020

12 Noon – 1pm, Thursday 27th March 2020 At Poole Crematorium, Dorset



a personal goodbye

Humanist
Ceremonies

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TRIBUTE

I am indebted to Colin for helping me create this tribute. I learned that Debbie was fiercely independent and did not suffer fools gladly - but she was the most kind, caring and giving person you could meet, with strong views of right from wrong. She was loyal and freely gave her time to anyone who needed it. When I asked what made Debbie proud, I was told her house and her son, she was so proud of Simon.

Debbie listened to popular and meditative music. She wasn't a huge reader but enjoyed Lord of the Rings, Harry Potter, King Arthur in fact anything historical and she loved any film with magic or dragons. She enjoyed cooking roast dinners, pasta, paella and Colin tells me her diced bacon and egg butties were the best.

She enjoyed beach holidays and sight-seeing, European city breaks and visiting different places in the UK. Debbie also liked a tippie – vodka with coke or ginger beer and of course wine, particularly Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand but above all, she was her happiest when entertaining close family and friends and just “*being*” at home with Colin. She loved playing parlour games. Many happy evenings were spent, even if their guests were indecent in the number of times they would win the games.

Debbie was born in Tukuyu, Tanzania, East Africa on November 3rd 1958, the youngest of three children to Harry and Doreen Smith. She had two brothers – Nicholas, who is sadly no longer with us and Gregory, whose whereabouts are unknown.

Harry worked for the local electricity supply company and Doreen stayed at home to keep everything in check – as much in check as she could because Debbie was a handful. Not naughty... but just too full of excitement and mischief. The two boys were no problem, they were being educated back in the UK but Debbie was a different matter! Her younger years were something like out of the film Born Free. Living in the vast expanse of East Africa, Debbie would often spend time with servants and play with the local children, as expatriate children were not often nearby.

Debbie was often reprimanded by her parents as she just couldn't resist an adventure. To try and limit her escapades, she would spend time in the Land Rover with her father, going about his work. It was probably during this time; she learned the rudiments of car mechanics as services such as the RAC were not a common sight in Africa. However, Debbie was resourceful and would often steal away to try and swim with the local hippos.

Following in her elder brothers' footsteps, Debbie was sent to England for an education. She was around seven years old and it did not go down well at all with her.

She made two initial attempts to abscond, both failed. The third however, was highly successful! Now a year older at the age of 8, it would appear that she stole into the school office and took her open-ended plane ticket, which was supposedly in safe-keeping for the return home at end of term.

She somehow travelled to Heathrow, cleared security and boarded the plane. By the time the flight had reached its destination, the crew had realised that something was amiss and they made contact with her father to ensure that Debbie was safely collected. Both parents made the decision at this point that formal schooling was not the best route for one so resourceful

It was either cunning, or sheer luck that Debbie returned home safe, to Africa. You cannot imagine this happening today.

The family returned to the UK in 1968 when Debbie was ten years old. Her father set up a taxi business and they settled, after a period of adjustment - being without servants, without sunshine and even worse without indoor toilets. Just as significant was the fact that Debbie arrived without friends in the UK, however with her easy nature, she soon made them and met Sally. They remained lifelong friends, despite moving miles away from each other.

While still at school, Debbie worked in a local care home and covered a wide range of tasks, this gave her a good base for her future work ethic. Throughout Debbie's life she showed her resourcefulness in a number of successful careers such as a police cadet, management trainee at Parker Pens and later at C&A in a managerial role. This role found her liaising with a team of software developers and this led her to a future in Information Technology.

In 1979 wedding bells chimed and she married Chris. They spent a lot of time out and about riding their motorbikes and most years would go to the TT races on the Isle of Man. Then along came Simon. Debbie continued to work to support the family and maintained that once she had worked out how she became a mum, it wouldn't be happening again and so, Simon remained an only child and the apple of her eye.

In 1994 the marriage came to an end. At times it must have felt like mother and son against the world, especially when the marriage was proving difficult and Debbie was diagnosed with stage 4 breast cancer. The signs were not good, but with her fighting spirit, huge support of her son Simon, who was only 8 or 9 years old at the time, and help from her brother Nicholas and sister in law Marie – Debbie defied the odds. Her health, over a long period continued to improve.

Simon left school and chose to join the Army, where he met his good friend Carl. They went on to join the Tank Regiment and completed some of their training at Bovington, before being stationed in Germany. On occasion, Simon and some of the boys would call in to see Debbie on their way home. She would make them her special bacon and egg mashed up butties and she would always make sure that those with an onward journey got some rest.

Debbie had a career change in her early 30s when she joined Bournemouth and Poole College as an Information and Technology lecturer. It became more of a vocation than a job.

As well as significant efforts into ensuring student progression, she was industrious behind the scenes and created documents and a system of working which ensured efficient student administration.

She also took on the role of internal invigilation to ensure standards and procedures were being met. For someone who was dyslexic, to thrive in this kind of work said much about her determination and resourcefulness.

It can be said that many young students are indebted to Debbie's efforts and although it is now a somewhat overused term, the word "Legend" was often said about her. Debbie recently received a long service award for completing 25 years at the college.

In a letter Colin received recently from Diane, Principal and Chief Executive of Bournemouth and Poole College, it says –

"Dear Colin,

Debbie was a very well-regarded colleague and teacher and I know that her former colleagues are very sad to hear the news.

Debbie was a true character, but what I will particularly remember about her, is her care for her students. She placed as much importance on nurturing them as on teaching them, they flourished and did well. For this many, many students have good reason to be grateful to her.

