

A celebration of life

Sudha Young

5th November 1935 – 23rd July 2020

3.30pm, Monday 10th August, Randall's Park Crematorium

a personal goodbye

Humanist
Ceremonies

Humanists UK is a registered charity no. 285987 and limited company no. 228781 in England and Wales. Humanists UK, 39 Moreland Street, London, EC1V8BB, 020 7324 3060

The tribute will start with Harshad, Sudha's brother, who would like to share with you some personal memories of his sister.

Sudha was our eldest sister, who led an incredibly adventurous life, and trail blazed paths for all the five siblings who followed her. The Indian community in Kenya where Sudha was brought up was very conservative, which makes her life even more remarkable.

She was an excellent student and had a distinguished professional and academic life. She went to India for her medical training and I remember vividly seeing her off at Eastleigh airport in 1952. It was a big event as she was the first person in our family to travel by air - I was 7yrs old. She was the first Kenya born Indian woman doctor to return and work for the colonial medical service and publishing important research papers in Kwashiorkor and Leukaemia.

But today I will not spend long talking about her professional or academic life. I want to paint a picture of my dear sister's personal qualities from my recollections.

I remember Sudha for four main human qualities:

1. Firstly she was very inquisitive and curiosity driven - in both science and in humanities, but she also read extensively. She was passionate about literature and her bookshelves were full of Naipaul, Rusdi, Lessing and Waugh. Surbhi remembers being introduced by Sudha to the Australian author Patrick White, who was a particular favourite.

Even later in life she picked up new hobbies and interests. She developed a keen interest in music and enjoyed sitting next to Liz at Yehudi Menuhin School concerts and talking to her about the musical performances and composers. She also studied French and wine appreciation.

2. Secondly Sudha was very caring and generous. She loved buying gifts. Surbhi remembers Sudha bought her first decent badminton racket when she left for University. She loved buying party dresses for my daughters, and bought them well into their teens when they wanted to wear jeans and t shirts! And more recently took great delight in doing the same for her great nieces Mischa and Emeline. At Christmas time she would always arrive at our home laden with homemade puddings, sauces and flowers.

Her three grandchildren in New Zealand; Alexander, Kit and Arthur, meant the world to her, and she missed them hugely, travelling there several times and offering support from afar. They have asked me to emphasise how much they loved her.

3. The third quality I want to bring out is her outspokenness. Sudha had strong views and beliefs and was never afraid to tell you about them! She was progressive, she believed strongly in feminist causes and frequently admonished men for not supporting wives who had career interests. She engaged with politics and was very upset by Brexit.... Although she was brought up as a Hindu, she didn't believe in religions or the after-life - hence the humanist service today.

She liked to argue and to put people through their paces, whether it was the owner of the Indian sweet shop bringing out the 10th variety of barfi, or wanting her glass of wine topped up.

4. The fourth quality I want to speak about was her creativeness - Surbhi remembers her exquisite embroidery and she was also a first class and original cook -we all loved her mango ice creams and elaborate Gujarati feasts.

She was also a huge amount of fun, and although she suffered greatly in the last years of her life, I remember her with a twinkle in her eye, hugging my daughters and laughing loudly.

As you can see there is much to celebrate in her life. It was a great privilege to have her as my sister. Thank you.

Sudha was born on the fifth of November 1935, the first child to her parents, Hiralal and Kalavati Topiwala. Her mother had had a successful career as a head teacher in Mumbai before she met her father, who worked as a GP in Kenya: she inherited an ambitious, independent and curious nature from them. Sudha was soon joined by siblings Hansa, Mina, Panna, Harshad and Surbhi. We remember Hansa and Panna, who are no longer with us, as part of today's ceremony.

Sudha was a friendly, intelligent and beautiful child. She caught the attention of film industry talent spotters as a young girl, but her parents knew she was destined for academia, and at 16, she was accepted into pre-medical school. Here, she thrived, qualifying in the top 50 of 2000 applicants to be awarded a place at the Grand Medical College in Mumbai at age 18.

Sudha excelled at medical college, passing all her final exams first time, and returned to Kenya to begin work at a hospital in Nairobi, where she met her first husband. This marriage blessed Sudha with her son Yatin. Sadly, the marriage was not a happy one, and Sudha made the decision to further her career in order to support Yatin independently. This difficult decision meant leaving him in Kenya under the care of her mother, to study in England.

Having amassed the necessary medical qualifications, Sudha returned to Kenya, settling in Mombasa where she was the Coast General Hospital Consultant Haematologist. Yatin attended boarding school so she could work, but Sudha needed childcare for the holidays. She heard on the grapevine about another single parent with 2 children, who employed a housekeeper to care for them during school holidays. Sudha met Douglas and they made an arrangement to share the childcare between the two families. Little did she know at the time, that this would mark the beginning of a whole new chapter for them both.

Douglas worked as an engineer for Cable and Wireless and was also recently divorced. He was immediately struck by Sudha's beauty and strength of character. In awe of her impressive list of medical qualifications and inspired by her adventurous spirit, he spent his free time with her whenever possible. They took every opportunity to appreciate Kenyan outdoor life, taking picnics on long walks in the Mua Hills, surfing and swimming in the sea, and going on safari trips. They soon discovered that they were in love. On the 1st of April 1972, with a simple, civil ceremony, they were married. They immediately became a household of five, and Sudha embraced Dianne and Christopher as the completion of her family.

