

A Celebration of the Life of

# **Denise Gail Atherton**

1 June 1954 – 31 December 2024

29 January 2025, Markeaton Crematorium

Celebrant: Lisa Sharpe



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Denise Gail Atherton was born on June 1st, 1954, at Dudley Road Hospital in Birmingham, the only child of George and Patricia Robinson.

Tragically, Denise lost her mom at the age of eighteen. Despite facing challenging times and taking on the responsibility of caring for her mother, Denise had a happy childhood and shared a close and loving relationship with her dad.

After marrying his second wife, Audrey, Denise's dad George relocated, but their bond remained strong. Audrey had a son called John, who became Denise's stepbrother. Both John and Audrey were important and influential figures in Denise's life.

Denise attended Marsh Hill Girls' Grammar School, where her natural intelligence shone, and she left with an impressive set of O-levels.

After finishing school, she began working as a Food Lab Technician but later left her role to start a family.

Denise married David Payne at the young age of eighteen. They were married for over twenty years and had two children together, Nicola and Kevin.

Although their marriage eventually came to an end, Denise's life took a new turn in early 1997 when she met Martin.

The two had initially connected online and discovered they lived quite close to each other. What started as a friendship soon blossomed into a romance.

At the time, Denise was living in Sutton Coldfield, while Martin was based in Erdington. After a few months of dating, their relationship deepened, and Martin moved into Denise's home.

At the start of 1998, Denise and Martin were discussing the idea of going on holiday when Denise suggested they combine it with something else. Martin, a bit puzzled, asked, "What do you mean?" to which Denise replied, "We could make it our honeymoon."

And so, on the 5th of September 1998, they were married at the Walsall Registry Office and headed straight off on their honeymoon to Bruges in Belgium.

Denise and Martin lived together in Streetly until August 2001, when they decided to relocate to Derby.

Professionally, Denise worked as an office manager for a double-glazing company in Kingstanding.

After leaving that role, she joined a company called Plasticlad, where she took on a similar position in home improvements. It was there that she became close friends with the owner, Des.

Des proved to be a true friend to Denise over the many years they worked together. He supported her through the difficult times in her life and was always a dependable source of encouragement and kindness.

Denise's intelligence and IT skills were remarkable, and as a testament to their friendship, she even created a website for Des.

Denise's daughter, Nicola, fondly recalls her mom's patience and tolerance during her upbringing. Nicola was fiercely independent and often argumentative, but she always knew when she had pushed her mom a little too far!

As a bit of a tomboy, Nicola's choice of wearing Doc Martens instead of pretty dresses baffled Denise, who could never quite understand her preference.

In Nicola's own words, she was a "little monkey" as a toddler. She would mischievously mix up random ingredients from the kitchen and smear the concoctions all over the place when Denise wasn't looking—a habit Denise never let her forget.

Apparently, this happened more than once, and Nicola has decided to keep quiet about what else went into those mixtures!

Denise's son Kevin once accidentally broke Nicola's tooth when they were kids. Nicola was hoping he'd get in trouble for it, but he didn't.

Denise, always fair, knew it wasn't intentional and encouraged them to move past it—though not before getting Nicola's tooth fixed, of course!

Now, let's hear some more about Denise as a mom as we invite Nicola to come up and share some personal memories.

### ***Nicola's Personal Tribute***

*Thank you all for being here today to celebrate the life of my wonderful mom. It hasn't been easy to put into words the depth of what my mom meant to me, but I'll do my best to capture who she was, and the love she had for us.*

*When I was asked to choose three words to describe my mom, I found it impossible to narrow it down. But if I had to pick, I'd say she was "loving," "generous," and "smart." Those words alone reflect so much of who she was, but of course, there was so much more to her.*

*She was creative, compassionate, resourceful, tolerant, funny, quick-witted. Those qualities combined to make her the beautiful person we loved.*

*One of my strongest memories of mom was her constant need to have a project. She always had something on the go and when she started something she fully embraced it, she didn't just dabble. When it was knitting, she had 5 jumpers on the go, when it was baking, the freezer would be full of goodies.*

*When she took up pottery, she took pottery classes, set up a pottery wheel under the house, followed by having an extension built to the garage to house her growing hobby. She sold her pottery at craft fairs; these were beautifully set up and I loved seeing how customers appreciated her creativity.*

*Mom never stopped learning and growing. She taught herself Greek, took up photography, and started a business printing canvases.*

*She developed a passion for antiques and could turn her hand to anything—from sewing clothes and toys to navigating the world of computing long before Google was even a thing. And yes, she was also an excellent cook. Whatever she did, she did with love, creativity, and a fierce dedication to doing it well. I'm in awe of her ability to take on a new skill and master it—she was truly one smart lady.*

