

A celebration of life Helen Demeter Imogen Booker (Ella)

17th February 1983 – 6th March 2021

12.30 pm, 16th April 2021, Eden Valley Burial Ground, Kent

a personal goodbye

Humanist
Ceremonies

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The Tribute

We're going to start the tribute to Ella by hearing from two of her closest friends, Chally and Amelia

Chally, I believe you're going to start.

Hello everyone.

I'm Chally and this is Amelia. We'd like to say a few words about our dear chum. I'll start...And then I'll hand over to Amelia for Ella's "salad days". If it's okay with you, I'm going to read from my notes because I don't trust myself today.

Ella and I met 20 years ago when we worked for Canterbury Cathedral Gift Shop together. I learnt quickly that Ella was a fantastic giggler. She had a tremendous sense of humour and would often giggle so much that her cheeks went pink and her eyes would water.

Ella and I would often talk about the Bonsai-Cactus theory of friendship. Friends who fall into the Bonsai category need their relationship with you tended regularly and frequently, whereas Cactus friends need minimal maintenance. You can not-see a Cactus-friend for ages and then when you do meet up it's like no time has passed at all.

Ella was a Cactus; easy peasy to get on with and always, always there for you. We've been chatting to some of you about Ella over the last few weeks, collecting memories, stories and anecdotes. We'd like to collect even more. We thought we could put them in an album for us all to share. Ella liked creating albums, so I think she'd approve.

The author Chuck Palahniuk wrote "you are a different human being to everyone you meet." In Ella's case, I'm not convinced that this is true because she was so genuine and honest about herself.

Our girl was colourful. Literally colourful from head to toe, dressed in the brightest of jewel colours. She was so pretty with that amazing grey streak in her hair and the cutest button nose that you ever did see.

Ella cooked beautiful meals, often involving a butternut squash, and could make a pizza out of thin air. She was at every party and in every pub, yet somehow was also always at home under a blanket and with a cat. She was a clever knitter, an enthusiastic crafter and a talented potter. She sent texts to her father, Alex, composed entirely of emojis. She was well-versed on many flavours of gin, kept an untidy house, cultivated and maintained solid relationships with many cats, was rubbish at gardening (unless we're talking about succulents), and played a never-ending game of Punch Buggy Yellow Car with Tom. She was generous and kind hearted. She'd put on a film and talk the whole way through it.

Let's not forget what a tough, self-reliant cookie Ella was too. When her mum, Julia, became increasingly ill Ella worked hard to look after her and keep her safe. Ella was independent and strong and would just get on with things. She was like that throughout her hip replacement too, joking that her new ceramic hip must be made by Emma Bridgewater. She was brave.

Above all Ella was loyal. As your chum, she was on your side no matter what. Even when you both knew that you were wrong. I'm so glad and grateful for Ella, and I'm incredibly proud to have had her as my friend.

Thank you, Chally. And now Amelia

I can't emphasise enough what Chally has said about Ella, we are all so lucky to have had her in our lives. I had the pleasure of knowing Ella in her childhood, meeting her in playgroup when we were 3. My mum spotted her first and thought – perfect what a lovely little girl to be friends with Amelia. Nearby lived Maureen and Daniel and Yasmina – also firm friends of Ella and Julia's – making up our extended Clapham family.

I saw many of Ella's fantastic talents grow from seedlings. Ella's love of all things creative were fed by the vibrant home she grew up in with Julia, there was always a painting project underway or new hand-made clothes being made for her in bright primary colours – a mini Ella in a yellow rain coat and red wellies is an image etched into my mind. It was so heart-warming to then see Ella's joy in reconnecting with her dad and discovering her family in Norway and Jersey – again to find that those artistic juices are a strong family trait.

Ella explored art and design in and outside of school – in the summer holidays we went to an art club where she had her first go at pottery – the start of something great!, at school we could be found in the DT department designing chairs and lamps or in the smoky art department doing oil paintings. I was so excited the fact that Ella recently found so much love in ceramics, and scheming with her over new ideas for her fish themed designs. Her hands are magic, they were also really warm, and I often had to rely on Ella to be my hot water bottle on cold days walking to school. Most of all Ella was so patient with friends - she listened to all my teenage boy-dramas again again and again – it must have been so boring (and didn't stop when we grew up)! I was sad when Ella moved to Canterbury, but that sentiment passed quickly as she blossomed there, and met sooo many lovely people who loved and supported her. She brought so much joy to everyone and lived life to the full. She was an inspiration.

As Amelia's told us, Ella grew up in what she called "a creative swirl" in Clapham, where Ella had her first cat, named "Wurlitzer Dervish" but generally known as Wurley. Wurley was of course to be the first in a long line of cats.