Due to Douglas' job, the couple would spend much time apart throughout their working lives. After they were married, Sudha continued to work at the Nairobi General Hospital as a Haematologist, and as a university lecturer, while Douglas completed his tour overseas with Cable and Wireless, as Engineer in Charge of the Ngong Radio Receiving Station. When Douglas was posted to Bahrain, Sudha decided to return to England to get a job and buy a house for the family. The children were all at boarding schools and needed a home to return to in the holidays. Sudha wasted no time in creating a new life for them all in England. Before long she had secured a job at Kingston General Hospital, bought a semi-detached house in New Malden and enrolled Yatin at the Tiffin School in Kingston.

Her career in medicine was an important part of Sudha's life. She worked both at St George's and St Thomas' hospitals in London over the years, and was extremely good at her job. Often the bearer of bad news for cancer patients and their families, her bedside manner and ability to connect with all walks of life stood her in good stead. She loved her job and completed it with the hard work and commitment that characterised all her pursuits. It was therefore a great sadness to Sudha to have to take extensive periods of absence due to two prolapsed discs. She underwent operations, long periods of bed rest and a great deal of pain, but showed a determination to get back on her feet and return to work.

The decision was made to move from their house in New Malden and seek their forever home. As ever, Sudha took the lead and was the driving force in selecting the new house, driving all around Surrey in the evenings after work and weekends. They sealed the deal whilst Douglas was on leave from his post in Saudi Arabia and in 1982, received the keys for their bungalow in Orchard Close, in the quiet and leafy, Surrey Village of Horsley.

By this time, Yatin, Dianne and Christopher were spreading their wings. Yatin, followed in his mother's footsteps and trained to become a doctor at Guy's Hospital in London. Douglas recalled a happy memory of the time Yatin invited a large group of fellow medical students, home to sample his mother's Indian cooking. Needless to say, Sudha took the challenge seriously and a frenzied four days of preparations ensued, culminating in an Indian feast to behold. A good night was had by all and the living room was turned into a dormitory for the happy guests. Ever the willing host, Sudha took this all in her stride and loved every minute!

Yatin completed his medical training, and ultimately settled in New Zealand where he lived with his wife, Shan, and their three children. Douglas and Sudha had many happy memories of their visits Down-Under, where they took coach trips around the South Island, and on one occasion travelled the east coast of Australia. Sudha doted on her three grandchildren. She followed with interest Alexander's career in law, Arthur's accomplishments in robotics and Kit's devotion to charity work, and was always so proud of their achievements.

Sudha had taught herself both Indian and English cooking, and the kitchen was definitely her domain, and so when Douglas was the first to retire, his culinary efforts did not lend themselves well to his new role as house husband! However, in 1993 Sudha's second prolapsed disc did not mend quickly enough for the NHS, and she too retired.

In retirement, a new passion for gardening began and Sudha could often be found tending to her runner beans, courgettes and floral displays, whilst Douglas spent time in his hut doing carpentry. Sudha's love of story made her an avid reader and a fan of the theatre and she and Douglas took many trips to the National on London's Southbank.

Sudha and Douglas continued to feed their thirst for knowledge and development while in retirement, joining the Horsley branch of the University of the third age. Sudha became a keen and knowledgeable member of the wine tasting group. Douglas takes up the story here. He wrote:

"When her turn came around to present wines to the group, she was asked if she would present wines to go with curry. She took the challenge very seriously, and bought 12 bottles of what she thought would be suitable wines. There followed a period of two weeks when she opened two bottles of wine every night for dinner. Dinner was a variety of Indian fare that she prepared. I was presented with half a glass of wine from each bottle with each meal, to make a decision about which 'went' with the meal, and which did not. The partly empty bottles were then labelled with a tick or a cross, stoppered, and put to one side on the sideboard. At the end of week six there were 12 partly opened bottles left, but she had the names of the wines she wanted to buy for the group. When the time came, she

accumulated various Indian foods for the presentation, and poured her selection of wines that should accompany them, with explanations of why. She made no mention of how she had intoxicated her husband every night for two weeks beforehand! The group were impressed and went home full and happy. “

Sudha and Douglas enjoyed travel a great deal. They sampled a different cocktail each night in Barbados, went whale watching with Hansa, Mina and Dhanvant in Maui, drove the length of Europe to visit Dianne in Italy, returned to Kenya to safari for old time's sake, and experienced the snow in summer on the North Cape in Norway. Sudha was the driving force behind each trip and Douglas joked that he was there to carry the bags! He admits that she did make a great travel agent! Their home at Orchard Close is adorned with mementos and photographs from all over the World, and their lives were clearly enriched by experiencing so many beautiful places and cultures.

Sadly, Sudha's later years were plagued with late onset Bipolar Disorder, and long periods of depression, compounded by Yatin's death three years ago. We remember him as part of today's ceremony. She was also diagnosed with Alzheimer's Disease last year which she found particularly difficult to deal with. Finally, on the 23rd of July, in the wonderful care of the NHS, to which she had devoted so many years of her own life, she took her final breath.

It would be wrong to dwell on these final years of difficulty, when, as we have heard today, she had led such a boundless, spirited, productive existence. The story told today is one of strength and determination, warmth and kindness, ambition and adventure. Sudha has experienced the highs and lows of life; she has experienced the fullness of the human condition.