

Sofia Dimoglou: Commemorative Statement in respect of Valery Dimoglou

Date of Birth: 15 August 1939

Date of Death: 09 October 2015

Val was a phenomenal person, full of vivacity and fun, and to write about her properly would take a whole book. This is a snapshot of who she was, and who we and the world lost when she took her own life in October 2015.

Her life was hard but she was resilient and knew how to deal with adversity, from a young age. She was born at the very start of World War Two, on August 15th 1939. Her dad, William Greenwood, had survived World War One and the Somme but had shell-shock and ongoing PTSD; he was a 'knocker-upper' for the railways – making sure people got to work on time. Val was always very punctual! He liked gardening, which Val inherited from him, though they were never close. Her mum, Helen, worked hard to bring up the three girls – Val was the youngest – as well as doing housekeeping for others for a little extra money. Val adored her, as we all did.

Our Grandma and the three girls were evacuated to rural Kilham from Hull for the first few years of Val's life and this embedded in her a love for the countryside and separated her from her Dad. She passed this deep connection to nature to all of her children, and our best times were out walking with Val and our dogs. She later witnessed [serious incidents of violence] and this had a long-term effect on her. She also stopped her mother from committing suicide and she knew the importance of staying alive, believing that things could get better.

Val was cheeky and very bright, passing the test to go to grammar school but not being allowed to go because of the cost of the uniform. She always wore hand-me-downs as the family was poor but was very proud and independent. There was also a belief from her Victorian dad that she should not rise out of her class through education, something that had a profound effect on her life, as she had a deep desire to improve her mind by reading, learning new words, and learning about the world. She did this all her life but the course of her future would have been so different – so much more nourishing, stimulating and financially rewarding – had she been allowed to take up

the education she was offered. She knew this, and always said she was glad to have had her four children, but we knew that her life-long struggles with money and the drudge of working in hospitality, as well as raising four children and a dog single-handedly, had a big impact on her mental and physical health. It also made her fight hard for us to go to the best local schools, even when she had to battle the authorities to achieve this.

Val's mind was always abuzz with the possibility of adventure and she left home at 15 to be independent and to begin exploring the world. She got a job as a nanny from an advert in The Lady magazine and went to Stratford-upon-Avon where she was treated like a house-maid or servant so she had to run away one night. She had already secured a waitressing job at Falmouth Hotel and loved it there in Cornwall. My Dad fell instantly in love with her when he saw her dancing at a rock and roll venue in Falmouth when his merchant ship docked there. A couple of years before Val first attempted to take her own life my sister ^[personal/sensitive] arranged a holiday with our divorced parents and we took them to the place they met, which was so sweet.

Falling in love and pregnancy meant that Val could not continue her adventures (she planned to go to France next), and, as dad had to go back to sea (he was a Greek merchant seaman, with a British company), Val went back to Hull so her mum and sisters could help her with my brother, ^[personal/sensitive]

She lived there in dire poverty in a vermin-infested flat, but did a great job and would work as a waitress to earn enough to live when Grandma looked after us (Dad sent some money to her and some to his mother in Greece). ^[My brother] and I have such happy memories of growing up in Hull in spite of the hardship. Dad gave up working at sea when I was about two, so ^[my brother] and I had built a strong connection with Val and her mum which we kept forever.

Our Hull version of Val was a vibrant, modern woman. She loved fashion, pop songs and popular culture. We had so much love and so many days out: to Hull Fair, Beverley Westwood, Hull's lovely parks and cafes. Val threw children's parties in our garden, made Christmas magical and the summers long and full of picnics and adventures; she made us believe in fairies and magic by making magic happen in front of our eyes.

When I asked her when I was older if she regretted having children so young she was adamant that she was so glad she had us when she was young, with the energy to work hard to give us things, and to make every day fun.

