

A celebration of life

Jeff Fox

18 June 1963 – 5 September 2021

Wednesday 13 October 2021, Rose Hill Burial Ground



a personal goodbye

Humanist
Ceremonies

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Born in Redhill, Jeff was the youngest child by a long way to Kathleen and Bill Fox, joining his siblings Joyce, Jane, John and Jimmy. He spoke really fondly of his childhood, especially of his family, and his home and surroundings: the really long road he used to run up to meet his mum, and the massively high wall that he used to jump off. Jeff took Claire back with him to his childhood haunts, only to find that, for a man of his adult stature, the road was really short and the wall was very small! It was through Jeff's brother John that his passion for football, and for Chelsea in particular, was born, when John took Jeff to his first match. They saw Chelsea v Arsenal at Stamford Bridge, John cheering for Arsenal and Jeff becoming a dedicated and lifelong Chelsea supporter.

Jeff's parents moved to Cornwall for a time, then up to Bradford to be near Kathleen's family, and it was in Bradford that Jeff attended secondary school and made a wide circle of friends. He continued his studies, transferring to nursing in Leeds. That was a real vocation for him, and he loved the time he spent with the patients, demonstrating early on his apparently boundless compassion for others. And though the nurse training didn't work out, Jeff's nurturing capacity was evident throughout his life.

His compassion wasn't limited to other people, either. From an early age he was a passionate supporter of Greenpeace and was a committed campaigner on issues of the environment and animal rights, attending many demos, even chaining himself to railings, and getting himself arrested in defence of his beliefs. The strength of his feelings never waned, nor the energy with which he fought for his values, and only earlier this year he stood as a Green councillor in the local elections.

Jeff's slightly tortuous career path took him to the Vehicle Licensing Authority and subsequently the Highways Agency, where he worked for many years and made many friends in the process, as he did in his last 11 or 12 years with Leeds City Council. One of his friends, Graeme, said:

Since I first met Jeff at the good old Highways Agency, I can't think of a happier time in my working life than the time I spent working with and alongside him. We hit it off from the start and became great friends over the years, and I'm sure this will be a familiar story shared by everyone fortunate enough to have known him. He was, quite simply, a great guy, and I, along with everyone else, will miss him like hell.

Jeff earned himself a sabbatical from work, and chose to use it to take a degree in Peace Studies at Bradford. He made an immediate impression on his fellow students, such as John, who wrote:

I remember meeting Jeff for the first time in the foyer of the Peace Studies Department in 1992. I was very nervous of going to university even as a mature student; I felt quite out of place being one of the older students. He walked up, bouncing in his usual style, with his big round glasses and his big round face and his big round belly.

Jeff's warmth and enthusiasm instantly distracted me from my nervousness. I will miss that. We proceeded to just chew the cud. Within minutes we were laughing at our different routes into Peace Studies. I'd done a couple of OU courses and Jeff, as I remember, had been on an Access Course. He reminded me we'd both read 'Haralambos' as 'Harabimbos'! I will miss that. It wasn't until a year later that I discovered a conversation with Jeff drew you into his world of Greenpeace, WorldParts and Terry bloody Pratchett! What seemed an innocent conversation later resulted in me swimming 100 lengths for a Greenpeace fundraiser. I still shake my head in surprise at how he roped me into that. I will miss that. His boundless energies and eternal optimism were the hallmark of the man and shone through everything regardless. I will miss that. We will all miss that. And whilst words cannot fully express my condolences to you, Claire, or the sadness of his passing, I will always remember him as a friend. I will miss him.

Jeff and Claire's great friend Lucy also first met Jeff at Bradford Uni. She remembers:

He was always laughing, drinking pints in the pub, wearing heavy metal t shirts and going on about Greenpeace and protecting the environment. That was nearly 30 years ago. We became friends very easily. Over the years we've been camping, to festivals, weddings, funerals, and many house parties. I've laughed at him for having so many cats and dogs and I can remember telling him that he was too old to be still wearing band t shirts. I'm glad he didn't change though because that was Jeff.

It was through their mutual friend, Annette, that Jeff and Claire's worlds collided. She said:

I first met Jeff in the early 90s when he was studying for his Peace Studies degree at Bradford Uni. I was immediately impressed with his activism for Greenpeace and other environmental causes – I think Greta Thunberg used him as a role model! We became firm friends and I'm proud to say this friendship lasted for three decades.

I was also proud to introduce my good friend Jeff to my equally good friend Claire and to watch the relationship blossom. Knowing how devoted they were to each other gives me great comfort.

Jeff and Claire welcomed me and mine into their growing family and I have happy memories of many events and festivities that we all shared together including holidays, birthdays, Christmases and New Years.



My memories of Jeff's personality will always be of a sure and steady, reasonable, and sensible man with a great sense of fun and an unwavering desire to make the world a better place.



