

Remembering Sue Gregory

Sue Archbold looks back at the life of Sue Gregory 18.01.1945 to 19.03.2022 (aged 77 years) who was a QToD and former reader in deaf education at the University of Birmingham and made many contributions to BATOD including coordinating the deaf history section of the BATOD website

This was something it never occurred to me that I would be writing while Sue and I were having endless interesting conversations about every topic under the sun – and spending a great deal of time laughing. However, it was a privilege to know her and count her as a friend, as well as a colleague, and a privilege to be asked to do this.

Sue Treble was born on 18th January 1945. Less than four months before VE Day and the end of the Second World War. Sue grew up with two younger sisters, Margaret and Alison, in Hoddesdon in Hertfordshire. She went to Ware Grammar School where she met Moira and formed the first of many lasting friendships that would be a constant feature of her life. She did well at school and would be the first person in her family to go to university, studying the new subject of psychology at the University of Leicester. She would work in this field until she retired, followed in her footsteps by her daughter Isabel who would become an educational psychologist, and two grandchildren who are currently studying the subject at sixth form and university.

Sue was encouraged to stay in academia, studying for a PhD at the University of Nottingham. There she would meet Keir, a lecturer in psychology. They married in July 1972 and had three daughters: Mathilda, Isabel and Lizzy.



While her first two children were small, Sue worked in the Child Development Research Unit at Nottingham University with John and Elizabeth Newsome. She often took the children with her to work, parenting her small children whilst running seminars. She used to entertain me with her stories about Keir arriving with a screaming baby as she was lecturing; she would probably laugh at being called a feminist role model but she was!

The family grew up in Pear Tree Farm in the tiny Leicestershire village of Hoton, two miles from my home – which was convenient for us! At that Georgian farmhouse, Sue was incredibly hospitable: she would host elaborate family Christmases, opening the doors to 14 or 15 guests supported by Keir, who did all the family cooking – very well!

Sue's career grew too. She worked at The Open University, directing the groundbreaking 'Issues in Deafness' course; she told me that was the hardest she ever worked, with only Christmas Day off. She also learnt a lot there about teaching and learning styles, and this was really helpful when later, we developed master's modules on early development and cochlear implantation. That was when she was at the University of Birmingham, where she ran the Teacher of the Deaf course, encouraging deaf adults to go into teaching and championing bilingual education.

I met Sue when I was coordinating the Nottingham Cochlear Implant (CI) Programme in the 1990s and she was known for her contribution to bilingual education. At that time there was a huge amount of controversy about



cochlear implantation and Sue and I were invited to the same conference in London to speak 'on opposite sides' of the debate. However, we disappointed the organisers – we decided to travel together and Sue drove (in her usual speedy way), and by the time we got there we were firm friends and found the middle ground where so often the truth lies.

Sue then became the psychologist for the Nottingham CI programme and her insights were invaluable and listened to by all the team, including surgeons. She influenced practice there and elsewhere, and we carried out a great deal of qualitative research with families, children, and young people. Some of the measures we developed are still used today, particularly a Parent Questionnaire – I have just had a request to use it from India and Saudi Arabia. Sue was hugely generous with her time, listening to families, children, and the team, and fascinated by this new world of hospital clinics. She had the gift to assess the most complicated children by engaging them, and her insights provided invaluable input to their assessments and for families. Doing joint clinics and visits with her was inspiring.

She then worked with me at the Ear Foundation, developing the family and child-centred research programme, with innovative ideas for dissemination – not only many peer-reviewed papers but accessible summary

booklets for families and non-specialists – and those of us short of time! We developed multi-professional assessment days for children with CI, and her daughter, Isabel, then became part of that inspiring team. She was also Chair of the Governors at the Royal School for the Deaf, Derby; Sue was surprisingly sharp at the business end of things and a great sounding board for me, running the Ear Foundation. She also loved the new technology – the first person I knew to have an iPod, entertaining a young waiter with it over one of our many pub suppers. He clearly thought we were two crazy old women.

Sue was a great friend to many, too, and drove all over the country to support people, including aged aunts and friends. To me she was an amazing friend – I became very ill at one stage, unable to move, while also doing my PhD in Nijmegen in the Netherlands. Sue would arrive in hospital with sharp sideways questions about the thesis to be answered by me from my bed – her only stipulation being "I don't do bedpans!"

Sue and I both loved to travel and even loved airports. She was a great travel companion, interesting but undemanding. We managed to squeeze in interesting trips alongside international conferences, where we were invited by CI surgeons who appreciated the wider view of cochlear implantation. Following an Athens conference, we went to Piraeus harbour and the first boat was going to Hydra so that was where we went too, having a lovely few days at a memorable little house with blue shutters reading, chatting, walking, eating, and drinking.





Sue and Keir moved to Oxford to be near their grandchildren but we kept up our friendship, with wide-ranging conversations, including sharing our love of books over pub lunches. She became a huge part of her grandchildren's lives and enjoyed shopping trips with them, lunches, shows and family holidays.

She continued her many interests and was always fascinated by Russia and the USSR. Her fortieth birthday present was taking the train across Russia. We both worked there and she learned Russian and visited the country many times. Recognising a need whilst there, she set up 'Signs of Russia' a charity providing support for deaf children in Moscow, continuing to improve lives across the world.

Not one to take retirement seriously, she became involved in the local deaf club in Oxford, took advanced literature courses and ran the Russian Perm society, coordinating exchange visits to share friendship and understanding. Her love of travel never left her; when Lizzy moved to New Zealand, Sue made frequent, memorable visits to the other side of the world to see the sights, eat seafood, and take incredible road trips.

Her career came full circle when three years ago she edited the 'lost manuscript' of her long-time mentors from Nottingham, John and Elizabeth Newson, resulting in the posthumous publication of their final book. An important piece of legislation she had called for, a Bill recognising British Sign Language as a language in its own right, had its final reading in the House of

Commons the day before she died. She worked with Ted Moore and Paul Simpson on the history of BATOD and deaf education History of deaf education Archives – BATOD (www.batod.org.uk/information-category/history-of-deaf-education) and tirelessly gave of her time.

Isabel first noticed her slowing down. Sue had always been so clever; it was shocking to see her losing that sharpness that had always defined her. She was very aware and had always loved driving, and when she decided that she wouldn't drive anymore to meet me I knew she knew something was happening. We used to laugh about her lack of sense of direction but this was different. During our last lunch together it was clear that she was having to work at the conversation. Dementia took her quickly, and I think she would have preferred it that way.

When Sue was admitted to hospital in Oxford, she was visited daily by members of her family and her friends, and she died there on 19th March 2022 with her daughters at her bedside. She leaves for me, personally, a host of wonderful memories; I can still hear her laugh, and I will always be grateful for not only the friendship but her sharing of her creative and sharp brain. It's hard to think it's not there – no more funny messages on my phone.

Her favourite play was *Time and the Conways* by JB Priestley. At the end, the oldest Conway brother, Alan, explains a theory of time to his sister Kay: the idea that we might only see one small slice of time at once, but this is an illusion.

From her favourite play, Alan says:

Time's only a kind of dream, Kay. If it wasn't, it would have to destroy everything – the whole universe – and then remake it again every tenth of a second. But Time doesn't destroy anything. It merely moves us on – in this life – from one peephole to the next.

But the point is, now, at this moment, or any moment, we're only a cross-section of our real selves. What we really are is the whole stretch of ourselves, all our time, and when we come to the end of this life, all those selves, all our time, will be us – the real you, the real me. And then perhaps we'll find ourselves in another time, which is only another kind of dream.



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