

Words for Babette, from Shirley Stone

I guess not so strangely Babette and I talked quite a lot about her funeral and one of the things that briefly crossed her mind was having her funeral *before* she died!!

She had read about someone doing that and experiencing the true feelings and deep love that everyone felt first hand.

Probably a step too far..... but I remain firm that she is with us today and will absolutely rejoice in the love that oozes here and seeing the impact she has had on so many of us so I decided to write my note specifically to her.....

Wow Babette, it's hard to believe its 20 years since we met.....I remember it so clearly..... determined to be a part of school life, despite being a working mum, I joined the Holmesdale School PSA and my first task was to get raffle prizes from local companies....

Probably the worst person to ask, as not being a local, I didn't know anybody!!

Having shown my meagre 'prizes' to the committee, I was asked if I'd spoken to you? Clearly surprised that I didn't know who you were (Who doesn't know Babette??) several members of the committee realised maybe I wasn't the best choice for this role, but still sent me off to contact you.

I finally managed to track you down and said I'd been told to call you as you'd give a raffle prize for the school fair, probably not the most diplomatic or warmest of introductions and it rattled you a little so you gave me a bit of a hard time about it!

You scared me half to death!

That said Selina and Josie were in the same class so we gradually got to know each other a little better, but it was really when we devised a plan for a charity event that was to become your legendary 'Babette's Stir Up' that we really got to know each other, (*I never changed my mind that you could still be scary by the way*) but you loved me (or anyone for that matter) challenging you back and that's where our relationship blossomed.

Back to the StirUp, we had SO much fun doing those, anyone that was there at any of those events will remember it with huge fondness. Everyone laughed until it truly hurt. Some of us still talk about them now.

It's funny how our friendship grew really, we are such opposites of each other, but it just seemed to work.....

You loved to shock me or maybe I should say it just came so naturally, you never shied away from any topic and if we ventured on something that began to get uncomfortable for me and my stiff upper lip, or English reserve, I'd look to change the subject but you saw that as a cue to dig even deeper.... And always did.

I've got so many precious memories with you, I reminded Andrew and the children recently about the time we went away for your 50th birthday. You were priceless and I genuinely think that was when we really got to know each other on a whole new, much deeper level.

You are such a unique and special lady Babette. I feel so privileged to have had the opportunity to be so close to you.

You challenged me to the point of being uncomfortable sometimes, but I welcomed our deep conversations. I loved to debate with you and challenge your thinking sometimes and when all else failed I would say 'just because Babette!!'

But it still never stopped you!

The time I managed to convince you that I could make clothes shopping a great experience for you (one you truly loathed but you succumbed and came with me anyway). Your face when I said you only had to sit and relax and let the personal shopper do all the running around the store was a picture. We got SO carried away that dayand I know you ended up taking most of the things backbut we often talked about it and how that really opened your mind to shopping - That said, I never got you to come back with me again..... So maybe I was a little delusional

But if I remember correctly that's where your love of scarves came from which became part of your identity.

I say you never came back with me, but that was until recently when I wanted to go 'antique' shopping in Dorkingyou were quite weak then but we had the most precious dayit was so wet and miserable but we still had to sit outside in the courtyard for tea and cake because of the covid rules in place, everyone was huddled under umbrellas keeping themselves to themselves in the true British way and you suddenly broke out in song..... I was mortified!

I've told you SO many times that I can't sing so I certainly wasn't going to join you and kept thinking "What on earth will everyone think?"

Within a minute you had everyone chatting to you and smiling..... (*maybe that was just to stop the pain of seeing me squirm??*) but, either way you brought some sunshine to complete strangers in the way only you could do.

I was paranoid that it was all too much for you and said "but you hate shopping' and you staggered me to say that you LOVE this kind of shopping, it's just clothes shopping that wasn't for you!!

How could I not know this after all these years ?

We have a daily reminder of that day as I bought Andrew the clock we picked and it's more precious than ever to us both but I feel so cheated that I missed so many other shopping days with you.

I know in the scheme of things, Babette, that shopping is so far down the list of what you'll be missed for but it's a reflection of how cruel it is that you've been taken so soon, how much you still had to do and achieve for yourself, how much you still wanted to experience, but more so, how much you still wanted to help others understand themselves and be honest with themselves, a skill that you had like no other.

The last few months have been so difficult Babette, to see the hope and determination slowly stolen from you but you never stopped believing and wanting to learn from each and every phase.

As we all think about you and share our memories, I hope you can hear them all, I hope you finally recognise the impact you had on so many people and in the absence of you being able to say it directly, I feel compelled to share with Andrew, Jonathan, Jeanne & Josie just how loved and precious they all made you feel and the pride in what you had achieved together as a family.

Goodbye Babette, God Bless

Sxx