*I will forever cherish the time we spent together. Our adventures were some of the most special moments of my life. Whether we were visiting ancient sites, castles, or houses, she always found something to see, something to learn, something to experience. I especially treasure our two-week trip to Greece, just the two of us.*

*We explored every corner of Athens, and it was during that time that I appreciated just how much she valued these experiences and how much she valued our time together.*

*Above all, my mom was full of love. I never once doubted her love and care for me. She loved us all so very much: Martin, my brother and I, Helena and of course her beloved grandchildren.*

*Mom, you meant the world to me. You shaped who I am today, and you'll always be in my heart. Thank you for the love you gave, for the lessons you taught, and for being the wonderful person you were. I love you more deeply than words can capture, and I will carry your memory with me always.*

When Nicola and Kevin were younger, the family had a dog named Candy. She was a lovely dog but often became the scapegoat for mischief around the house.

For instance, Kev once broke one of Denise's pottery lamps and blamed it on Candy, while Nicola dropped the iron on the sofa and claimed the dog had knocked it over. Denise, knowing the truth, chose to let it slide and poor Candy took all the blame!

Nicola fondly remembers the day they brought Candy home—Denise was overjoyed to welcome her into the family. She always loved having pets, and Kevin and Nicola grew up surrounded by cats and dogs.

Denise's love of animals stayed with her throughout her life, and she leaves behind her beloved three-year-old Cocker Spaniels Lily and Rosie.

For Nicola and Kevin, childhood holidays meant caravan trips around the UK. They would visit places like the South Coast and Wales, with their favourite destination being Barmouth, where they would stay in a tent.

Their first family holiday abroad took them to Corfu, and it was there that Denise fell in love with Greece, with its rich history, and vibrant culture.

Over the years, they returned to Greece several times as a family. As Nicola mentioned, Denise became fluent in Greek and explored the island extensively.

Denise's love for the sea never waned, and she, of course, went to Greece with Martin. On one trip to Athens, they visited an authentic restaurant, and when Martin saw the menu, it was all in Greek. Luckily, Denise was there to read it for them!

Denise had a love for theme parks and was always delighted to join the kids on rollercoasters. The family even enjoyed a memorable holiday to Florida when Kevin and Nicola were teenagers.

However, Denise preferred quieter, more serene environments. She loved exploring new places and, with Martin, visited beautiful cities like Prague and Rome.

One of Denise's passions was tracing family history. After Martin mentioned that his great-grandmother was French, Denise delved into genealogy and managed to track down some of Martin's distant cousins. The couple even travelled to France to meet them.

In later years, Denise and Martin developed a shared love for France, frequently travelling there to hunt for Art Deco marble antiques at flea markets, which they brought back to the UK to sell.

Throughout her life, Denise was blessed with many good friends. As mentioned earlier, one of them was Des, but another dear friend was Freda, her neighbour during her time in Sutton.

Another special person in Denise's life was her cousin, Margaret. As an only child who lost her mother at a young age, Denise often found comfort and family at her Uncle Charlie and Auntie Margaret's house. They became like second parents to her, and young Margaret was more like a sister than a cousin.

Kevin described his mom as very protective in many ways. While she could be firm, it was never in a harsh or shouty manner—her discipline was always fair and measured.

Kevin shared how close he was to his mom, describing her as incredibly generous, sometimes even more than she needed to be.

She was a truly wonderful person who was always there for him, and Kevin said he always felt her unwavering love.

With that in mind, I'd now like to invite Kevin to come up and share some memories of his mom.

### ***Kevin's Personal Tribute***

*Thank you for being here with us to celebrate and remember my mom, Denise. I'm Kevin her 'baby boy' as she liked to call me.*

*Whilst we are all devastated at losing Mom, particularly so quickly and suddenly. I'd like us to remember and celebrate her life and the love that she had for her family and close friends.*

*Mom was highly intelligent, mastering various skills inc Pottery, Baking, DIY, Canvas photo printing, gardening to name a few. It was never enough to just be ok at something, she needed to become a master and to do it as well as she could.*

*I remember she went through a phase of ice cream making, where she got all of the equipment, learnt how to do it, then made so much ice cream had to buy a freezer to store it, and it was very good.*

*Mom loved a project and was a whizz on the computer, researching our family history, creating family trees, organising old photographs and digitalising them.*

*Mom was a very light-hearted person who loved to be silly and make people smile with her 'Dad' jokes that she picked up off Grandad. She deeply loved us, Martin and her dogs.*