On behalf of all the staff at the college, I send my condolences and very best wishes to you, Simon and the rest of Debbie's family"

In 2002 Colin and Debbie met, thanks in part to her good friend Barb. It was the easiest thing in the world to let the relationship develop, some things in life are just meant to be. Colin was a steadying influence as Debbie and Barb were showing signs of growing old disgracefully.

Over time Colin and Debbie shared many interests, including an Africa connection. They held similar views and opinions.

Colin was a mature student when they first met, and Debbie had an ability to learn anything fast. It wasn't long before she became an invaluable research aide for his studies, while he worked overseas. She readied final assessments and presentations in subjects she had previously known little about.

The next piece of music has special meaning to Debbie and Colin and is from the Lion King – Can you Feel the Love Tonight, by Elton John.

Debbie had a great sense of humour and often bounced around in a whirlwind. She was akin to Tigger, and loved that Winnie the Pooh character, so much so, she had him on a keyring so she could carry him around wherever she went.

She often had funny things, or accidents, happen to her – I asked Colin if he could give me some examples, there were lots - but here are a few.

Debbie suffered with awful hay fever and she is probably in a very small percentage of people that could actually have uncontrollable sneezing fits in the middle of a desert.

There is a longstanding joke that Colin threw her over a fence, when in reality, she wanted to take a shortcut, when they were out walking, and asked Colin to *bump* her over the fence. She landed on soft spongy leaves and ended up twisting her ankle, causing Colin to abandon her and make a run for the car to get her to hospital. Colin sprinted past a jogger, who was so shocked it made him stop in his tracks - Colin will never forget the look on his face.

Debbie created havoc in Cairo Airport by forgetting to remove and bag all the cigarette lighters from her pockets and handbag. This resulted in her having to go back through the scanner five times. Frustration kicked in and she accused the security lady of wanting to set up a local bazaar selling British lighters. Debbie lost her patience and proceeded to tip the entire contents of her bag out. The security staff were sympathetic but awestruck at how much debris came out. Never have so many lighters, memory sticks, pens and tissues been on view in one go from one handbag.

She was an excellent map reader and navigator but got confused with her left and right, which could lead to some hasty manoeuvres or the occasional, “let’s go around the block and start that bit again”.

Debbie was also banned from using ladders as she would step backwards off them and bounce on the floor.

Colin requested that this short piece of music be played, as it really sums up the “Tigger” part of Debbie’s character and needs no introduction.

Despite Debbie being unwell for some time, she remained positive, kind and cheerful. Unfortunately, a diagnosis was made that cancer had returned, but this time in her pancreas and it was terminal. Debbie was so grateful that she got the chance to see her son grow up, get married to Kayleigh and settle.

Colin and Debbie were married in March this year. Colin says that they should have done it years ago, but they were just happy being happy, and being a couple. The wedding day was a beautiful bright spot in what has been a difficult time for everyone. That day will always shine.



Poems Included in the Ceremony



*Debbie's friend Barbara read the poem entitled,
Pardon me for not getting up by Kelly Roper.*

Pardon me for not getting up

Oh dear, if you're reading this right now
I must have given up the ghost.
I hope you can forgive me for being
Such a stiff and unwelcoming host.
Just talk amongst yourself my friends
And share a toast or two,
For I am sure you will remember well
How I loved to drink with you.
Don't worry about mourning me,
I was never easy to offend,
Feel free to share a story at my expense
And we'll have a good laugh at the end.



*Debbie's friend Sally read the poem entitled,
My Best Friend by Staci Selke with some adaptations made by Sally*

My Best Friend

I sit around and wonder and watch the days go by.
I look at all the pictures and ask, why did you have to die?

You've always been there for me, because you were my best friend,
and I was always there for you, until the very end.

Today it's time to let you go, your spirit now is free,
Although you're not truly gone, as you'll live inside of me.

So when I have to leave you, at your resting place,
I will always remember, your smiling, lovely face.

Even though I will miss you, and think about you every day,
you'll always be my best friend, and that's all I have to say.



Debbie's husband Colin read the poem entitled, You Were Someone I Could Talk To.

You were someone I could talk to

You were someone I could talk to;
That no one can replace.
You were someone I could laugh with;
'Til tears ran down my face.
You were someone I could turn to;
When I needed a helping hand;
You were someone I could count on;
To advise and understand.
You were someone I thought more of;
As each year came to an end.
You were my dearest wife;
And also, my dearest friend.
Thank you for the memories;
That are yours and mine alone;
For they recall so many special moments;
That you and I have known.



Debbie's friend Marie read the poem entitled, She is Gone by David Harkins

Poem – She is Gone

You can shed tears that she is gone
Or you can smile because she has lived

You can close your eyes and pray that she will come back
Or you can open your eyes and see all that she has left

Your heart can be empty because you can't see her
Or you can be full of the love that you shared

You can turn your back on tomorrow and live yesterday
Or you can be happy for tomorrow because of yesterday

You can remember her and only that she is gone
Or you can cherish her memory and let it live on

You can cry and close your mind, be empty and turn your back
Or you can do what she would want: smile, open your eyes, love and go on.





Music Included in the Ceremony



Processional Music

The Seal Lullaby – Eric Whitacre



Music

Can You Feel the Love Tonight – Elton John



Music to make you Smile

The Wonderful Thing About Tiggers - Sung by Jim Cummings



Music for Reflection

Landslide by Fleetwood Mac



Recessional Music

Starman – David Bowie