Later on, the friends went on to Secondary School together, and Ella, Amelia and Kate took up the Millennium Challenge in the year 2000, climbing Snowden and walking to Lands End.

They won the Challenge – a brave feat, particularly for Ella. Their prize was a trip to Paris, a huge treat for three teenage girls.

But before that, in 1991, the family holidays in Jersey started. Over the years, all three of Alex's daughters, Ella, Frøya and Alexandra would spend long summer holidays with their father, their aunt Caroline and her family, and their grandparents, on the island. Caroline remembers the eight year old Ella vividly, as a delightful, wide-eyed, inquisitive child. They were idyllic holidays, with sunny days on the beach, surfing, and trips to the zoo. The sort of summer holidays which every child imagines, and Ella took to them with the same kind of joy and wonder with which she faced the world all her life. The three half sisters got to know each other during these summers. Frøya, four years younger, remembers how she used to follow her big sister around with devotion – a devotion not always appreciated by Ella. Ella got to be the big sister to Frøya again years later, when Frøya was applying for university and stayed with her. Apparently Ella had great patience with this 20-year old penniless party-animal who'd suddenly descend on her.

As Julia became ill, Caroline and John became, more and more, surrogate parents for Ella. John thought of her as his eldest daughter, and both the girls saw Ella as their big sister. Ella relied on John to help her with the final versions of her academic work, and she and Caroline would put the world to rights over a glass of wine. And, together with her grandparents, Tony and Sally, they looked after her when she had to have a hip replacement.

Ella regularly visited Alex in Norway too, where she loved the landscape, the culture, the architecture and the art. In fact, when she was doing her BA in jewellery design she did her thesis on Norwegian jewellery.

Ella did her first degree at University of the Creative Arts in Rochester. She then did teacher training, and taught design and technology for a while, before doing a Masters in Conservation, wanting to use what she had learned about metals to preserve historic artefacts. She found the world of conservation hard to get into, though she did work for the Cathedral and for private clients.

Whether for work or for pleasure, Ella had a fantastic creative drive, be it for painting, drawing, photography or, later, ceramics. These are skills and enthusiasms she shares with both sides of the family. You've already heard about her mother's creativity, and on her father's side, Alex is an artist, Frøya studied design, and Alexandra is studying textiles.

Her creative drive was fuelled by her observational powers – she would notice a pebble in the water, the sun catching it, the eddies moving round it, when others just saw a stream. A few years ago, when Alex was having an exhibition in Oslo, Ella came to visit. They drove from Trondheim to Oslo together. As they drove, Ella kept on asking Alex to stop, so she could take a photo of another lake, another sight of glowing autumn colour. The six-hour journey had extended to ten hours by the time they arrived. She was unselfconscious in her pursuit of the correct angle for photography or observation. When Alex took all three of his daughters to Rome and she wanted a picture of the ceiling of Zaha Hadid's MAXXI gallery, she calmly laid down on the floor of the foyer to take it, regardless of the feet of other visitors.

Ella first tried ceramics over 30 years ago, in that summer art club in the Clapham Leisure Centre. And about four years ago she returned to it, and found she had a real skill. She had her own Etsy shop, where she sold her handmade carved pots, mostly in the Kurinuki (carved) style, and her gargoyles, no doubt inspired by her knowledge of cathedrals.

From listening to her family talk about her, and looking at photos which they kindly shared, it was obvious what FUN Ella was, and how big a hole she will leave in so many lives. She was an incorrigible photo-bomber – you couldn't point a camera at anything when Ella was around, without her grimacing face, tongue sticking out, appearing in the photo. Another habit which may have been encouraged by gargoyles! Other words used of her include, playful, mischievous, naughty (but completely without cruelty), generous, and firm in her own mind.

Occasionally she could be fierce, using her "teacher voice" to tell off lads who were yelling at Frøya, or kids messing around in the Cathedral shop. Apparently she also inherited her grandmother's capacity to give a withering look.

She was extremely accident prone. She could fall over thin air, I was told. She certainly managed to fall over on the Great Wall of China, over another passenger's luggage on the train, and just over her own wide-bottomed trousers. Her pottery mostly survived the accidents, though she did manage to drop a bag of plates she was taking to Frøya, with only a couple worthy of rescue, and to drop the lid of the same teapot seven times.

Tom and Ella first met a few years back, but finally got together about seven and a half years ago. They were originally due to be married next month, but because of Covid this had been put back to May 2022. The delay had not caused Ella to become less enthusiastic about the planning. She spent hours on the phone to her cousin Francesca in Jersey who was also planning her wedding.

