

# A celebration of life

# Stephanie Jane Rowley

13<sup>th</sup> December 1967 – 15<sup>th</sup> October 2021

Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2021 at Wakefield Crematorium



*a personal goodbye*

Humanist  
*Ceremonies*

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*There is no way to compress a lifetime into one brief ceremony, even one sadly cut short as Steph's has been. But the snapshots that people have given me of their connection with Steph add richness and colour to the story I can tell of her.*

*Her sister Carol wrote:*

*We had just moved to the newly built estate in 1967 when Stephanie Jane was born. Ray was 9, I was 7 and Donna was 5. My first thoughts at such an early age when we were introduced to Steph were how is she going to learn to spell such a long name when she starts school. She was our baby sister and we all loved her dearly.*

*When we were young it was always the tradition in our house to decorate the Christmas tree and put decorations up 12 days before Christmas and 12 days after they were all taken down and stored away for the following year. With Steph's birthday being on 13<sup>th</sup> December (12 days before Christmas) she thought from a really early age that we just trimmed everything up for her birthday; and indeed, when she saw all the other houses on the street trimmed up that day, she thought everyone wanted to celebrate her birthday by doing the same. She absolutely loved Christmas and we didn't have the heart to tell her it was tradition and not just solely for her.*

*When Steph was old enough to start school she absolutely detested it. Most mornings started off with a physical attack on her teacher, screaming and punching. She was then rewarded each day with a new toy if she went into school without a fuss, which suited her.*

*After working in banking for so many years, Stephanie studied really hard to get the qualifications to do the job that she was so amazing at. This made me immensely proud for all the work she crammed in to get to where she wanted to be in life, especially for someone who hated school at 5yrs old.*

*My memories of our beautiful, caring lovely sister: kind, loving, joyful, inspiring and hilarious to name but a few. Her energy will live on forever and she will carry on being with each and every one of us whose heart she touched along her journey in life.*

*Rest in Peace beautiful lady.*

*And Donna put:*

*As the youngest of four, Steph was loved and protected through childhood. She used to follow me wherever I went, much to my annoyance at times. She was always full of joy. Steph was a great auntie and sister, always full of joy. She always helped me find a positive even in bad situations. We've laughed and cried together. Steph was my rock when my husband died suddenly, at the end of the phone at all times.*

*She taught me to be kind to myself. I have a Steph-sized hole in my life now. I miss you so much, Steph. Rest in peace darling sister.*

*Ray told me of his sister's finest traits, including her ability to talk for England, striking up conversations with anyone who would listen; according to Ray, this was probably one of the reasons for her poor time keeping! He also described Steph's way of making everyday items seem personal by giving them entertaining names that reflected their use.*

*He was equally proud of the path she took in her career. Steph started out in banking, but as it headed towards pushing people into debt and loans, rather than helping them manage their money, she looked for a way to move out of the industry. She undertook a part-time degree in Psychology, and also started volunteering at Wakefield Prison, at the suggestion of the governor there, whose banking she managed. Steph went on to do a Masters in Forensic Psychology and worked in the field for ten*

years, particularly looking at the risk of reoffending by long-term prisoners. She decided that moving to the youth estate would give her a better chance to change young offenders' behaviours and help them achieve better outcomes in their lives. She spent a stint working away from home, leading and building a new psychology team, which cemented in her mind that practical work with offenders and developing others brought her the greatest satisfaction and purpose in life.

Steph loved being out in the fresh air, preferably walking; Walton Woods was a special place for her, not least as a preface to her ultimate target of the New Inn, where she would practice what she preached with her favourite phrase, 'Sup it while it's fizzy.' A sentiment I hope you will all bear in mind when you head to there from here, to continue this celebration of Steph's life this afternoon.

Steph enjoyed her holidays too, always looking forward to her annual trip to Grassington with the girls at Christmas, along with many happy visits to Cornwall. One holiday that left a marked memory was her journey around India, a brave move considering she did the trip alone, and one on which the poverty she saw was unavoidable, but also one rewarded by the people she met, and the welcome and friendliness she received from them (the five star hotels, saunas and massages were also a bonus!).

Ray said:

*Most of all what Steph will be remembered for best is that she loved spending time with family, including her nieces and nephews and the many friends she had not just locally but UK and Europe wide. You will all have many memories of times spent with Steph, a kind-hearted, giving person, once met never forgotten. One thing is for sure: wherever Steph is now, she will still be kicking the can down the street.*

One of her nephews, Nathan, paid tribute to his Auntie Steph:

*She has always been an inspiration to me and my family, full of knowledge and advice.*

*We had a many karaoke night, singing until our lungs hurt because we could! She has clearly left such a space in everyone's heart, because she was so amazing.*

*He also recalled Christmas Eve 1989, when Steph came to stay over, sharing a room with her sister, and a four-year-old Nathan wandered into the bedroom, wearing white PJs and haloed by the landing light behind him; Steph confessed when he was a teenager that she thought she was being visited by an angel! Something they laughed about many times subsequently. Nathan said visits from his auntie were always full of fun and laughter, and always involved sweets!*

*Steph lived her life open to the world, receptive to ideas and available for all the people around her. She put so much energy into her relationships with family and friends. So when Francis came into her life, at an AC/DC tribute gig six years ago, it was her chance to have someone put their energy into her. She and Francis enriched each other's lives without asking for or expecting the other to change or give up on the things they enjoyed. But Francis shared Steph's love of the arts, and delighted in showing her new things, new places, new experiences that brought her joy, from llama walking to carols at the Chantry Chapel, and poetry readings from Leeds Library to Wakefield Art Walk to the Peterloo memorial.*

*Lockdown only brought them closer, as they learned cooking together, talked of anything and everything, and watched virtual events, especially anything involving Norse mythology. A Christmas present from Francis of a DNA analysis had revealed Steph's Viking ancestry, which she embraced wholeheartedly, another strand of the energy she wove into her being.*

*Francis said of her:*

*Steph understood the difference between passion and compassion, knowing that her passions gave her energy and her compassion for others was able to inspire theirs.*

*Her empathy for others was drawn from the understanding of her own privilege to have good health, strong will and pleasure in many and simple things.*

*She understood that everyone and everything needs a purpose and tapped into that, in her work, in her learning, in her relationships and how she saw and interacted with the world. Each experience revealed the beauty in things and people, and gave her great enjoyment, whether it was poetry, songs, eating, dancing or relaxing with those she loved.*

*Steph faced her diagnosis with huge courage, perhaps drawing from the energy she had gained from all the people and things that brought her joy. She kept a stone nearby her bed that had inscribed on it:*

*Courage is not the absence of fear, but the acquired ability to move beyond fear*

*Whatever courage is, she showed it throughout, and never lost her confidence in her own self. And she still took delight in the world around her, Francis bringing in every nut and seed in the house so that she could feed the squirrels in the hospice. The staff there took great care of Steph, and her family have asked for donations, in lieu of flowers, to go to Wakefield Hospice; there is a collection box outside, or you can give on the online remembrance page for Steph.*

*You may find other ways to pay tribute to Steph as you return to your lives and learn to navigate around the hole she has left behind. Hold tight to the energy she gave to you, remember the positive force she was, and can still be, in your lives, say her name with gladness that you knew her and loved her. As Maya Angelou said,*

*...people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.*