

Sibyls Service in Memory of Elaine Sommers 10 March 2021

This service and chat will be recorded. If you do not want to be seen or heard mute your microphone and turn your video off.

Note to presenter, load this order of service onto your computer and run it on your computer using Acrobat or equivalent. Do not run it using your internet browser or you will lose your place in it when you switch screens.

We start with the video. We will continue to record chat at the end so that people can make their own tributes.

“Let us build a House”.

<http://sibyls.gndr.org.uk/online/eveningmeetings/SuN0310a/ElaineHouse.mp4>

Note to presenter: use this link and share screen. Do not let the video overrun.

Note to Presenter: Fade out to the picture on the following slide after song when video ends, then period of silence. Do not let the video overrun.

Elaine 26 February 2021



Leader

Friends today in our Sibyls Service on the 10th. March 2021, we gather to remember Elaine Sommers a much-loved friend, companion and mentor to many of us.

Death is always a time of parting and pain. Although in the end Elaine's death was not unexpected, every death is a heartache for some family, and the pain and grief of that parting must be fully expressed. However, the end is another beginning in the cycle of life.

In this poem "The Music Trees" written a long time before the present pandemic, I have tried to express something of that cycle, the unpredictability of death, the ripples we create throughout our everyday lives, and how we live on though the memories transmitted to the music and song of the trees, after life has passed. For, in watching nature, we may find peace.

Number 1 "The Music Trees" from Thoughts, Poems and Reflections In A Time of Pandemic: <http://com.tgdr.co.uk/articles/sgthoughts.htm>

Note to presenter: do not use this link. The poem is in the order of service.

Leader: THE MUSIC TREES

She watching sits as ringlets spread
From central stillness left behind
While shafted in their golden glow
Portrayed in stillness on the ground
Light's casted haloes dance their way
Through canopies of branches held
In autumn colours leaves entwined.

For in this warm September eve
No one could tell the blighted fly
Its fitful course across the lake
Would end within the fishes' bite
And soulful in the turmoil's wake
The passing sound of water breaks
The rustle from the trees on high.

Enflamed by sun on forest ground
The ripples reach the nearby shore
Where mirrored by the water's edge
They set in dance the move of trees
With bended light against the sky
To list in time to nature's course
Until dispersed to dance no more.

In tinselled tone the autumn trees
Prepare the way for spring's rebirth
As sapless leaves their work complete
Caressed by wind and nature's force
In endless motion search for flight
From nurtured branches made replete
And through decay renew the earth.

In harmony with nature's realm
The music trees sing of her tryst
To seek not grief when life is gone
But crown the life of offspring run
Where leaf and fly and human form
Give way in death for life's rebirth
The trees sing of our greatest gift.

Leader: The Trees sing of our greatest gift. We remember Elaine, not only in her own music, but in the music of her existence, her warmth, her friendship, her companionship, her wisdom, her care, and her help.

Although those physical presences have passed all of these remain and in these greatest gifts we may remember and cherish her presence.

Yet no words of ours can do her justice. Let us use her own words in an article in “Voices of Hope” – April 3rd 2019

Reader 1: *“Hope in a Desert Place” (Part 3) – “Flying High” by Elaine Sommers*

I am a bit of a birdwatcher, although you won't find me hiding in the bushes with binoculars and a notebook. No, I just love watching birds, especially when they're in flight. The ones which I enjoy most are those which soar. I've marvelled at red kites in the Wye Valley, eagles in the Scottish Highlands and lammergeiers in Nepal.

And from early childhood I dreamt that one day I would be able to fly.

So, as a student I took up skydiving, which gave me the feeling of floating, although I was actually falling to earth at 120 miles per hour. Later I switched to paragliding, probably the nearest a human can get to flight. I learnt to circle in thermals, and once or twice had the privilege of soaring with the birds, following them towards the clouds.

My chosen verse has come to mean so much to me in my life, although I must confess that I have spent much of it flapping my wings in my own strength.

