

A celebration of life

Carole Yvonne Caulton

26 September 1944 – 2 April 2021

Wednesday 21 April 2021, Rose Hill Burial Ground, Birkby



a personal goodbye

Humanist
Ceremonies

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Dianne wrote of her little sister, 'Carole was born on 26th September 1944, in Richmond, Yorkshire. I was hesitant at first, telling my mother, Mummy, to "send her back on the 'bus". I was less than two years old at the time but soon we became each other's constant companion and playmate.' One reason for the closeness of the sisters' relationship was their father's occupation. Gordon was in the Army, so he, Dorothy and their two girls lived in various military houses over the years; the regular moves made it hard to make and maintain friendships, but Dianne and Carole always had each other to turn to. They began their education at a convent school in Richmond, but then Gordon was posted to the newly-independent Pakistan. As Dianne said, 'It took a long time to get to Pakistan in 1950, with our 'plane stopping at exotic places like Nice, Rome, Cyprus, Iraq and Persia. It all sounds very grand but, as we were on government business, there was no stopping for sightseeing.' The girls ended up at school in Abbottabad, and have fond memories of their teachers there, as well as later back in the UK, at the academies in Sandhurst and Aldershot. Gordon was in the Army Physical Training Corps, and at Sandhurst was in charge of training the UK Olympics Gymnastics team; Carole was particularly proud of a photo of her father from this era performing a one-handed handstand.

Even after Dianne moved out of home to start her nursing training, she and Carole found any and every excuse to get together, often going out for the day with their mother. Throughout their lives, whatever the reason – high days, holidays, shopping sprees or parties for their ever-growing families – they would get their heads together and make a plan (though you had to be careful they didn't get a little carried away!).

Dianne spoke of Carole's sense of fun and adventure, and her rebellious side. 'Aged 6, she jumped off the top board at the swimming pool with Daddy, even though she was unable to swim at the time. She painted her hair silver in her late teens; she was working at the Farnborough Air Show as a summer job and didn't want to look boring. She arrived at her niece's 21st birthday as a punk, wearing a black plastic bin-liner for a skirt. Even aged 74, she risked a zipwire dive in the Welsh hills.'

Carole studied at Farnborough Secretarial College, before she met and married her first husband, Bob. She was delighted to become a mum to Stephen and David, who described her to me variously as, 'great fun', 'a rock for us both', and 'the best mum ever'. Carole and Dianne continued to get together as their families grew, Carole and the boys enjoying days out on Hayling Island with Dianne and her children, Matthew and Stephanie; both mums were brilliant at making experiences for their kids, even down to little things like Carole putting crisps in their sandwiches so no-one would notice the sand that inevitably snuck in there too!

Carole cared for Bob through his own diagnosis with cancer, and encouraged him when he was offered an assignment with IBM in the USA. She was always keen to explore new horizons, and relished the challenge of setting up home on a new continent. The family moved to Pleasant Valley in north New York State, getting to know their neighbours on Rawls Road, most of whom also worked for IBM, as well as the Strain family, who owned a large area of land nearby.

All the children went to school together, and the families often socialised, enjoying the local lake, and the swimming pool at the Rawls' house. The lake would freeze over in winter and Don Strain would drive his tractor over the ice to check it was safe for skating. Dianne came to visit, and she, Carole and the four children made a memorable trip to Washington and got stuck in a snowstorm. There were logging parties in the Strain's woods to build up winter fuel, and a trip to their ski lodge in Vermont and their other residence on Nantucket Island. Much of the time otherwise was spent in and around the Rawls' pool.

They were happy times, in general, though they also saw the end of Carole and Bob's marriage. But a new chapter in her life opened up with Graham, and the emotional turmoil of their early time together forged a bond that is reflected in the tune that became their song, which we are going to hear now.

(Music heard: Bridge Over Troubled Water by Simon and Garfunkel)

Graham said that Carole told him it was love at first sight when they met, until he stood up and she realised he was four inches shorter than her! Regardless, in love they were, and once they had both returned to the UK they moved in together, forming a blended family of five children, as Stephen and David joined Graham's three, Jaquie, Richard and Caroline. Caroline said she and Carole bonded even while in the US over girly things, Carole having always wanted a daughter, and she acted as something of a buffer for Caroline with her three brothers to put up with. Caroline remembers going on holiday to France in the big American station wagon that also crossed the Atlantic with them: 'Driving through Paris, me the only one of the five kids in the back who was awake, talking to Dad and Carole at 2am.'

