

TRIBUTE TO HELEN NICELL

Sometimes in life you meet those special people who give so much, making the world a much better place for their presence. Without doubt, Helen was one of those. She had so many personal qualities, combining industriousness and organisation with a very kind and caring heart. Add courage to this, and we are going some way to describe the Helen that I knew.

I shall start with Helen's courage. She was stalwart in continuing to organise and lead Watford Writers, despite the physical and emotional hardships she was having to suffer. I can only guess what this must have been like for her. Helen, being Helen, never complained, preferring to 'get on with it', focussing instead on the writings of others and refusing to give in. She did not want the group's thoughts to be about her, but about our work, as writers. Helen was an outstanding and talented writer herself, of course, winning a number of prizes.

In this way, Helen was a role model for us all, as a strong woman in both mind and spirit. Her critiquing of our work was always honest and supportive, seeking the best for each of us. Now that Helen is no longer with us, we have come to understand the huge amount of work that she put into running the Watford Writers group, all without financial recompense. I now hear people saying things like, 'What about this?' or 'What about that?' before we realise that it was yet another task that Helen carried out, often unrecognised and with great efficiency. When people combine hard work and modesty, it is only when they are not with you that you understand the magnitude of the contribution they made.

From a personal point of view, I still find it difficult to attend a Watford Writers meeting without expecting Helen to appear, making her invaluable comments. Her face was always the one we turned to when looking for guidance. I shall never forget Helen's laugh as well, as her face beamed a smile towards us in appreciation of a joke, finding humour which motivated us all to keep going. Helen would also apologise if she felt she had done something wrong, which I can honestly say was almost never.

Helen Nicell, I shall miss you, as I know all my fellow Watford Writers will. The world in general, and my world in particular, have undoubtedly been better places for having had you as part of our lives. You were a lovely person and someone who was the catalyst for so much good. It was my privilege to know you. Thank you for all you have given me and the world, particularly Watford. You shall live on in all our memories. We shall never stop thinking about you.

Yours, with heartfelt sincerity,

Chris McDermott.

(Your fellow Watford Writer).