

Words for Babette, from Jim Smith

I met Babette on a number of family occasions, mostly celebrations such as notable birthdays and funerals. But I remember the first time, way back in 1994, in the little house in Nutley Lane. Her warmth and generosity were evident from the first. What else do I remember? Her curiosity! A bombardment of questions about my life, but with genuine interest, not just conversation making.

And I remember the last, when a grand congregation of Smiths and Bluett-Duncans from Liverpool and Twickenham and Cambridge converged on Reigate for a weekend in September 2018. And I spent a couple of happy hours in the kitchen - the focus of the house round the corner here.

Did you know that cooking can be fun and relaxing? Actually, I expect a lot of you do, because you know this family and their shops and their expertise. It was certainly fun that day under Babette's easy-going, caring, and watchful eye as I made two quiches to help feed the gathering. I think there may even have been red wine to hand. There was definitely the same curiosity and more questions.

Looking back, I realise how lucky I was to have that opportunity to cook with her. We had hoped that the gathering, and the kitchen fun, were to be repeated in March last year, but it was not to be.

And finally, still on food of course, to sourdough baking. In 2016, Babette turned up to my mother's funeral party with a jar of starter for me – not some bizarre funerary offering, but a typically kind response to a request and fully in keeping with the celebratory atmosphere.

Last year, instead of meeting, we exchanged emails and I sent her a picture of one of my loaves. Babette gets the last word, as her generous response filled me with pride:

Oh la la! Vachement bien mon cher!

September 9th 2021