

Debbie C Parfrey

12th October 1964 - 2nd October 2022

I taught Debbie to ring back in the early days of spring 1988, along with her mum, sister, and brother-in-law. Debbie took to ringing like a duck to water, and over the coming months we spent an increasing amount of time with each other. In those days she was living and working in Windsor during the week and I in Plymouth, and Friday nights would see me driving from Plymouth to Bath Spa railway station to pick up Debbie, from where we would head off to practice night at All Saints', Corston. Rarely arriving at the station on time it wasn't long before I knew I'd fallen in love with the most patient girl in the world, and it came as no real surprise to anyone when a few months later in the tower at midnight on New Year's Eve, glasses of bubbly announced our engagement and the date of our wedding. The following months were a whirlwind of securing job moves back home near Corston, buying a house and planning for our big day, but there remained room for plenty of ringing. 17th June 1989 was a sweltering day, but nothing was going to stop Debbie climbing the little spiral stone staircase in her wedding dress to have a ring.

She never really cared for peals, much preferring quarters, however she rang her first on 19th July 1992; the treble for the first peal on Matthew Higby's first mini ring in his Mum and Dad's garage. For all of us our first peal is very special, and so it was a lovely moment when Matthew pitched up many years later with that treble bell in his hand, and said "I've used this as a paperweight on my desk for a while, but I really think you should have it", very few of us have the bell we rang for our first peal sitting on our mantelpiece!

Philippa was born in 1993 and was joined by Helena in 1997, and with work taking me away from home most weeks, our ringing was focused on our home tower, and the Bath Branch of the Bath & Wells DACR, where Debbie was Branch Secretary. As the girls grew they began to ring, and the four of us rang our first quarter together on 23rd July 2016, with our first peal together later that year on 27th December, when we remembered my parents who, just like Debbie and I, had come together through ringing. Happy days brought many family quarter peals, and a small sprinkling of peals, all made possible by our many ringing friends.

Debbie was Tower Master for some years, with her first priorities being the ringing of our bells for Sunday Service, running a good practice night, and the strength and happiness of her band. She strove for progress in our ringing combined with smiles and laughter in our tower, never happier than when a new method was learned, provided it was not achieved at the expense of smiles. A huge milestone was achieved in 2016 when she showed her mum-in-law, Bette, the 'Harold L Parfrey Memorial Shield' just won by her band in the Bath Branch striking competition, followed a month or two later by taking first place in the Bath and Wells DACR striking competition. It is poignant that her last quarter was three of J J Parker's 12 parts rung as a practice for a local peal attempt. Diagnosed just two weeks later that attempt never happened, however she would have looked with immense pleasure at a local band achieving the full 12 parts on 17th June 2023.

Beyond her ringing she was a Churchwarden at Corston, having previously also been PCC Secretary and PCC Treasurer. Having left behind a career in banking, Debbie gave 15 years' service at the local primary school, mostly supporting children with special educational needs. Debbie was physically very active beyond her ringing, and could be seen walking miles each day, topped up with regular yoga sessions. She enjoyed the theatre, particularly Shakespeare and the trips to Stratford-upon-Avon, but her greatest love was family and friends. She saw herself as someone who lived behind the scenes, supporting quietly without fuss. She would have been shocked to have seen our little village church perhaps fuller than it has ever been at her funeral; that 235 were there to celebrate her life was itself a testament to the number of lives she touched.

It was on our 33rd wedding anniversary on 17th June 2022 that Debbie was diagnosed with two brain tumours, and then together we absorbed the devastating news that no treatment was possible, and she had but a few short weeks. Her own bravery was matched by that of our daughters as they and I cared for Debbie in what became a few months, throughout which her infectious laughter filled the house. She leaves us, her family and friends, with a huge gap in our lives, yet a gap filled with the most wonderful and happy memories of the most patient girl in the world.

David L Parfrey