Jeff and Claire's love story was one of the greatest, as was obvious to anyone who saw them together. But that's not to say there weren't a few hiccups at the start; it took Jeff two weeks to actually get hold of Claire on the phone, and when they did arrange a date, his car wouldn't work, so Claire had to go and pick him up. That was when she was first introduced to his menagerie of cats, 13 at the time, one of which he was mopping up after when she arrived! But Claire said from the moment she stepped into the room with Jeff, that was it; he was just lovely, and the two of them were very much in love from that first date, over a curry and a few drinks, to then moving in together, then buying their first house in Honley. Jeff and Claire married on 27th July 2005 at Hazlewood Castle, before honeymooning in the Lake District and then Croatia. And Lucy recalled their big day:

I felt honoured to be Jeff's best woman alongside Annette at his wedding to Claire, and remember Jeff starting a tradition of us dancing to a certain Puddle of Mud song at our weddings whose lyrics cannot possibly be repeated here! Being an oddparent and 'auntie' to Melissa and Caitie was also a great honour as I'm watching them become wonderful girls who are both a credit to him and Claire. My daughter Amy called Jeff 'Uncle Jeff' and she has also felt part of their lovely family.

I've talked to Jeff about all sorts over the years because he was a great listener, warm hearted, funny, kind, and full of empathy with a healthy side helping of sarcasm. He always had time to help or give good advice even when he was busy, and I have to say that Jeff was the most genuine man I've come across. He was a good friend. Jeff loved Claire, Melissa and Caitie very much, and they brought so much joy to his life. I loved you Jeff and I'll miss you. Rest in peace.

Jeff was absolutely overjoyed to become a dad to Melissa and Caitie; Claire remembers the look on his face when he knew each of them was coming – sheer delight.



They were his world, and it deserves to be noted that the only two years in recent memory that he missed Glastonbury Festival were the years that his girls arrived. And Caitie told me in no uncertain terms that he was the best dad she could possibly have. And not just because he provided a willing taxi service to her and her friends, with bonus moshing if they put on AC/DC in the car! He taught the girls to ride a bike, giving them the confidence to set off on their own two wheels. Caitie can still picture him up at their previous home in Wilshaw, helping the neighbours shovel snow dressed, obviously, in shorts and a t-shirt!



Every year Jeff and Claire would take Melissa and Caitie down to Norfolk for their holidays, staying in Old Hunstanton, or they would head for Whitby or Sandsend, for days of sandcastles and ice cream and fish and chips. They would always call in to Beckett's coffee shop in Whitby, with the dogs, of course; Jeff would only go where they were welcome too. He had the back of his van converted just for the three hounds, Max, Honey and Elsa, and he continued the feline theme, bringing home kittens in his pocket on Christmas Eve for Melissa and Caitie, as well as accumulating everything from hamsters to African Land Snails.

Jeff's good mate Pete recalled his early days of cat-keeping:

I first met Jeff when he was living on Quarry Street in Bradford. He was the only person I knew who didn't have a tele, so we always knew that the evenings would be full of good conversation and some questionable music and that's usually the way it turned out. But the cherry on top of the cake was the moment when Jeff stood up, walked to the back of his living room and opened a door to a room at the back. Out would come a stream of what seemed like hundreds of cats, looking for a lap to sit on or a fire to lie in front of.

Jeff saw talent in one of those cats, so much so that he took him for a TV audition. I always thought this was ironic considering he didn't have a tele. And as a result of this audition, a star was born, George. George became the star of the very first episode of Red Dwarf as the original cat. But he was also pretty talented at sitting on laps as well. I even adopted one of Jeff's cats, Josie, a beautiful little tabby. Animals were always a big part of Jeff's life.

Pete also shared memories of Jeff's musical passions:

It was on a farm in Glastonbury where I spent the most time with Jeff. It was a little corner of Somerset that Jeff fell in love with and called home for a week every June. He first started going in 1997, the year of the quagmire and the year he succumbed to the mud with trenchfoot. But it didn't put him off. If anything, Jeff's love for the place grew. The next year wasn't much drier, but he still kept coming back.

I could reduce his time at Glastonbury to a few anecdotes, but that would undervalue his time there and I can't remember any anyway. It was always just a real pleasure to spend time with him, it was fun and it was easy. Those first couple of days were the times we really enjoyed. Getting our wristbands and free bags, walking up the hill, finding the same spot and setting up the tents before cracking open a tinnie. Sitting outside the Brothers Bar drinking cider and listening to random music, catching up and chatting rubbish, occasionally getting up to dance, not moving for hours on end. Wandering around aimlessly, visiting all the same places that had been there forever and discovering the latest shiny new playthings. And then the music started and the aimless wandering stopped. Jeff rocked out mostly, Neil Young was a highlight amongst many for both of us, but as the cliché goes, it was never about the music.