*I keep expecting to see a message from her, just checking in, asking how we are and telling me how much she hated Brexit, Boris and Trump!*

*I was recently asked to describe how she was as a mom, which is so difficult to sum up in a few minutes. The best word I can use is simply 'brilliant'.*

*She was a great role model, utterly selfless and very thoughtful, loving, kind, generous, sensitive and very warm, along with being protective of us and our feelings. Just talking to Mom made things better, she always seemed to know what to say or when to just listen*

*My memories as a child are of being very loved, feeling safe and happy. I was never under any illusion at how to behave and what was expected, though it wasn't through fear or being too strict, just lots of love and affection.*

*Mom instilled in me her values, more than just right and wrong but how things should be and how to be a good person.*

*We became particularly close when it was just the two of us for a few years. This was a difficult time for Mom, but she maintained her generosity, her sense of humour and her love.*

*As I became an adult, Mom married Martin and moved to Hilton. I married Helena and we had the children, Mom watched on as we built our life, always supporting but not wanting to interfere which was just an example of her thoughtfulness. She helped us with Lucy's pre-school childcare, which I know she loved and was very helpful for us.*

***A short poem called 'Your hug meant the world'***

*Nobody else held me so tight  
Or made me feel so right  
No one's eyes shined so bright with love  
As my mom, who is now high above.*

*Mom, you were always there for me and I will cherish the memories but forever wish for one more hug, love you always, your baby boy.*

Denise was fortunate to become a grandmother to five grandchildren: Nicola's children, Callum and Charlie, and Kevin's children, Lucy, Emily, and Danny.

She adored all her grandchildren deeply. Even though Callum and Charlie live on the other side of the world, Denise cherished the visits when Nicola brought them back home.

She always went above and beyond to make those visits special, ensuring that Nicola and the boys were well looked after. The boys were showered with love, attention, and plenty of delicious food. Despite the distance, Denise loved them as much as if they'd lived just around the corner.

Denise even travelled to New Zealand when Callum was just a week old. Though it was difficult for her that Nicola lived so far away, she treasured the experience of being there in those early weeks, forming a bond with Callum that remained strong with him throughout her life.

It was the same with Kevin's children. While they didn't live as far away as Nicola and her boys, being in Sutton Coldfield meant it wasn't possible for them to just pop around.

As Nicola and Kevin mentioned earlier, Denise was passionate about many things, one of them being baking—a hobby she loved sharing with Danny and Emily. Together, they would bake crumpets, cakes, and baguettes, creating countless happy memories in the kitchen.

A fun example of Denise's baking was last Christmas when Martin and Denise went to Kevin and Helena's house for dinner.

Kevin's mother-in-law, Sue asked Denise if she was still baking, and Denise confirmed that she was. Kevin, however, cheekily chimed in that he hadn't had anything from her in ages.

Taking the hint, Denise showed up three days later for Danny's birthday with a bag full of crumpets and muffins, much to everyone's delight!

Denise's daughter-in-law, Helena, was also a big part of her life. Having known Helena for over twenty-eight years, Denise always thought very highly of her and appreciated their close and loving relationship.

Denise found her greatest happiness in Derby with Martin. Together, they created a life they cherished. They were deeply settled and content. Whether it was watching TV, enjoying each other's company, or pursuing her creative hobbies, Denise loved the simple pleasures of their time together.

One of the single happiest moments in Denise's life came in September 2023, when she and Martin organised a family getaway.

They brought everyone—children and grandchildren—to a holiday cottage in North Wales. Denise was in her element, surrounded by her family in one place, and she baked enough cakes and bread to feed half of North Wales!

Nicola described their family as having a sense of humour that was ironic, teasing, and self-deprecating, something Denise embodied perfectly. She had a sharp wit and a great sense of humour—playfully sarcastic but always kind.

Denise also loved comedy and enjoyed going to live gigs. Her favourite comedian was Rhod Gilbert, and she and Martin saw him perform live several times over the years, bringing her so much joy and laughter.

One of Denise's favourite TV shows was Gavin and Stacey. Just two weeks before Christmas, she and Martin decided to rewatch the entire series from the beginning—and even managed to watch the finale twice!

Nicola shared that she and her mom enjoyed watching movies together, with *Dirty Dancing* being one of their all-time favourites. It was a film they returned to many times over the years.

Nicola also mentioned that she inherited her mom's drive to always have a project, a change, or a new focus—something that kept life interesting and full of purpose.

Denise instilled in Nicola and Kevin the importance of giving things a try and never letting "no" be the final answer—just take a chance and see where it leads.

She also taught them the value of self-deprecation and the importance of always appreciating others.