Things did change in about 1965, when I was nearly 5 and we moved to Colchester in Essex, as my dad hated the cold and rain of Hull and the north of England. I think this really isolated Val and made her depend on him, which was not good. The pain of leaving her mam at this time was deep, and we were distraught that Grandma was so far away, though we saw her every school holiday.

There had been signs of mental health issues already – Val suffered bad post-natal depression after I was born (Dad went back to sea) and she always had terrible PMS; neither of these conditions was recognised or treated in those days. They created strong mood swings in Val – from elation to deep frustration, sometimes bordering on depression, but she always pulled herself out of it to do something nice with us, for us.

One of the ways Val showed love was by buying us lovely, special gifts. She travelled over a hundred miles once to buy me a book I wanted and she made every Whitsun, Easter, Bonfire Night and Christmas magical beyond words with thoughtful gifts; new clothes; decorations; special food. We know that she made so many sacrifices for us, rarely treating herself and always encouraging our hobbies (art, reading, nature) with gifts. She bought me the Cicely Mary Barker Flower Fairy books in Cornwall when I was fascinated by wild flowers, and my brother always had the best Hornby train sets and Matchbox and Dinky cars. She read to us every night and used to ask us questions about what we had read, not in a teacherly way, but helping to embed knowledge and recall; we used to say our prayers with her until she suddenly stopped believing in God – I never knew why, really, [personal/sensitive] and Val was fiercely protective of us all.

Life in Colchester was brilliant in many ways, especially when our little brother and sister arrived 7 and 9 years after me. But it was not always easy and Dad and Val argued a lot. She had taken a job in a night club as well as in a Wimpy burger bar as my dad was really strict with money and did not earn a lot. He would tell her to stop buying any luxuries and once cut the plug off the record player to save electricity, he

said. Her job at the Andromeda night club gave her a bit of a laugh and she enjoyed the buzz of it; we used to go with her to King's Road and Biba to buy her nice things to wear, and it was a fabulous part of our lives, hearing about how the place was run. She became friends with the owner and worked hard. He was kind to us, but my dad started to resent her working there, hated the owner, [personal/sensitive] and told her to give it up. She was beautiful and got a lot of compliments, [personal/sensitive] Neither of them drank and my mum had strong morals and loyalty. [personal/sensitive] [personal/sensitive] this was at a time when her loneliness and frustration was at its height. Marriage guidance helped for a while and Val did leave the club, [the situation did not improve] [my older brother] and I encouraged Val to leave my dad but two more children had been born by this point, they were close to Dad; our house was tied to Dad's job at the local engineering factory, divorce was not easy and Val was daunted by the process and the cost. She did eventually divorce Dad, and the mood lightened when he left, though it was hard on the younger siblings, who were close to him. I remember being so proud of her when she came back from court in her suit and said the judge had granted the divorce, [personal/sensitive]. There were struggles about housing (the danger of being evicted from the tied factory house) which became a motif of Val's life, right to the end. She fought hard for us to stay in the house we loved as she fought hard for us in so many ways. It was tragic that she felt she was being evicted from the hospital, after such a life protecting our home.

I would like to share something [my brother] the eldest child, wrote on Val's birthday in 2024, when I told him I needed to put together a statement:

Our mum was brave, hardworking, loving, intelligent, kind, and gave herself to raise us kids and provide the best of everything to give us the best start in life.

She was our mum, our friend, our big sister, having given birth to me when she was a girl herself. That's why we grew up calling her 'Val' rather than 'mum'. She played with us and was a part of so many of our games. She did all she could to give us the best education, from reading to us at bedtime to choosing a brilliant primary school which taught French when most others didn't. She pressed the local grammar school to take

me and then my sister as our secondary modern had few A Level students, and this was an amazing thing to do for us, and a real battle.

People loved her, especially when she ran the restaurant at Williams and Griffin, Colchester. She was a lively Yorkshire lass and could be blunt - she was never afraid to disagree – but everyone admired that she was so down to earth.

