

A celebration of the life of **Gail Scott**

30th September 1955 – 29th January 2024

Ceremony held on Friday 16th February, at Natural Endings, Todmorden
Committal at Luddenden Cemetery

Celebrant: Hannah McKerchar



a personal goodbye

Humanist
Ceremonies

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Those closest to Gail spoke of someone who spent her whole life helping others, from her work in care homes for the elderly or looking after children with special educational needs, to her persistent battle for social justice on so many fronts.

It was Gail's father who instilled her steadfast socialist principles in her, as she grew up in Sowerby Bridge with her siblings Deborah, Angela, Steven, Duncan and Mark. She didn't stay in the Calder Valley, heading down south with her good friend Sheena to work in Torquay, even going out to work on a kibbutz in Israel in 1973, and at one point spending a year working on an archaeological dig.

Gail was open to new experiences, interested and curious about the world outside her own sphere, and sensitive to the inequities of the systems in which we all live. She had a lifelong interest in the politics of the Middle East and was obviously concerned and distressed about the current situation in Gaza. Gail was widely read, and erudite, a grammar school graduate despite having failed her 11+. It seems it was recognised that that was still the most suitable school for her to be in. She went on to gain a BA in Humanities at Huddersfield Polytechnic in 1987.

Gail was delighted to become a mother and was devoted to her son Che. His father died when he was small, but Gail met Steve and he became the father figure in Che's life. Gail and Che moved to Germany to live with Steve. Che moved over first, and Gail would come and visit regularly. Steve ran a club, and he joked that whenever he cashed up he never saw a five Deutsche mark note; turns out that the club staff – Werner and the girls – were saving them all for Gail! It went on for two years and Steve never had a clue.

When Gail moved over permanently, she devoted much of her time to looking after Che. She loved the freedom Che could have in the village – everyone knew the two of them: 'Die schone Kleine Frau mit der spezial Kind'. She felt able to let Che wander freely, knowing he would usually stay around the police station; if she ever did start to worry he would appear as if from nowhere, sometimes coming home with photos and little notes from the police officers.

Gail was perhaps a little lost when, at the age of nineteen, Che asserted his independence and moved into Wohnheim (supported living). It worked wonderfully though, Che managing things the way he wanted. Gail was free to travel and to work, supporting people with special needs in Werkstatt. Gail made so many friends, some with children of their own, and everyone was always welcome. Steve said, 'Gail loved that our house was always busy on the weekends when Che came home, and she made a massive point that his life was full of people.'

Everyone who knew her in Paderborn loved her. Friends visited from the UK, and vice versa. Once Gail moved back to England a whole group of staff from the club came to stay, spilling over into the houses of Gail's very welcoming neighbours, Martin and Jacqui.

It was around 18 years ago that Gail made the decision to move back to the area where she grew up, again finding work in local care homes. Jules remembers meeting her for the first time, at a class on teaching adult literacy at the local college in Halifax. He said she was small, and quietly spoken, but made quite an entrance that first lesson; the two of them were laughing together from the start, and their connection was immediate.

Jules sensed a great kindness in Gail, that only became more apparent as he got to know her and fell in love with her. She was open and approachable, completely nonjudgemental, emotionally intelligent and sensitive, and, as Jules put it, they rubbed along great together. It wasn't long before they made a home together, and went on to settle at Booth House Terrace, where they lived happily for fourteen years. The plan was, of course, to move on to somewhere new – boxes packed, arrangements made – but, so unexpectedly, that turned out to be Gail's final home.

Luckily it was one she was very content in; she chose it for the vista, visible through the trees that housed such a wealth of feathered visitors who never failed to delight both Gail and Jules. Gail loved being outdoors, setting off from the doorstep up into the hills, exploring the many footpaths of the area. She was never afraid of being out in the elements and was an enthusiastic camper. They visited sites all over the UK, smaller ones off the beaten track, and though putting up the tent often revealed their novice status and left them sprawled on top of the canvas, they would always be laughing their heads off. They did progress to a camper van, and Gail's great-niece Eve came with them a couple of times; Gail used to love taking Eve out on shopping trips too, or treating her to a burger.

Gail expanded Jules' horizons when it came to holidays; neither of them were big fans of flying, but Gail had had to master her fear to go and visit Che so often, so she could be strong for Jules on their first short hop over to Amsterdam. That cracked it, and they went on to visit places all over Europe, including France, Sicily, Sardinia, Croatia, Slovenia, Montenegro and the Greek Islands. They also visited perhaps their favourite destination, Morocco, twice, and drank wine from a teacup in the same cafe frequented by Jimi Hendrix.

Gail also loved having Che come to stay with them at home; he would visit for a couple of weeks at a time, and mother and son adored that time together. Che's own ill health in recent years meant Gail and Jules made the reverse trip regularly instead. In between visits Gail spent hours on the phone, sending her love and care down the wires to Che and devoting her energy to his wellbeing.

Jules encouraged Gail in her career and she took the step to become Learning Link tutor at Halifax College, a job she really enjoyed. She retired from work at 65, taking the chance for a proper rest, and enjoying spending time with friends. Jacqui, who she had known since school, been neighbours with when both their children were young, and reconnected with when Gail settled in England, was a frequent companion, the two of them going out for meals, and gigs, and always a good catch up.

Gail also turned her focus on the garden. She developed a lovely plot outside the house, filling it with bright blooms, a reflection of her own vivid dress sense. Her clothes were always vibrant, rich with blue tones especially, and always completed with a colourful scarf. She was so expressive and took great joy in living her life. She would perhaps have enjoyed this, from Virginia Woolf:

Let us simmer over our incalculable cauldron, our enthralling confusion, our hotchpotch of impulses, our perpetual miracle - for the soul throws up wonders every second. Movement and change are the essence of our being; rigidity is death; conformity is death; let us say what comes into our heads, repeat ourselves, contradict ourselves, fling out the wildest nonsense, and follow the most fantastic fancies without caring what the world does or thinks or says. For nothing matters except life.

Gail made the most of her time and didn't need grand gestures or fancy environments to feel joy. Jules told me of a very special moment when a favourite song 'Dance Me To The End Of Love' by Leonard Cohen came on, and he and Gail danced, and held each other, and knew they were loved. Gail was certainly danced to the end, by all those who loved her; remember, too, that that love remains – it never really ends. Now it takes a different form, perhaps, but it will always be there to hold you and guide you.