

Lavender Clarke's Funeral

"Nooks and Crannies"

Welcome to this celebration of Lavender's life.

Lavender was very clear that she did not want this to be a conventional or sombre affair and in organising it we have done our best to honour that wish. Some of the choices of music may surprise you but she either asked for them explicitly or they were her favourites. During the preparations for today there have inevitably been some sad and poignant moments but we have also had some wonderful fits of laughter, often whilst thinking about how Lavender herself would have roared with laughter at our deliberations and that's how she would have wanted it to be.

Once we are done here, Lavender stipulated that we should all have a "jolly good time" and we do hope that you can all join us for lunch at 32 Upper Mall so we can do just that. Remember, it's a brave person that would defy the wishes of one of the Herbert sisters!

We would like to start with some images of Lavender accompanied by one of her most favourite pieces of music.

{Play sequence of images accompanied by Villa Lobos}

Lavender had many facets, many nooks and crannies, too many to do justice to in a few minutes but I'd like to share a few of them with you. It's hard to talk about her without also talking about my father because they were such a special team, so you will get a bit of him mixed in along the way!

So where does one start with mum. Not at the beginning and not in some predictable chronological order that's for sure – that would not be her way. This is an example of the paradox that was Lavender: on the one hand fiercely individual, rebellious and unconventional and on the other, a lover of control, efficiency, order, punctuality and of course, endless endless quantities of lists.

She loved time and motion studies. Like before a camping trip, taking her family to Dukes Meadows, assigning us all colours from a set of tent poles she had colour coded and then getting us to practice putting up a tent in record time; the time when she handed me a three dimensional sketch of how the car should be packed; or the fact that she would always have her suitcase packed at least two weeks before any trip.

Whilst other parents would probably have been kicking a ball round the park, she and dad would be teaching us skills such as carpentry, mixing concrete, plumbing and bricklaying. They instilled in us the belief that with a little common sense one can do almost anything, especially anything that required a so called "expert" and of course they were right.

She and Chris were early members of the green movement in this country. When it all became too party political for them, they took matters into their own hands and, egged on by John Seymour's ludicrous and fanciful vision of Self Sufficiency, embarked on the Bwlchgwynt experiment in Wales.

I have such wonderful memories of those crazy years; of hay making, of delivering lambs in the snow, of erecting 6 miles of fencing across the Welsh highlands, of driving JCBs, of my father bottling his urine to act as compost activator, of my mother training her sheep dog Emma and of course, of blowing things up.

They trusted their children from an early age with all manner of potentially lethal tools, devices and chemicals. Somehow they knew this would lead to mastery rather than disaster. And so when one day they received a phone

call to say that Stephen at school had manufactured a rifle in metalwork, had filled it with home made explosive and had blown his study door off, I think there was almost a quiet sense of pride.

Lavender loved to fix all manner of things in her own inimitable way. She loved to fix with wood, with cement, with Araldite and Uho, with Selotape and with industrial quantities of glass fibre and Isoxon. However her finest hour was when in Wales she discovered bailer twine and proceeded to lash together anything and everything with the infernal stuff. If a job needed doing right, Lavender would bodge it with bailer twine!

Music flowed in her veins. She loved to sing and knowing the words or even the tune were considered optional extras. Indeed my children would often refer to grandma's "La la la" singing which I like to think is the real origin for her nickname "La La".

She loved to travel, to seek out the sun, to experience new cultures and for the opportunity to practice her French, German and Italian. When younger she also loved to ski and after a day on the slopes, could be found setting the world to rights in German over a glass or two of gluvine.

Time spent with us on holidays and at Christmas was precious, especially for the grandchildren. Although in latter years her memory often failed her, she took a genuine interest in all our lives. She was a very playful and unconventional grandmother and she never lost her childlike excitement at opening her stocking on Christmas morning.

Lavender had a special kind of creativity and intelligence. She had the sort of non linear mind Edward De Bono would have been proud of and she deeply regretted not having continued with her education. Motherhood was definitely not enough for her and at times one could sense her search for fulfilment on a bigger stage.

When it came to the importance of being oneself regardless of what others might think, she walked the talk and encouraged her children to do the same. That said, life with Lavender was not without its battles. She was a force to be reckoned with and sometimes her desire to help and fix people got the better of her. However there's no doubt that her heart was firmly in the right place.

When it came to fortitude and selflessness, my parents had deep pockets indeed. They weathered Stephen's schizophrenia, his alcoholism and his eventual death with huge courage and grace, indeed if anything it seemed to strengthen their relationship. She was fascinated by the inner workings of the mind and the shadow side of life.

Although she split from conventional religion many years ago, Lavender had a deeply spiritual side. She was fascinated by big concepts such as cosmology, metaphysics and even the possibility that aliens had built the pyramids! We grew up with all manner of alternative medicines, with crystals and once she even hung a large metal pyramid over my father's bed to help him get better.

She believed in something beyond this life and was definitely not afraid of death. From my early childhood I can remember her telling me how she would not want to remain alive if she was incapacitated or infirm and that we had to make sure that did not happen to her.

She adored her house on Upper Mall and made it clear that she wanted to be carried out of there in a box, a wish that was realised this morning. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to Brigitte, Martha, Antonia and Solving for their role in enabling her to live out her days there and to the many neighbours, friends and family who also provided support. She left this life the way she would have wanted to go: quickly, with a minimum of fuss and inconvenience to others, and surrounded by people who loved her.

Paul Clarke

11:00 15 May 2007, Mortlake Crematorium