I don't know how she managed to work so hard. For many years she had two jobs combined with looking after four children and a dog single-handedly; she carried bags of shopping home from town before we had a car, and cooked the most delicious meals. When dad was around he obstructed her modern view on what women could do – even though she paid for his driving lessons from her work and bought the first family car. She paid for all four children to learn to drive when we were 17 and told us how important independence would be in life, and that driving was part of that.

Her determination wasn't to be thwarted, no matter what. In fact, we quoted her on the funeral order of service: 'Don't tell me what to do!' We loved this spirit in Val.

Every penny she earned was for us, and she nourished us with the best food and provided us with the best holidays – we have never met anyone from our era who has seen so much of the British Isles – we had the loveliest times: even when our old Triumph Herald broke down, Val would turn it into an adventure and a learning experience, teaching us resilience and optimism.

If it was pelting with rain she would ask if we wanted to go out in the car and find some puddles to splash in. She would get the giggles at stuff as easily as we would. She would love singing and dancing to the Top 30 with us on the radio. She loved singing, till someone told her that she couldn't sing. She was really sensitive to criticism, and it was sad when the music stopped for her. Sundays were family walks, black and white films and her amazing Sunday roast. She was super-organised to fit so much into a day – she wouldn't let us wash the dishes, even. She helped me financially all through her life, even though I could be so lazy, and I feel guilty about that now.

Val was an avid reader and a life-long learner – from newspapers, books, anything. She was immersed in Dostoyevsky's 'Crime and Punishment' one summer in Cornwall and would have made a brilliant criminologist or lawyer, had she had the opportunity, but further education was not an option when she was working all hours and raising us all. She never blamed anyone (maybe her dad) for her lack of formal education but she always knew she had not reached her full potential. I think this was a factor in her depression, though we never had that conversation, sadly.

Val was close to people and would help anyone, especially if they were in trouble. She didn't have friends to the house but encouraged us to have friends round and would feed them and have a laugh with them. So many people still talk about her sense of fun and her generosity. One time, though, in my 20s, I had some disagreeable biker friends round and Val chucked them out as they refused to take off their studded biker jackets and she thought they might damage the leather sofa she had worked so hard to buy; she was only little but tough as nails and I will always remember her manhandling a couple of them out of the house! The others left with their tails between their legs!

We had such special times with Val, from Cornwall to the Lake District to Scotland. She was an amazing driver and took us to so many fancy and historic places, though she had to scrimp and save: dinner at the Post Office Tower; the Headland Hotel in Newquay; the Imperial at Blackpool; the Beatles' houses in Liverpool when the youngest sister was obsessed with them; afternoon tea at Harrods and the Ritz.

Val was super-fit, striding up Beachy Head cliffs and leaving us behind, though she was in her 50s then. Her love of animals and nature was deep and beautiful and our first dog, Monty the Golden Labrador was so special, trained and walked by Val, mainly, and adored by us all. Bellina, an Italian dog adopted by my sister and then Val, gorgeous Plum and Tommy were all dogs Val had such a bond with, and who would do anything for her. She felt happier with dogs, as they were so steady and loyal.

My last happy memory close to when she ended her life was sat on the promenade in Clacton. We sat at a café all afternoon and left as the sun faded. We laughed a lot all her life, and that was a hilarious day: it was good to see her being her old self. A jogger

passed and she exclaimed: 'Get those knees up!' and she interacted with anyone who cared to chat, just like the old days.

I miss her love and her special personality – she was always funny and ready to laugh, like her mam, our Grandma. Not many mums played April Fool's jokes on their kids – she once sewed up the cuffs of my school shirt! We had a big laugh every day about something or other!

I am so sad she did not receive the care she needed – I am sure she would have had a long and mostly happy older life.

That is from ^[personal/sensitive] my older brother. [my sister and younger brother] would have similar things to say, too – lots of brilliant stories about Val's unconventionality and thoughtfulness, her generosity and love. Her five grandchildren adored her and loved her stories, her sense of fun and her incredible generosity and interest in them as people.