You could measure the number of years Jeff went to Glastonbury by the size of his tents. He began with a tiny two-man job. He could barely fit in it and it looked like a bomb had gone off inside. But every few years the latest upgrade would appear. Jeff's final tent was a stately home in comparison, he could even stand up in it, but the bomb site within remained. If memory serves me right, next year would have been Jeff's fifteenth time at the Glastonbury Festival of Contemporary Performing Arts and the place will not be the same without him. Keep on rockin' mate.

When Jeff was at Glastonbury, Claire and the girls would look out on TV and try and spot him, and one of the times they managed to find him in the crowd was when ELO were playing. So we're going to have one of their greatest, and Jeff's favourite, tracks now, and you don't get to just sit there; you have to sing it the way Jeff would want you to.

Song: Mr Blue Sky by E.L.O.



Jeff and Melissa shared some amazing nights out at gigs, from Hands Off Gretel and The Levellers to Ferocious Dog, who we heard on the way in, and who will be playing that same track in their set tonight, in honour of their Hellhound, Jeff. Ferocious Dog even featured on Jeff's Facebook newsreel, along with Labradors, and his family of course. But Claire only realised when she looked through, that all those evenings she thought Jeff was just messing about on his phone, he was continuing his fight for social justice, just without the chains and loudhailers.

Jeff was an astonishing advocate for so many people, from those going through the adoption process to other people living with FASD, as his friend Jill describes:

Tilly and I met Jeff, through Claire, when we started our family. He became a good friend and was someone who was there through celebrations and struggles.

It was through Jeff that I became aware of Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, and the valuable supportive FASD networks which he contributed to.

Jeff's knowledge and advocacy was greatly valued by the FASD support network. Jeff had the ability to raise meaningful debates to promote the awareness of FASD and fight for appropriate support and recognition from services. My family and many others would not be where we are today if it wasn't for Jeff's support and encouragement to stand up for our young people's rights. He always gave help whenever anyone asked for it.

Jeff was a great friend and I fondly remember spending years of Saturday mornings relaxing by the pool in tropical Almondbury whilst the kids had their swimming lessons. During the sessions Jeff was always getting me to join different Facebook sites and sign up to deals, anything from the League of Gentlemen to a nice toaster and kettle set.

Jeff and his family became great friends with my family. The boys loved spotting Jeff in his different Foxmobiles around and about. He could navigate around the smallest lanes to avoid the traffic. I remember the grin on Jeff's face when he had swiftly navigated the Foxmobile van through narrow country lanes to get to an FASD conference in record time. He then parked in Salford media centre carpark with just a thin layer of paint separating the top of the van from the multi-storey roof. He was so chuffed that he hadn't got it wedged, despite taking out the height restriction barrier.

Jeff was a lovely friend who had the knack to make all things seem possible. My family and I are so glad to have been his friend. We miss him dearly x

And it's telling that Jill titled her message 'The Glastonbury God'!

Jeff really would help anyone who needed it, but most of all he was there for the people he loved. From supporting Claire and driving her up and down to Droitwich to visit her seriously ill father, to being there to look after Melissa and to hug, kiss and tickle Caitie every bedtime, literally until she couldn't breathe, it was Team Fox all the way. Jeff was so incredibly proud of both his girls, and his love for them stemmed from the love he and Claire had for each other. He used to say, 'It's you and me, Mole,' and Claire felt that anything was possible.

She has asked me to read her words today:

My Darling Jeff

Best Dad. My gorgeous husband. Our Mr Fox. Best for everything. Best for all the things that go unsaid. For all the band t-shirts. For the Marvel and Harry Potter. For being the plus one at gigs. For all the gigs lined up from now into 2022. For making all the Christmases magical and all the Easters chocolatey. For the stories and tickles at bedtime. For all the flowers bought “just because”. For playing loud music. For wearing shorts every day. For all the home-cooked meals. For being the bank of Dad. For missing Glastonbury when the babies arrived. For letting our girls see you cry. For fighting for what is right no matter what the cost. For having the best sense of humour. For making the impossible always possible. For being Mum and Dad when I am broken. For holding me up when my Dad is bringing me down. For being the dogs’ best ever human. And never saying no when a cat needs a home. We love you.

Our friend Annette introduced us. We went for a curry, got a bit drunk, laughed until our sides hurt and fell in love. We didn’t really spend time apart after that. It really was that simple. We had each other and it has been the most brilliant time of my life. I am as much in love with you almost 20 years later, and love you just as much. I have honestly never spent a day with you where we have not laughed even when times have been at their toughest. We have never gone to bed on an argument and never left or arrived without a kiss. I cannot get used to not hearing the sound of your voice or seeing you smile. I miss holding your hand and being in your arms.

Sleep gently Jeff, and rest peacefully. You will always have my heart and all my love forever.