

Ceremony

in memory of
the life of

Helen Kendall



Mortonhall Crematorium
Edinburgh

Saturday 29th August 2015
11am

Helen Elizabeth Kendall

Remembering her life

8th August 1952 – 14th August 2015

Arrival music: It's What We Do / Ebb and Flow by Pink Floyd

Entrance Music: Barwick Green (The Archers Theme)

Welcome

Good morning and welcome. I am Laura Dolan of the Humanist Fellowship of Scotland. I would like thank you for being here today to honour and celebrate the life of Helen Kendall and to show your love and support for her family and each other. Everyone here is very welcome and others, who couldn't be here, are also thinking of her and her family today no matter where they may be.

Each of us is joined to one another through love and friendship, by living in a community, having common interests and activities or simply through our shared humanity and caring for each other. It is certain that Helen made her mark on many people, was greatly loved and admired, was good fun to be with and will always be remembered. She was someone who was able to be herself, enjoyed life and everyone warmed to her. Helen was a loving wife to Jim, mum to Laurie and Charlie and step-mum to Jane and Anne. She was a terrific friend and hugely respected colleague. She will be very sadly missed by everyone who knew her.

Helen wanted a humanist ceremony: a fond farewell where people could come as themselves, feel happy to have known her and go away feeling cheerful. As someone who held an affinity with the Buddhist approach to life, Helen would have appreciated these words of the Dalai Lama, which could have been written about her:

“ There are only two days in the year that nothing can be done. One is called Yesterday and the other is called Tomorrow. Today is the right day to Love, Believe, Do and mostly Live.”

(Dalai Lama XIV)

She had so many interests and talents and was someone who equally loved being in the great outdoors or at a party with friends and family. Everyone here, who has been lucky enough to know Helen, will be all the richer for that. So we'll let ourselves be glad that we knew her and enjoy sharing memories of good times spent with her.

Helen was a great writer - her blog conjured up colourful images and explained things effortlessly, very honest about her emotions but never dwelling too long on her struggles or sadness and always allowing the sun to shine through. She could convey the love and laughter of a situation that was no doubt quite difficult - like the tale of an unexpected detour on one of their many trips to Colonsay when there was no wheelchair to hand and Jim ended up pushing her from car to house in a wheelbarrow. I felt better for coming to know her just a tiny little bit and am truly honoured to be here today. You will all feel that that so much more than me.

Tributes to Helen

All of you, who knew and loved Helen, have your own memories and could all easily pay tribute to the wonderful person she was. So who better to speak about Helen, than some of you who knew her well, both professionally and personally.

I'd like to invite Frank Little, with whom Helen worked at the City Museums, to say a little bit about Helen's working life.

I'd like to share with you some of Helen's many achievements over a long and varied museum career.

Like many seeking a career in museums Helen started as a volunteer in the late 1970s at the then National Museums of Antiquities before securing her first curatorial post as assistant curator at the Royal Museum of Scotland. Next she moved to become Assistant Keeper of Social History at Beamish Open Air museum in 1982 where she developed an interest in, and passion for, oral histories and the trade union movement. Joining Edinburgh City Museums in 1985, she remained there for the rest of her career.

Helen entered the profession at a time of significant change - old assumptions and certainties were being challenged and a new philosophy of what museums were for was being articulated. Helen was at the forefront of a new generation of curators – social history curators - who believed that museums could change lives, that museums really mattered.

Helen was passionate about people, their lives, their stories and their place in the world. Above all Helen wanted to give a voice to the unheard, those who were disadvantaged, dispossessed or under represented. She wanted to tell the people's story. Unlike many of us who talk about it she actually did it. Helen led the

development of the People's Story Museum, a museum about the life, work and leisure of Edinburgh's people. What we take for granted today was a radical, new way of working in the 1980s and the People's Story was an original and ground breaking museum when it opened in 1989. Ordinary people's lives were celebrated – fishwives, printers, joiners, domestic servants - using the people's own words to tell their story. The People's story museum is still as vital and relevant today as it was 25 years ago.

Helen put community involvement and partnership at the heart of her work and this commitment carried on in the 1990s culminating in the opening of the Newhaven Heritage Museum in 1994 – a community history museum owned and staffed by the people of Newhaven – a community fiercely proud of their history and heritage.