But there was another reason why I took to the air. As a trans person, born male, one of the reasons I took up these adventurous activities was an attempt to expunge the female side of my identity from my life. As I discovered, it didn't work!

Then came the day when I crashed my glider and nearly died. As I lay on my back, a voice in my head said: 'I knew I'd get my way in the end'.

From that moment, I knew that my struggle with my gender was over. I realised that Elaine was an integral part of me and I had found an inner peace, and most importantly peace with God.

I often think of the eagles and how they rely on those invisible currents of air to lift them up to new heights. Trusting God's Spirit to lead us through life in all we do is so important.

Every day I thank God for sparing my life and leading me daily to new things.

A Prayer

Help us God to trust you for everything and not rely on our own strength. Fill us with your Spirit to be ourselves and to reach new heights for you.

<https://www.viamedia.news/2019/04/03/voices-of-hope-april-3rd-2019/>

Reader 2: The Road to Acceptance

There is I believe a level beyond Acceptance where the Transgender side of a person is seen as something to be embraced and even appreciated by those around him or her. This is fuller acceptance, which I prefer to call Inclusion. The Transgender person is valued and welcomed, irrespective of whether they present in their adopted gender role, or their birth gender. Any confusion that this causes for the friend or family member is something that they are prepared to work through themselves, which usually needs some effort and heart-searching. Transgender is no longer seen as an enemy or something that needs to be discouraged (like trying to persuade a smoker to cut down or give up).

I do have some people around me who fit this description and I am very grateful for them. I can talk unapologetically with them about my Elaine side at any time or place, without feelings of judgment or disapproval. I know that they are happy to be with me in my male or my female presentation and some even prefer my company when I'm Elaine!

<http://www.acceptingevangelicals.org/transgender/fgm3/>

Elaine has meant so much to all of us in life music and song. The joy she expresses is made clear in one of her favourite songs. Hallelujah. Unfortunately, we do not have a recording of Elaine singing it. This version is sung by Shanon's friend Mark Hutin.