Graham and Carole made a lovely home at Crofton Farmhouse in Hill Head, and that house became the favourite place for family gatherings, especially at Christmas: tinsel, balloons and bubbly galore. It saw at least one production of a family pantomime, Stephen and Richard excelling as the Ugly Sisters! And it was the venue for two family weddings: Jaquie's marriage to Steve, and Dianne's to Peter. Stephen went on to marry Peter's daughter, Louisa, occasioning Peter to coin the phrase 'fuzzy family', and Carole made a very welcoming mother-in-law.

She always had an incredible curiosity about the world, never felt it was too late to learn something new. In Portsmouth she joined a local choir, and taught adults with learning difficulties. She also volunteered with Oxfam in Hampshire and on the Isle of Wight; she had a significant body of knowledge regarding antiques, from her own hunts through fairs and charity shops, and she put that to good use as a valuer for the charity, as well as in expanding her ever-growing collection of small ornaments and miniature boxes. She went on to volunteer at the 2012 Olympics as well, guiding people to the appropriate transport at the Olympic park.

In her late forties, Carole wanted a new challenge, and so undertook a geography degree at Portsmouth, surviving even the statistics paper and gaining her qualification aged 48. She indulged her fascination with the landscape on the many fabulous journeys she and Graham took over the years, especially once they had both retired. From the Galapagos to the South American rainforest, Namibia to Cuba, China to Chile and the even less well-trodden paths of North Korea and Iran, there was no adventure Carole wasn't game for. Though Dianne commented that she did also like her 'stylish hotels, and to walk around colourful bazaars and souks'. Carole and Graham even went down to Antarctica, taking in the stunning scenery and the wildlife, and also meeting another couple who became very close friends; Graham was touched when half of that couple, Ann, paid Carole the compliment of saying that, of all her friends, (of which there are many), Carole was the one with whom she felt most relaxed and at ease.

I'm sure many people would share that sentiment; Carole was such good company, and made friends wherever she went, including after she and Graham moved to Holmfirth. She joined Zumba classes, the U3A choir (of which she served as Treasurer), a games club and a book club – she was an avid reader, and enjoyed expanding her book collection. One of her good friends from Zumba, Brenda, also became a regular walking buddy, along with another friend, Catherine, the three of them still getting out right up until Christmas. Carole also enjoyed music, from Buddy Holly to Neil Diamond, via ballet and opera, and she and Graham regularly made the trip across to see the Liverpool Philharmonic perform. Though she was equally happy heading out to gigs with Stephen, including the likes of Meatloaf!

Carole had wanted to move up north to be nearby while Stephen was facing his own health issues, plus all four of the grandchildren were in Yorkshire. Carole was a doting Nana to Belle and Oscar, and Nana Rolee to Joe and Sarah, and had a really special relationship with them. She was never worried about being silly, loved acting the fool, bouncing on the beds or rolling around on the floor with them when they were little. They loved coming to stay in the 'house on the hill', which was always warm, not just thanks to Carole's Aga but also to the warmth of the welcome she gave them. She had a knack of really listening to what her grandchildren told her, was genuinely interested in each of their enthusiasms. Oscar was perhaps inspired by his nana's passion for the land, buying him fossils and explaining rock formations; certainly his choice to study for a degree in Environmental Geography demonstrates their shared interest.

David, also, told me about the way his mum always had time for people, always listened, and gave the best hugs. When she came down to visit him in Portsmouth, she enjoyed a bit of luxury in the spa and sauna of the Solent View Hotel, but her favourite place with her youngest was down on the beach.

By his own admission, David, and Stephen, didn't make life too easy for their mum when they were teenagers, but Carole was so proud of the men they grew into, and the paths their lives took. She may even have been a little envious of David's most recent adventure, helping sail one of his satellites by sea to French Guiana – sounds right up Carole's street! David, and Stephen, were equally proud of their mum, of the way she overcame the challenges that faced her and triumphed in everything she did.

Carole was generous with her time and her energy, as a volunteer but especially with her family. Dianne cherishes memories of their many weekends away together, in particular on the Eurostar to Paris, and though she and Carole couldn't get together quite as much in recent years, they were always on the phone to each other. Dianne described her sister as 'my travel guide, my shopping and fashion adviser, my confidante and my 'bestest' friend'. While David said, 'She was a mum, wife, sister, traveller, counsellor, therapist, nurse, chef, driver, cleaner, seamstress, gardener, animal lover, antiquarian, hugger, listener, adviser and all-round amazing person.'

Carole made the most of every moment she had, and though she has gone far too quickly from your sides, she has left a part of herself in each and every one of you. In a literal sense, something of her lives on, in Stephen and David, and Belle and Oscar, but in an equally real way she lives in all of your memories. Vivacious, kind, loving and forgiving, Carole was something different to each of you, but to you all she was precious, and always will be.