Then in 1995, she worked in partnership with the Workers Education Association, to create *The People's of Edinburgh*, a celebration of Edinburgh's cultural diversity, again collecting oral histories and first person testimony, culminating in an exhibition at the City Art Centre, an exhibition that also involved music, dance, poetry, food, discussion and debate– museums for Helen could be a serious matter but it was also about having fun too.

A more recent landmark project was *Remember When and Rainbow City*, working with the Living Memory Association, to celebrate the histories of the LGBT communities in Edinburgh. Over 150 people from Edinburgh's LGBT communities – ranging from 18 to 80 years old – came together to share their experience and create a unique archive of oral history interviews, photographs and memorabilia. This is a wonderful rich collection and a lasting legacy to over half a century of LGBT life in Edinburgh. The exhibition *Rainbow City* opened at the City Art Centre in 2006. The evening was one of the most entertaining and moving exhibition openings that I and many of my colleagues have ever been too.

Of course, Helen was also passionate about women's history and as part of 'A *Gude Cause*' – which commemorated 100 years since the 1909 suffragette march down Princess Street - Helen curated a show 'Votes for women' at the Museum of

Edinburgh. Even in retirement Helen continued to celebrate and bring to public attention the lives of women who have made a significant contribution to Edinburgh. *'Women on the Platform'* explored the lives of four 19th century Quaker women who campaigned against the slave trade and for votes for women.

It was not only exhibitions and displays that Helen celebrated the lives of the women of Edinburgh –it was through publications too. *'She was Aye Workin' Memories of Tenement Women in Edinburgh and Glasgow'*, was first published in 2003, and co-authored with her friend and colleague Liz Carnegie. It used oral histories to explore the lives of women who faced difficult conditions and grinding poverty in the first half of the 20th century. This book proved to be very popular and I remember her delight that it remained in the top ten best seller list for a number of weeks and has since sold a remarkable 26,000 copies worldwide.

So Helen's career was rich and varied. She was passionate about people, their lives, their stories and their place in the world – her reputation went far beyond Edinburgh and she inspired a generation of social history curators who felt and still feel, that it is possible to change the world and make a difference to people's lives - she was passionate and she cared – she shone a light on the hidden histories and gave a voice to those who were unheard. That's the best kind of curator.

Helen had many fantastic friends and I would like to invite her very dear friend Brenda Fishwick to share some of her personal thoughts and memories.

Helen asked me a few weeks ago if I would speak at her funeral; an honour I accepted, though reluctantly. I didn't want to admit that it was almost time to say goodbye. Maybe Helen asked because she trusted me to evoke the vibrancy of our student days, the fun of meeting up or visiting her on our various world travels, and later swopping our experiences of being new parents and nurturing a family.

I first met Helen when we were freshers at Homerton College Cambridge. Along with another new friend, Tessa, we soon teamed up with a group of bright, slightly wild, left wing students – Brian, Ian, John, Aidan, Roger among others – with whom we spent happy summer afternoons on punts, or toasting crumpets on dilapidated gas fires. My abiding memory of Helen in those early days is of her swirl of blonde curls, her infectious laugh and love of games, drama, music and zany humour. Helen's passion for her main subject, History, was obvious from the start and she always a natural researcher and curator of the past, her perseverance and attention to detail acute. On my last visit to Helen she presented me with a folder of letters I'd sent to her in the 70s and 80s and we read them together, peering through a window into our past life, Helen's photographic memory filling in forgotten details.

Helen and I completed our B Ed degrees at Newnham College and Helen moved, with John, to London Ontario, Canada, for John to begin work on his Phd. This was followed by extensive travels in South America. Helen always loved the wonder and excitement of travel, to which she brought her curious mind and adventurous spirit. After a period in Bath, Helen and John moved to Edinburgh in 1977 and were in love with their adopted home ever after. The magical island of Colonsay has also been a constant thread running through their family life since their first visit in 1991. I know it will remain as another 'home' in Charlie and Laurie's hearts.