<http://sibyls.gndr.org.uk/online/eveningmeetings/SuN0310a/Hallelujah.mp3>

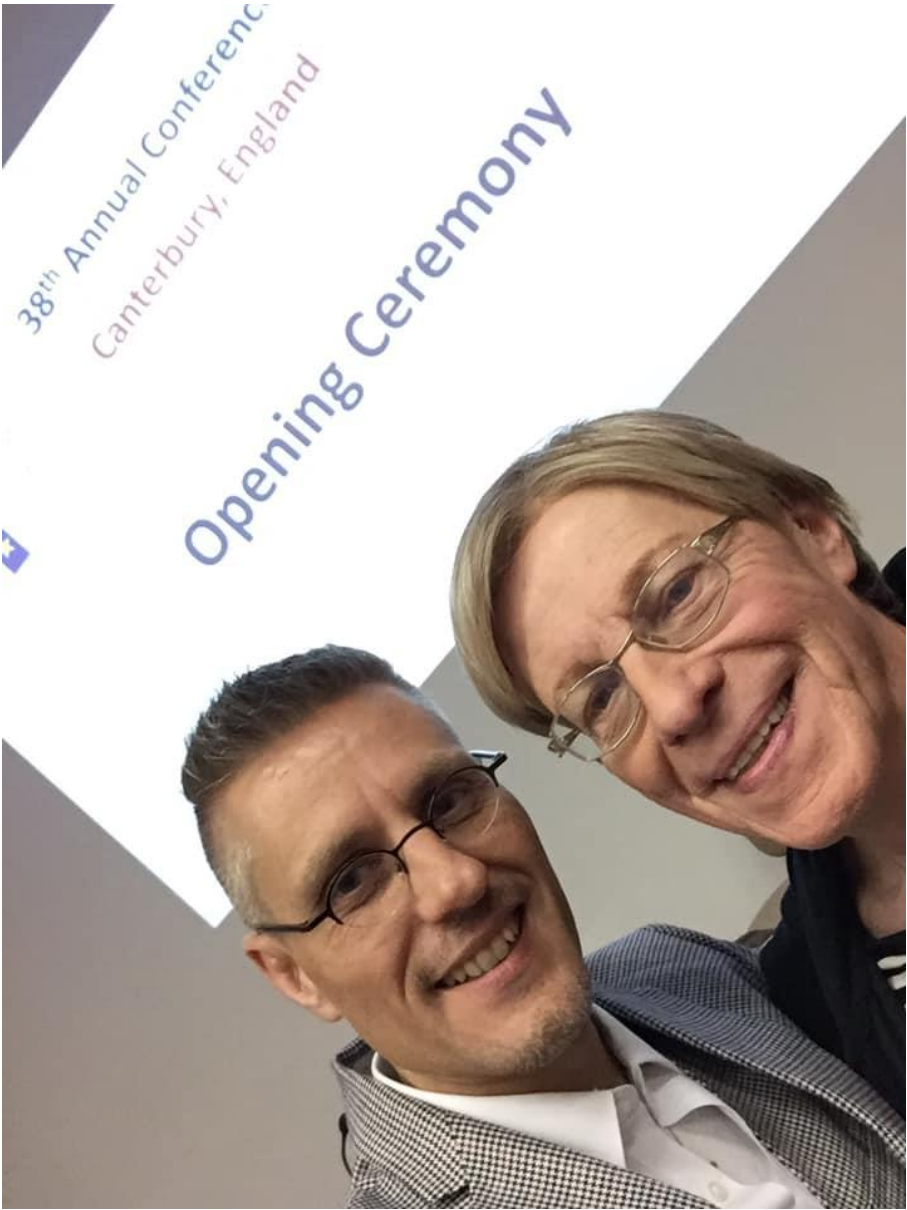
Note to presenter: use this link to play the music

Note to presenter: Move to the next slide as soon as the audio starts. 6 pictures to show during the song.













TRIBUTE FROM PAULINE

Elaine

For many of us joining the Sibyls has been an important, even pivotal, point in our lives. It was so for me, not least because through the Sibyls I met Elaine, with whom I quickly became firm friends. I remember at one of my first Sibyls weekends her telling me her story with her characteristic openness and honesty.

I marvelled at the way she was navigating the challenges of her “bi-gendered” life at home, at work, at church, at how she had come to terms with the experience of having both masculine and feminine gender identities, with the compromises in her relationships that that entailed.

I saw at once how she was a person of great innate decency, integrity and unselfishness who was negotiating the tricky course of her life with a determination to be her authentic self but also with great respect and consideration for the needs of others especially her wife Solveig.

Over the years I came to know more of her extraordinary and eventful life, her early attraction to extreme sports like hang-gliding, her cycling exploits including Lands End to John O’Groats twice, her work as an orthopaedic surgeon (during which time she was “outed” in the Sun newspaper), latterly her work as a President of the European Forum of LGBT+ Christian Groups.

Elaine took up the causes she believed in with great passion and vigour and worked tirelessly to support other trans people. She wrote movingly in the first Sibyls book “This Is My Body” about her life as a bi-gendered person of faith and also had her story featured in the Church of England’s Living in Love and Faith book.

Elaine was above all a person of great faith. She came from an evangelical background and felt great pain at not feeling welcome in her church after coming out. To the very end, she was hoping for reconciliation with those who had rejected her. I am sure her deep faith sustained her in the long ordeal of her illness which she bore with courage, trust and seeming serenity. She was an inspiration in the way she lived her life and how she met its end. May she rest in peace and rise in glory.

TRIBUTE FROM YVONNE

We owe so much to friends who found a way to resolve their gender identity with family and community; I have gained so much from many Sibyls who have overcome challenges to be true to themselves and to their faith.

Elaine gave me so much richness and wisdom from her experiences: of suspicion and rejection within her church; her devotion to Solveig and their mutual upholding. I reflect on what I have learned from Elaine.

