

Tribute to Sarah Montague, by her husband Phil



I was in the bar of London Corinthian Sailing Club, Hammersmith when I first met Sarah. I had been chatting to my friends, about a visit to Paris, where I would be staying with some Venezuelan girls, I'd met the previous year. An attractive girl, who was standing within earshot, butted in, to say that she had always wanted to go to Paris. Soon after this, when our friendship had blossomed into love, the 'bird in the hand' and I had a romantic holiday in Paris – and we did briefly meet the Venezuelans!

As Sarah's parents, Allan and Barbara Vidow lived in Lymington, we were married in the town's church, on an unseasonably warm and sunny January 24th, 1981. Although it is tradition for the bride to be late, unfortunately I was the one waylaid in the pub. This required Sarah and her father to make a number of circuits of the town, before getting confirmation that my Best Man Sibby, had finally got me into the church!

Sarah & I both worked in London at that time and bought a terraced house in Croydon, where Sarah had the choice of commuting either by rail, or on the back of my motorbike. Sarah often preferred to take the train home, as the inter-city service to Brighton made its first stop at Croydon and had a bar! Here she could be chatted up and

bought her favourite gin & tonic, safe in the knowledge that she could leave her host after a quick drink at his expense!

When I first met Sarah, she worked for Liberty of London as a buyer of wedding dresses. Her beautiful wedding dress came from here at a bargain price. I worked for Crown Agents who were commercial agents for a number of government bodies around the world. Soon after we married, I was offered a two-year posting to their office in Singapore. After a lengthy consideration of probably no more than 5 seconds, Sarah persuaded me to accept the offer and we were soon jetting off in Club Class to our new home. My sister Jo came here to join us for a holiday stop-over, on her way to Australia. She remembers being picked up at the airport by Sarah and whisked off in a trishaw shortly after her arrival, to be taken to Raffles for one or two of their famous Singapore Slings. We returned to Raffles a lot during that visit, for a banana leaf curry or tiffin and no doubt, a few more Singapore slings.

There is something about the tropics, maybe it's the heat. But surprisingly after a few months, a bump appeared in Sarah's tummy which we nick-named 'Oddie' after the cartoon dog. As we lived next door to Singapore's main hospital, we only had a short walk to make, when Sarah's contractions started. Our family began with the arrival of Nathalie. Four years later, when we were living in Epsom and watching Last Night of the Proms, Sarah's contractions started again. Later that evening we completed our family with Emma. Jo and Gordon, who had thoughtfully moved their wedding date to enable us all to be with them, were married 3 weeks after Emma's birth. We attended the wedding with our very new baby and her elder sister, to the great delight of the bride and all the guests.

Although Sarah was a proficient horse rider and qualified riding instructor, she quickly came to her senses and was converted to a love of sailing. She did not object to the occasional dunking in the Thames from our first dinghy called 'Rolling Bones', but I think preferred the larger and more stable boats we owned later in our lives.

When the girls were still very young, we decided that a move to rural East Anglia would provide all of us with a better quality of life. In 1989 we moved to Yoxford in North Suffolk, close to where I had recently joined the staff at Sizewell B Power Station. Sarah, who was also a qualified swimming instructor, taught young children to swim in small open-air pool at the local primary school. One of those youngsters was Emma, who remembers always being the first to dunk her head into the icy pool, under her mum's watchful eye.

We bought a yellow Wayfarer dinghy called 'Slippery Bunch' and joined Aldeburgh Yacht Club. Unfortunately, although larger than the earlier dinghy, this too had a tendency to tip Sarah & I into the water. It was therefore soon replaced by the infamous bright-red family cruiser, 'Hot N Spicy', and a beautiful Loch Long called 'Ripple', which we still own to this day.

As we felt the schooling was better north of the catchment area where we lived, we moved again, to a lovely cottage at the end of a farm track in Wenhaston. The girls both attended Halesworth Middle School, where Jo had been a teacher a number of years earlier. We lived in 'Marsh Cottage' for over twenty years, where we celebrated birthdays, anniversaries and later toasted Emma's marriage to Ashley. It was here that we became good friends with our neighbours, Mary and Peter and even holidayed with them in Turkey on a couple of occasions.

We were fortunate to have many memorable holidays. One of the last as a family, saw us revisiting Singapore, releasing baby turtles on an island near the Thai border and travelling the length of Malaysia back to Singapore by 'jungle-train'.

Sarah and I returned on many occasions to the Caribbean island of Barbuda, which has no tourist infrastructure and miles of empty pink sand beaches, which we explored on bicycles. With the beaches to ourselves, our swimming costumes were rarely needed!



Following my retirement from Sizewell at 62, we decided it was time to consider where we would like to spend our future together. We both loved sailing on the Norfolk Broads, having earlier joined Horning Sailing Club as distant members. In January last year, we moved to a lovely single storey house in Tunstead. We purchased a small River Cruiser called 'Pickle', which many have suggested sums up part of Sarah's character. We also joined the East Anglian Cruising Club and Pickle's first races were in their Spring Regatta.



Late last summer, Sarah noticed a lump near her collar bone, that was increasing in size. This was investigated and we received the devastating news that she had Stage 4 cancer of the oesophagus. Without treatment, it would be unlikely that Sarah would survive until Christmas. Sarah wanted to end it all then, but was persuaded that she must give treatment a chance to extend her life. In the end, she was proved right, as this short extension provided her with little quality of life.

Although Sarah's recent death has left a big gap in my life, she has provided me with some great memories, two lovely daughters and my adorable grandson Jake.

I've been overwhelmed by the support I have received since Sarah passed away and the lovely comments from family and friends across the globe. I have noticed that the tributes in the numerous cards, emails and phone calls often describe Sarah in similar ways, such as feisty, fun, bubbly-personality & helpful. In her early life she was given the nick-name 'G & T Removals' by our friends Val & Paul. Unsurprisingly this stuck and grew into wider use. Since moving to Norfolk Sarah also gained the nick-name 'Jelly Baby Sarah', due to her habit of throwing jelly babies at the sails of other River Cruisers!

Sarah may have been a Pickle, but we all loved her and the happy memories she has provided for the rest of our lives.