Stuart, Tom's father, will now talk to us.

Where on earth do you try and make any sense of where we find ourselves today?

Ella was one of those people who touched the lives of everybody she came into contact with. Ella was such a kind loving and caring soul who only saw good in all.

When I first met Ella I thought your punching above your weight here Tom. But very soon I began to realize Ella was so much more. She was and always will be a part of our family. We will miss her every day. Ella you will forever be in our thoughts and forever in our hearts.

We love you always.

Thank you, Stuart.

Tom will now talk to us about Ella. When he has finished speaking, we will hear "How Long Will I Love You" from the movie "About Time", which Ella had chosen for their first dance at their wedding. While it plays, please take some time to remember Ella and what she meant to you. At this point some of you might want to say a private prayer.

I first met Ella at a New Years Eve party. She was seeing someone else at the time and we only had a brief conversation but afterwards I remember thinking her boyfriend was a lucky man. At the time I had no idea that I would one day be so lucky.

We crossed paths again nearly two years later at a mutual friends birthday. Neither of us were in a relationship and we gravitated to one another, the rest of the celebration becoming little more than background noise. Some years later we came across this quote that we agreed summed up that evening for us:

"It was... not love at first sight exactly, but – familiarity. Like: oh, hello, it's you. It's going to be you. Game over."

We had an effortless rapport that made it feel like we had always been together. Yet in those early days, when it seemed too soon to say, I love you, Ella queried one of my longing looks. I answered, "Just looking", which she purposefully misheard as, "just licking" and licked my nose. Such was her mischievous sense of humour. I finally found the courage to tell Ella how I felt a short time after when I caught her in my kitchen holding a teabag against her cheek to determine if it had gotten damp in the box or was simply cold.

Ella knew her own mind. She was sure of her values and was not afraid to speak up if she believed something was wrong. She was also unashamedly enthusiastic about her passions. This sense of self gave Ella a genuine charisma. Ella never tried to be the centre of attention, in fact she actively avoided it, but people were drawn to her all the same, and I never knew anyone to have so much as a bad word to say about her.

Ella had the remarkable ability to find joy in every situation, even when she had every right to be miserable, such as when she was waiting for her hip replacement. Despite the pain she was in, Ella found ways to be happy and lived her life as fully as she was able. More recently Ella turned the doldrums of lockdown into an opportunity to focus on her ceramics. Our kitchen became her pottery studio, our dining table an organised chaos only she could navigate, though not with any certainty. For Ella, working with clay was a form of therapy and meditation where she turned lumps of mud into pieces ranging from the functional to the sublime, but always beautiful.

Ella was generous with her time. If someone needed help, Ella made it her priority. To me, the best example of her compassion was few years ago. We accepted a parcel for a neighbour and ended up with it for days. They never came for it and it took several attempts for us to deliver it before Ella had some luck. He explained to Ella that he had not been home as his wife had given birth to their daughter prematurely and had been in the hospital with them.

Ella came home, told me this and then got out her wool and needles and began to knit a hat and blanket sized for a premature child as she had heard it was hard to buy clothes in such a small size. It was a selfless act of kindness towards people who were essentially strangers to us. Ella truly understood how small gestures like this could raise someone's spirits.

In the seven and a half years we had together Ella, made me happier than I knew it was possible to be. She raised me up from a low point in my life and inspired me to be a better man. I would not say I fell in love, rather that I rose in it. It was my great privilege to support Ella while she was making the world a better place for those around her.

Ella's favourite author was Terry Pratchett. In his book, "A Hat Full of Sky" the character Tiffany Aching eloquently captures a sentiment that I have found comfort in, "I'm made up of everyone I've ever met who's changed the way I think."

So much of Ella is a part of who I am, who all of us here today are, that we can keep her with us in spirit and honour the way she chose to live her life. With joy, curiosity, enthusiasm, kindness, and odd socks.

Music: How Long Will I Love You?, Ellie Goulding

Alex cannot be with us today because of Covid restrictions, but Caroline will read us some words he has written, at the end of which the coffin will be lowered.

*Ella
Beloved..
Daughter
Sister
Niece
Cousin
Companion
Friend
Beautiful child, youth and woman.*

Our loss breaks the fragile shell of understanding, grief and disbelief rush over us

When struggling to find words to fit the immensity of our sorrow, when words seem so flimsy in their reach. The thought of you shows the way.

*Ella
Loved and loving, full of colour, always reaching and growing, touching and shaping, always giving and making, generous and funny.
Ella
Curious, exploring, creative and seeing.
Ella
Shining happy with a crown of wild-flowers
Ella
The gift to us that can never be forgotten*