Helen's life has been a roller-coaster of great joy, but also deep grief, particularly following the tragic death of Charlie and Laurie's dear dad, John. But she always dealt with whatever was thrown at her with resilience, optimism and a matter-of-fact approach. She cherished and appreciated the good times, delighting in her boys, her relationships, her museum work and the lure of the wider world. She recently showed me a scribbled note made at a yoga course reflection a few years back ; ' I really appreciate life. I have 2 beautiful boys and the good health to enjoy them'How special but how fragile our good fortune is....

I know that Helen asked us not to speak today of 'Mandy – her MND', as she called it. She tried so hard to make her illness a friend and not a foe. It defined only a very

small fraction of her life – 2 years out of 63. So I understand why she preferred us to celebrate what went before. And yet her approach to this devastating disease was typical and deserves to be mentioned. Through her inspirational blog she shared her journey with us, sometimes amusing, sometimes harrowing, but always lucid and pragmatic. The recent comments posted there sum up Helen's best qualities - 'indomitable', 'courageous', 'exuberant', 'tenacious', 'loyal', a 'bonnie fechter!', a little trooper'. Helen tried not to dwell on what might have been; she confessed her sadness that she wouldn't grow old with Jim or become a grandmother, but in the last 2 years she revisited many vivid happy memories of the rich and fulfilling life she had experienced.

Helen would wish to thank many people here today; she really valued her friendships and family. But she would reserve the biggest thanks to Jim, who has dedicated himself to caring for her and helping her to remain dignified, comfortable and calm throughout..... Jim- your love and your patience has been inspirational. You made it possible for Helen to wring as much joy and adventure out of her life to the very end. It is not the future you anticipated and planned together just 4 years ago when we celebrated your wedding day, but we are in awe of the way you shouldered this 24/7 commitment to cherish and care for Helen during her darkest days. And Jane and Anne too, whom I know Helen was so fond of, have included her in every aspect of their lives. So Charlie and Laurie, you still have a wonderful new family to play a part in.

Helen posted a video of herself on her blog shortly after her diagnosis. (It's still up there if you haven't seen it). She wanted to be remembered like that; laughing, having fun, hopping on one foot, embracing the present moment. Recollect her like that today, or treasure your own unique memories.

Farewell dear friend.

Helen's husband, Jim, would like to pay his own tribute and say some words of thanks.

Helen was very clear that she wanted today to be a celebration of her life, not about the last two years with MND. In any case she has already documented that through her blog. So I'm going to talk about that time only to say thank you to everyone who helped us through it. In particular the Health Professionals from MND Scotland, Marie Curie and our GP Practice whose care was exemplary. No less important were the Carers who helped look after Helen, they were lovely people and truly cared for her. And, of course, our wonderful friends and family.

Helen and I met in June 2007, we had both lost our previous spouses tragically young and were looking for a new relationship for life. We married in June 2011 and moved into the house we had bought together in November 2012. Despite the many similarities in our backgrounds and interests we are, in many ways, very different people. Two strong and sometimes contrasting characters meant that at our best we had indeed the best of times and we knew each others' value and remained solidly committed when our characters clashed. We had such good times, experiences and fun together.

Helen was a loving, devoted, supportive, loyal and justly proud mother to Charlie and Laurie. She did not have a big family but valued them the more for that. In the time I knew her she was particularly close to her Aunt Margaret and made great efforts to keep close to her. She loved having my daughters as hers too and really appreciated being welcomed into and becoming part of the much larger Kendall Clan.

Helen was also a loyal friend who made the effort to keep in touch and loved to see her friends. She was hospitable, gregarious and loved socialising: enjoying fine food and wine with friends, going to the pub, cinema, theatre, concerts - and she loved a party - even better if she could be dancing.

I must mention Colonsay. She loved the Highlands and Islands but Colonsay was special. She had visited 29 times since 1991, the last visit in April. She so loved being there and sharing it with others. She was never happier than seeing the pellucid blue sky and sea all around or watching the sun sinking into the ocean. It was her place.