Her joyful openness and lack of embarrassment; her rejoicing in worship, singing, radiating her inner beauty and strength; offering her ability and talents to LGBT work; offering her experience to others in talks and writing.

I first saw Elaine at an event in London where she gave her life story. I then wrote to her to buy her booklet - an original, conversational approach to explaining her careful steps towards acceptance by her church, her rejection, her adaptation and adjustment, her resolve to make churches and congregations inclusive.

Elaine shared her experience with sadness not anger, she knew her fullness opened up a depth of worship and leadership. I learned in particular so much from her love: her respect and devotion to Solveig, the importance of family cohesion despite not being understood and accepted by some family. I feel great humility around Elaine's and Solveig's demonstration of the resilience of marriage in love and faith, and of other Sibyls whose marriages adapt and give love.

When I was in Bristol three or four years ago, I called into see Elaine and Solveig in their Westbury home, and to see them both made me know Elaine better. I remember meeting Elaine in Birmingham John Lewis cafe before a meeting - a lovely sparkling conversation.

In recent months, while Elaine was undergoing treatment, I enjoyed a few phone conversations, when Elaine spoke of building a strong relationship with the vicar; of singing and leading in her church; reaching out to her brothers in a letter; of having her children visiting at home; of trying to grasp the truths across the fraught debates around transgender. It was sad when the conversations stopped but I had the sense she was strong in her faith and her relationship with home.

TRIBUTE FROM SHANON

A Letter to Elaine Sommers

My Dearest Elaine,

I first met you in France at a conference for the European Forum of LGBT Christian groups. I was a co-president at the time and working to change the constitution to be more inclusive and empowering of trans* members.

You told me that you felt very strongly that Sibyls should be a member even though you had never attended any event. Consequently you decided to go along to a conference as an individual so you could take more information back and hopefully encourage Sibyls to join. You emailed me a few times leading up to the conference as you had some concerns about accommodation etc. I could tell you were very nervous and so I made sure I was available to greet you on your arrival and help you settle in.

It was lovely watching you relax and fully engage in the activities of the weekend. You were clearly very passionate about the work the Forum was doing and looking for a way to increase your activism. As I was about to stand down from office I suggested you put yourself forward to take my place. This was a huge leap for you but the more we talked, the more we both felt this was why you were there. Consequently, you joined the Forum as a Forum Friend so you had voting rights etc. and you simply embraced the challenge.

You had spent your life trying to follow the way that God lead you as I discovered as you shared your life story with me, including all your missionary years. For you, Elaine, this was just another calling from God which you took in your stride with full confidence that God would provide anything you lacked.

You were a real blessing in my life and I watched with pride and admiration as your activist heart and soul blossomed as you devoted yourself to the task of the work of the co-president.

On top of the demanding schedule of the work of co-president, Elaine, you supported the work of the Trans* working group, even taking over as chair when I needed to take some time out.

I never once heard you say 'no' to a request for help.

By comparison to so many of the members of Sibyls, I didn't know you for very long, I guess about 8 years, but I thank you for the many blessings you brought to my life and I feel honoured to have been able to call you my friend. I will always cherish the last text messages we shared.

There are so many things about you that I could list and tell you that I will miss them but in the end it all just boils down to the fact that I will miss you! Your soul now rests in the arms of God where it truly belongs.

Until we meet again, I will keep all the memories we made in my heart where they will continue to inspire me.

Thank you.

Love and blessings as always

Shanon Eli

ELAINE WAS CO-CHAIR OF ACCEPTING EVANGELICALS

Accepting Evangelicals is an open network of Evangelical Christians who believe the time has come to move towards the acceptance of faithful, loving same-sex partnerships at every level of church life, and the development of a positive Christian ethic for gay and lesbian people.

PRAYERS

Leader: As we remember Elaine, let us pray for Solveig, and all of Elaine's Friends and Family and all those she loved so dearly.