I think we always knew Val suffered from mental health issues, but she managed these well and without drugs, most of her life. She almost never drank alcohol, never smoked, and was anti-drug. She sought counselling when she suffered the loss of her mum and our first dog, when she felt she made an error moving house to a flat in Holland-on-Sea, when where she lived seemed to consume who she was as a person, though her houses were always beautifully decorated and with an amazing garden. Getting older was hard for her and although cognitive behavioural therapy worked to some extent, she eventually agreed to take anti-depressants when her psychiatrist went down that route. She had never been diagnosed properly, though we thought she may be bi-polar or something similar as she had big mood swings. These could be scary, but we always loved her and worried when she was low.

[Details to be considered during the substantive stages of the Inquiry's investigations] after a period of uncharacteristic anxiety and an unsuccessful session with a psychologist (Val said she could not talk openly as a trainee observer was present and she was too nervous to ask them to leave) she crashed her car into a moving lorry and was seriously injured when the car caught fire. No-one else was injured, though a passer-by pulled her from

the wreck. Her beloved dog, Plum, was killed, the other dog, Tommy, escaped and now lives with my sister. This was December 7th 2013. The aftermath was filmed and is still available on the internet...a disturbing but real piece of footage.

This was the beginning of the end, and involved years of medical attention for her severe burns, her broken hip, and her anguish. She was beyond devastated and guilty about the death of beautiful Plum, her dog. She could not see living in the house where she lived with her dogs (Plum was buried in her garden, too) and she talked about suicide a lot, and we begged her psychiatrist to help her to stay alive.

She had some brilliant treatment and some awful treatment. There were brief flashes of the old, fun Val, but very few. We spent hours looking at properties but knew she needed a place of asylum, of being looked after and cared for so she did not kill herself. None of her children were in a position to offer this. She had a real sense of justice to the very end, and it was Val who stopped the unit she was in, from writing up in public in their office what the residents had done to try to take their own lives; she befriended many people there and made them feel loved again.

The impact of Val's death continues to this day. Suicide is a trigger, but we have learnt to accept that it is part of life, though it could be minimised with better mental health care. The loss of Val from our lives is enormous, inexpressible, really. To go there is to admit the loss of so much love and fun and potential memories with grandchildren and with us all. My daughter [has been severely affected by the trauma and often speaks about how proud Val would have been of her achievements, how she would have been there for her. I know my siblings keep their sadness to themselves, often, or shut it out, to survive. We are all trying to live our lives for Val, and for Dad, who is still alive and who often speaks of Val's amazing personality when he met and fell in love with her.

The loss feels worse because we believe that, with the right treatment, more fitting drugs (if necessary), more talking therapy and a safe space to live, Val would not have crashed her car and would have lived a much longer and happier life. It was agony seeing her desperate for help but denied that. It took me five years to feel I could breathe again – I almost lost my job as an English teacher (being made to teach books

about suicide and death, and an unsympathetic management) ; I got a skin condition from stress and depression and lost weight and all interest in anything, to be honest, though I did what I could to support my daughter through her own grief. I also tried to be there for my lovely sister (who found my mum dead after the hospital let her out for 12 hours without letting us know) who also became unwell [personal/sensitive]

Nonetheless, we have the best memories of Val, and this Statutory Inquiry is something she would have believed in as she was passionate about the need to improve mental health services, to offer suffering people a safe space to live, and to really talk to them to try to understand what is wrong. We hope that all the effort put into the Inquiry does not end in a hollow *'lessons learnt statement'* and that real policy changes can be implemented; we hope that people will tell the truth, that the Inquiry can compel people to be honest and to be part of a permanent and positive shift in mental health care in the UK – to something kind and caring, offering true asylum without limit and safeguarding individuals and society from a health issue which should have solutions as any other physical ailment.

Please find attached to my statement pictures of Valarie I would like to submit to the Inquiry.



Sofia Dimoglou -
Commemorative Exh