In some ways Helen was a contradictory character:

- highly intelligent but with a blind spot for numbers
- an excellent communicator who could freeze, particularly on the phone, and fail to grasp anything you said
- would often say the first thing that came into her head but when the chips were down would show great emotional intelligence
- was often mercurial, flying off at tangents as things flitted through her head but could also focus to the exclusion of anything else
- at home was chronically untidy and disorganised but who achieved so much through her talents and commitment

Commitment is a word I've used a lot: commitment to her family, to her friends, to her work, to the causes she championed and to her many interests. She also had extraordinary resilience in a life with tragedies that would have floored many of us.

But the reason why so many of you are here is that Helen had Life Force in spades:

- she always hoped for the best
- every day was a new day regardless of what had gone before
- she a natural, inspiring and uninhibited enthusiast
- she was confident and opinionated
- she cared passionately about what she did
- she didn't take "no" for an answer
- and she was always "up for it" - with vitality and energy

Life with her was rarely dull but full of experiences, activity and fun - that's the way she wanted it.

So thanks for everything Helen - not least your smile - which could light up a room.

Committal

In love and respect we have remembered the life of Helen Kendall. We have now reached the part of today's ceremony when we will commit Helen's body to its final end.

Please stand if you feel able to do so.

As we commit Helen's body to its final journey, we are glad to have been a part of her life.

We treasure the time we had with her and cherish the memory of her friendship.

It has been said that:

Some people come into our lives
and move our souls to dance.
They awaken us to understanding
with the passing whisper of their wisdom.
They make our world more beautiful,
leave footprints in our hearts
and we are never, ever the same.

With love, we leave her in peace; with respect, we bid her farewell.

Her love and smile we commit into our hearts.

Please be seated.

Reflection

Let's take a few moments to each reflect on Helen, bringing to mind happy images and memories of good times you shared with her. Our ceremony has been just a small taste of her life and you all have memories of your own. Those of you who would like to, may want to take the opportunity to say a silent prayer.

One of Helen's many interests and talents included singing in a choir. So we'll think of Helen as we listen to a choir she sang with many times - Protest in Harmony.

We are *Protest in Harmony*, Edinburgh's campaigning choir. Helen was a member for many years, until she was robbed of her singing voice and she helped organise some of our activities. We shall sing *Bambelela*, a South African song, which Helen sang with us many times. We sing it in her memory and in honour of her particular spirit. Bambelela.....Never give up!

Music during reflection: Bambelela sung by Protest in Harmony

Retiral

Thank you for being here today, celebrating the life of Helen Kendall - a remarkable woman with a great many talents and passions and a great many friends. She was a devoted wife and mum who lived a varied and fulfilling life amongst people she loved and who loved her. Her vibrant personality brightened the lives of others. She loved to sing and dance, was a great writer and educator, creative in so many ways, incredibly wise and brave and caring of others and the natural world. She was truly inspirational.

Jim, Laurie and Charlie would love for everyone to please join them after the ceremony for some refreshments at the Braid Hills hotel – it's on Braid Road, which is a short drive from here, and if anyone needs directions please just ask. Those of you who are able to go on to the hotel, please would you use this side door and make your way directly there. If you're not able to go to the hotel, please leave through the main door where Helen's family would like to thank you for being here today.

There won't be a collection taken today but, anyone who would like to, please do feel free to make a donation to Motor Neurone Disease Scotland or Marie Curie Edinburgh in recognition of their fantastic work and in memory of Helen.

As we part, I will leave you with some final words of the poet Rabindranath Tagore which Helen might perhaps have said herself – in this poem entitled “Farewell My Friends”:

FAREWELL MY FRIENDS

It was beautiful as long as it lasted
The journey of my life.
I have no regrets whatsoever
save the pain I'll leave behind.
Those dear hearts who love and care...
And the strings pulling at the heart and soul...
The strong arms that held me up
When my own strength let me down.
At every turning of my life I came across good friends,
Friends who stood by me,
Even when the time raced me by.
Farewell, farewell my friends
I smile and bid you goodbye.
No, shed no tears for I need them not
All I need is your smile.
If you feel sad do think of me
for that's what I'll like
when you live in the hearts of those you love,
remember then you never die.

(Rabindranath Tagore)

Thank you - please would you stand as Helen's family lead us out.

Retiral Music: Poms and Pride by Toots and the Maytals