Lord: You hold time within your hands, and see it all, from beginning to end. Please comfort, keep and carry Solveig, Elaine's family, and friends, and all these precious people in their sadness and loss. Cover them with your great wings of love, give their weary hearts rest and their minds sound sleep. Lord, lift their eyes so that they may catch a glimpse of eternity, and be comforted by the promise of heaven.

We ask all this in the precious name of Jesus.

Response: Amen

INDIVIDUAL PRAYERS AND REFLECTIONS

Leader: This is now the time to offer individual prayers and short reflections in memory of Elaine and any other concerns. There will be an opportunity to offer longer tributes after the service.

If you wish to offer it as a prayer end it with *“Lord in Your Mercy”*

The response of all is *“Hear our Prayer”*.

The prayers and reflections will finish when the leader says: *“Grant us Lord your peace and help us to do your will”*.

THE PEACE

Leader: Let us offer one another the sign of Peace:

The Peace of the Lord be always with you.

All: And also with you.

Share peace in whatever way possible!

Shanon will show us how to share the peace in British Sign Language!

Leader: As we listen to the words of St Paul, we hear that message of love

Reader 1: 1 CORINTHIANS CHAPTER 13

I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part,

and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

Leader:

Paul says: Love Never Ends, now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

People have many views of heaven. Your images of Heaven may be different from mine and Elaine's but they all come together in that vision of Love. I try to address this in this poem "Heaven", for, for me Elaine expressed that love.

Number 6 "Heaven" from Thoughts, Poems and Reflections in A Time of Pandemic:
<http://com.tgdr.co.uk/articles/sgthoughts.htm>

Note to presenter: do not use this link. The poem is in the order of service.

HEAVEN

Is heaven a place when observed from afar
The Palace of God in His Might and His Power
A place where the righteous sing out His Praise
To God in His Glory, and where no humour strays?
You show me a place where my feet must feel sore
From standing and singing God's praise evermore
Then sometimes I'd tire of the bright golden light
And instead wish to see the stars of the night.

But these views of heaven are not ones of mine
For my thoughts see heaven a place outside time
Where eternity soars free in its own place apart
To observe the time passing like lines on a chart
Extracting from life all the times which we've set
When all the best moments of life have been met
And revealing in these the whole Godhead of joy
With each moment the fountain of love I enjoy.

Eternity is not now, in the future or past
For eternity is where every moment shall last
And the heaven I sense is piled high to the brim
With the passion of love and of care and concern
Overflowing with people whose delight I perceive
Through love which I give and the love I receive
And joining those people whose rapture I share
Are all those I love who will always be there.

Heaven is not here, in the earth or the sky
And you will never find heaven however you try
For heaven finds you from the cries of the heart
Then growing through gladness its praises impart
For whatever our suffering our weakness or strife
When we share all we are with the others in life
We rebuild ourselves in the love and the grace
At one with creation that gives us our place.

Then heaven is never a goal we'll achieve
It comes only from faith and the will to believe
But could heaven be true or is it solely in mind?
It is only through death such an answer we'll find
And should heaven be false we will never detect
For we'd have nothing left to confirm it's correct
But the heaven that comes in our heavenly birth
Is true to the heaven we'd make here on earth.

Leader: Elaine May you Rest in Peace and Rise in Glory

End with video

<http://sibyls.gndr.org.uk/online/eveningmeetings/SuN0310a/ElainePeace.mp4>

Note to presenter: use this link and share screen. Do not let the video overrun.

Presenter: After it show the following slide



St Anne's Church Soho has been the "Home" church of the Sibyls for many years. We are grateful that St Anne's Church includes the Sibyls in its mission and this service as part of its worship. Hymns and music are covered by Christian Copyright Licensing (Europe) Ltd are reproduced under CCLI No 104840.

WE WILL CONTINUE TO RECORD THE CHAT FOR A TIME TO ENABLE
PEOPLE TO MAKE THEIR OWN TRIBUTES