

Serena Davidson, 1938–2016

Serena Prudence Lillie Dubois Davidson was born on 19 January 1938 in Chelsea, the younger daughter of Douglas and Margaret Davidson, and she spent her first years in London just before the onset of war. Her elder sister Phillida (1952 Modern Languages) had been born in 1932. During the war both sisters were evacuated to Seaton in Devon. Their father Douglas was responsible for the evacuation of children in the UK and overseas. After they returned to London in 1945, Douglas sadly died of a heart attack. The family remained in London in a house in Eaton Terrace with numerous lodgers and sundry cats.

Both sisters were educated at St Paul's Girls' School, where Serena was a foundation scholar. Serena went up to Lady Margaret Hall to read medicine in 1956. She made many friends during her time there, notably, in her year, Anne Seakins (*née* Fazackerley), a biochemist, and Sara Hereward, who also studied medicine and went on to have a successful career as an anaesthetist. By all accounts Serena enjoyed her time at LMH and on graduating she completed her clinical training at St Thomas's Hospital. Her subsequent career in medicine was varied and successful. She specialised in paediatrics, preferred to stay in London, which she loved, and worked at the Lambeth, Great Ormond Street, St Stephens (now Chelsea & Westminster), Maudsley and Carshalton Hospitals, and finally Newham Hospital for a number of years until her

retirement in 2007. She also had work experience in New York and RAF Wegburg in Germany.

Serena was a consultant paediatrician from 1975. She researched and published extensively on childhood diseases of epilepsy, neonatal sleep disorders and cot death syndrome. She was well-respected and attended many conferences and on numerous occasions was called on as an expert witness for the Crown Prosecution Service. She also taught at Queen Mary's, Westminster and King's. She was a fellow of the Royal Society of Medicine and of the Royal College of Paediatrics. Later on she dedicated herself to Médecins Sans Frontières and Le Dispensaire, the francophone hospital in London. This entailed her mastering the French language of which she was already quite a proficient speaker. She was a leading figure at the hospital and in 2006 she arranged for HRH Duchess of Cornwall to visit the hospital as its new patron, a memorable occasion for all. Indeed, for all the work she undertook for Le Dispensaire she was awarded the Order of Merit by France.

In spite of all this and the busy life she led, Serena was always very modest, unfailingly kind and generous to her patients and especially to her family and friends. She was intensely loyal and supportive to Simon and Guy her nephews, Lucy and Juliet her stepdaughters, and Alice and Patrick her godchildren. She made many friends from her university days, professionally and socially, and travelled all over the world, in particular visiting a children's home in southern India, Happy Home, which is supported by her parish church St Simon Zelotes.

Serena lived in Halsey Street, Chelsea for most of her life from 1954, and sadly with her passing that house has had to be sold with all our memories of her in



Serena aged 17 in Venice



Serena relaxed with her cat

it. She was committed to her local community, serving as secretary to the Chelsea Society for several years.

When not working, Serena enjoyed swimming (having been awarded a half-blue at university), skiing, sailing and gardening, as well as reading and travelling and cultural pursuits of classical music and painting.

In 1997 she married Julian Pegler (Worcester 1955 Classics). They had met during their time at Oxford. They were happy together, travelling extensively until very sadly he died in 2007. In recent years Serena's own health deteriorated and she endured bravely, and with dignity, vascular dementia following a series of minor strokes. That made it difficult to keep up with all her friends and commitments which caused her much sadness. To see anyone so reduced is distressing, but all the more so in her case. She dealt as best she could with the condition and was well looked after. A week before she died she was visited by her sister and nephews and they treasure the sweet smile of recognition she gave them. Eventually pneumonia was the cause of her death, as is the case for many with her condition. Her passing on 10 August 2016 was peaceful with no undue suffering and her immediate family were present.

Phillida Grantham (Davidson 1952 Modern Language), Serena's sister, and her sons, Serena's nephews, Simon and Guy