

Eulogy for Dee Fifield by Ania Marczyk

I have spent many hours agonising over the right words to say here today; words that would remember Dee as she was and express the tremendous respect and affection I had for her; words that would do her passion for them justice. It hasn't been easy and as the virtual paper mountain of my discarded efforts grew, I lamented the loss of her gentle criticism and editorial skills.

Dee was my very dear friend. That in itself is unremarkable, as she was kind to everyone and her warmth, enthusiasm and extraordinary sense of humour endeared her to so many of the people whose lives she touched.

It is hard for me to be sad when I think of Dee. For although there will be a yawning chasm in my life left by the lack of her presence (and she did have a significant presence). Although I will miss our encyclopaedic rambles that would sometimes last for hours, curtailed reluctantly by the necessary mundane tasks of everyday life and the all-too-rapid passage of time, leaving us with still so much to say. Although I will miss her genuine warmth, enthusiasm and ideas; the way she rejoiced at my 'ups' and was so supportive during my 'downs', never failing to make me feel good about life. Although I will lament the loss of her wonderful vocabulary and exquisite turn of phrase - despite all of these things, she has left me with so many memories to smile, or even laugh, about. Memories that drive away the sense of sadness and loss and sometimes leave me chortling guiltily, appalled that I can even begin to smile at such a sad time; but perhaps I shouldn't be surprised - we always managed to laugh together no matter what. In good times and sometimes in bad, we would laugh until we wept and the world always seemed a better place.

I would like to share with you just a few of the memories I have of Dee.

The way that she answered the phone in a quizzical and faintly hesitant tone, as if investigating an unfamiliar noise in a dark cellar, and her obvious delight once you replied.

The wonderful originality, often ribald humour and the eloquence of the things that she said and wrote. A friend said her "e-mails were leisurely strolls around a garden of language, arcane and marvelous."

Knowing that no topic was taboo and anything could be discussed deconstructed and often laughed about. She was under no illusions as to her mortality, aware she was living on borrowed time and while she did not seek to hasten her death, she did not fear it either.

Her remarkable fearlessness when it came to big stuff and yet timidity and apprehension over minor things. She was frequently baffled by technology and often asked for my help, usually signing herself "Queen of Ineptitude".

Her determination not to let anything grind her down. When a friend asked how she was feeling during her recent and very debilitating chest infection, who but Dee would write:

"I'm keeping warm and hoping my Chestikov is a flash in the pan, that it won't hang around like a depressed spurned lover in a bad Russian novel"

She loved to knit and had knitted some unusual items in her time, including ice-cream, a scarf that once adorned the side of a bus and a suntan. She proselytised sock knitting shamelessly and many of her friends succumbed to that addiction thanks to her.

We shared a love of language. She was fascinated by etymology, collecting obscure expressions, dialects and argots, including Romany and Polari, enriching my vocabulary with many unusual words and phrases. Grammar abuse was a particular pet hate for us both and we almost ended up nervous wrecks after teaching a Tarot and writing course together. We had much to laugh about too with some wonderfully funny writing, often unintentional.

It amused her to refer to our venture as “Pikey and Posh Teach Grammar”, but reluctantly admitted that if you cut her open you'd probably find the words "Middle Class" running through her bones like the lettering in a stick of rock.

She was one of the few people able to surprise me.

She is the only person I have ever known to be struck by lightning...and in her own living room.

Her abiding ambition was to become the batty old woman who lived with 36 cats. Although she didn't manage this during her life, I hope to redress this in some small way with a personal memorial. I have designed a sock pattern with a decidedly feline flavour, sporting a dozen cats per pair. A few of her friends and I will be knitting this up, so she will have at least 36 cats knitted in her honour and I hope many more when I post the pattern up for public use. It seems a fitting tribute and one I think she would appreciate.

Dee was never at a loss for words. Even when "speechless" she was often at her most eloquent and I am not at all sure she is silent even now. I can still hear her through my memories and I think she will remain with me and all those who loved her until we meet again. In the meantime, the world will be a little dimmer, a little less joyous and a lot less entertaining with her passing. To use a favourite expression of hers, she was “a good egg of the first water”. I will drink to her often and remember her always.