

Irene Jeanette Brunning

9th January 1943 to 29 June 2010

Irene was born in Laindon in 1943 to William and Winifred Cossey but her father, a merchant seaman died before Irene was two. Although an only child Irene was never lonely - she and her mother moved in with grand-parents in Stratford and there were seven cousins nearby. Irene's mother remarried and they moved back to Laindon where she completed her schooling and went to work in a recruitment agency where she was running the branch office by the time she was twenty! Irene met her first husband, Peter when they were both commuting and they married in 1962 and started a family; firstly son Peter, then baby Lorraine who died at 5 months, Zena in 1967 and finally Toby in 1969 - by which time the family were living in Tiptree.

Following the tragic death of their eldest son Peter in a motorbike accident on holiday in Crete, the strain of grief and bereavement led to the breakdown of Irene and Peter's marriage and they went their separate ways. At her funeral Irene was described by Rev Canon Clare Sanders as 'a woman with an inner core of steel but a gentleness of touch' - a woman who 'developed a wisdom, a grace and a generosity of love that was to single her out as an extraordinary woman' - Clare said 'she knew how to love, she accepted people as they were, she enfolded them in her love; she knew the gift of patient listening ---'

It was the gift of listening that led her to offer her services to the work of the Samaritans and it was while training with them that she met the man who was to become her second husband - another Peter, this time surname Brunning, who apparently managed to pass the vetting process of 'the cousins', known as 'the Eastenders'!

Irene and Peter were married and they came to live in Grundisburgh where she has made a considerable contribution to the life of the village. With the then Rector, Canon Norman Davies and others she set up the village luncheon club - a ministry of real care and concern. Irene organised rotas for church cleaning, locked and unlocked the church building and at times helped with flowers. She enjoyed handiwork and craft activities with others in the Parish Rooms and was very involved with the refurbishment of the Parish Rooms. She sang in the church choir and also with Trianon and Ipswich Choral Society and organised concerts in the church for fundraising. She performed with these choirs at Snape and at the Albert Hall and enjoyed choir tours to Austria, Italy and Turkey. Incredibly she managed to sing in the concert in the church on 19 June - just ten days before she died.

Irene worked at Ipswich Hospital where she had helped to install their IT system, but when Peter retired in 1991 she felt, after a few weeks of coming home to find him sifting in a deck chair with a gin and tonic, that retirement was the better option and she too retired.

Peter describes their wonderful holidays in the Lakes and trips to America to visit family, and one memorable visit to New Zealand. Toby took part in the BT Global Challenge Round the World Yacht Race in 1996 and Irene and Peter flew out to meet him at the half-way point in New Zealand. Irene loved the reception at Government House but felt the only way to inspect the house was to find the toilet, which she did - returning half-an-hour later with a full report!

Irene loved entertaining, particularly in the summer, with a marquee in the garden, and her loving generosity brought great joy to her many friends both in the village and further afield.

Madge Nicholas, with thanks to Rev Canon Clare Sanders and Irene's family.

