

## Speech for Jennifer's funeral

*By Tony Somers*

When I was first asked to speak about Jennifer's party-political life my English upbringing made me reluctant. Talking about Party Politics at a funeral!! Then I realised one could not give a true picture of Jennifer's life without. For 45 years at least she was an active and enthusiastic member of the Liberal Party and then the Liberal Democrats. She had variously been PPC, council candidate and GLC candidate, for which my wife was her agent. She was a member of at least one of the Parties policy panels and a founder member of the Green Liberal Democrats long before green was fashionable. Also a regular attendee at conference.

I first met Jennifer at a local party meeting in late 1973 where she spoke with passion tempered by charm. I was impressed from the start.

Then early in 74 Heath called a general election. Jennifer threw herself into the campaign with characteristic verve. The White house became the headquarters. Jennifer took on the onerous task of organising the free-post election address. A huge task in those days. 70 to 80,000 envelopes to be hand addressed and stuffed and put into the order required by the Post office. Jennifer's talents and strengths really came to the fore. Endless patience, a smile for everyone, never a sharp word even when dealing with the most obtuse. Her charm and good humour made all feel welcome and built up a team spirit. A tour de force.

A year or so later I became chair of the local party with Jennifer on the committee. I worked with her for many years. She was always an enthusiastic member, hardworking and full of ideas.

She sometimes had a way of hitting the nail on the head. I remember complaining to Jennifer about a rather pompous new committee member who spoke a lot lecturing us on where we were going wrong and what we ought to be doing but when asked take on a job said immediately that he was far too busy! At that point Jennifer chimed in and said, "...that's because he is a bullfrog". "Bullfrog" has been part of my vocabulary ever since.

Jennifer could sometimes sum up an argument perfectly. I remember we were trying to put together arguments in favour of the, as we then called it, Common Market. Europe has been an issue all my adult life. Having both been born before the war, and having spoken directly to people who had endured the hell of the trenches in the First World War, and having our own memories of the second, to our generation PEACE was a major concern and we wanted to put that argument. Jennifer said "it's easy. It is like children. If you have a collection of sovereign states interacting with each other quarrels are inevitable. Unless there is an accepted method of dispute resolution in place the quarrels will degenerate into violence. The Common Market is that dispute resolution mechanism." A perfect summing up of the point.

Jennifer could be infuriating at times to work with. As, another speaker has mentioned Jennifer had her own version of time. Einstein tell us that time is not as it appears to our common sense but I doubt if even his theory could accommodate Jennifer time!

She was also sometimes, in her enthusiasm to get on with matters, cavalier about process and procedure. Both these characteristics could make the life of the chair difficult. However, I could never stay angry with Jennifer for long. I don't think I ever managed to actually complain to her. Her obvious sincerity, good intentions and charm made any angry complaint I was about to make die on my lips.

If may be allowed to parody George Orwell. All humans are unique but some are more unique than others. Jennifer was certainly one of the most unique.