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In memory of Lyn

PLANS for straight talking about synthetic surfaces, watering on turf, Open Days, Good Friday racing, and anaerobic respiration were scuppered when my sister, Lyn, who ran our 'estate department' (all things not specifically involving horses – from gallops and paddocks, to muck removal and light bulbs) and, more recently, the greyhound training, died suddenly on April 27.

At that stage, Mikaelle Lebreton had been pestering me for weeks to have my Kingsley Klarion piece done early this month. But, just as in the days when I wrote for the Sporting Life, the Racing Post, Horse and Hound and, particularly, The Times, I find it totally impossible to string together a single sentence without a very imminent deadline. And now, in something approaching a state of shock, I cannot possibly concentrate on the mere trivialities of our game.

First thoughts were that the Klarion must go without me this month, but telling the Klarion team of Mikaelle, John Scanlon and Gerry Hunt that a family bereavement should stand in the way of the publication is like telling a broadsheet editor and production team to leave out the front page on the first day of war.

And so I find myself, writing about Lyn. Initially I thought it was, perhaps, a little macabre to write about her so soon after her death but, frankly, it is that or nothing. I am, as is no doubt normal in these circumstances, thinking a lot about her death but also, much more, about her life. Very few in the horseracing world knew her, but she has usually been there on the fringes of my career.

Lyn was born on March 30, 1953 and I didn't come along until six and half years later. During that time my mother gave birth to a still-born boy, who would have been Mark, and my sister Sharon. So Lyn was my

biggest, big sister – all 5'2" of her – and I was the baby of the family.

Despite the age gap, we always got along and we spent a huge amount of time together throughout our childhoods, teens and early 20s. Lyn was the one originally mapped out by my father for a career in veterinary medicine and, probably, in horseracing. She was the one who got a thoroughbred filly, Saint's Flicka, for her 16th birthday, for the princely sum of 110 guineas at Doncaster sales; and another, Tourdelos, just a year later.

'She will be irreplaceable'

A change of heart saw her apply to do medicine, rather than the veterinary equivalent, and a slip-up in her Highers (a family trait even then) forced her to settle for an MA in English and Classics. Marriage and the production of daughter Lori forced a break from her studies but, when divorced soon afterwards, she returned to complete that degree and, after a failed attempt to get into vet school, an honours degree in Genetics.

So, despite the age gap, we spent six years studying in Glasgow together when I was re-sitting my own Highers at Cardonald College of Further Education and then when I was at Glasgow Vet School and she was in other faculties of the university.



A young Lyn and Mark with their dad, Ron

The memories of those days are many and some are quite hilarious. If only I had a picture of us travelling from our home in Aberfoyle to Glasgow with her riding pillion on my 50cc Fantic moped, wearing a climbing helmet borrowed from a friend.

Jobs for geneticists with anything short of a PhD were pretty thin on the ground in the mid-1980s, and they probably still are now, so when I saw a job advertised for an assistant in the pedigree department at the British Bloodstock Agency, I suggested that Lyn apply. She got that job in 1985 and spent several very happy years there, working for the late Joss Collins, until the department was disbanded.

When Lyn left Newmarket she moved to Newcastle, where she had various jobs unconnected with horses, until joining MJR in 2007. Since then, and particularly since I foolishly acquired three greyhounds, she has worked unimaginable hours, despite failing health, without an utterance of complaint or a moment of self-regard. She will be irreplaceable.

WHEN Lyn applied for the job at the BBA and for a short while after she started, she came to live with

Deirdre and me at Braintree in Essex where I was in veterinary practice.

Lyn and I were under no illusions about the weaknesses in her knowledge of pedigrees and we set about rectifying this before anyone at the BBA would notice.

Our method revolved around a game of 'Double or Quits' which started with a £1 bet and which, we were confident, would eventually return to zero. For example, I might start with: 'I'll bet you a pound you don't know the sire of Roberto' and, if she said 'Hail To



Lyn with the greyhounds at Kingsley Park

Reason', I owed her a pound. I might then come back with, 'double or quits -- who is the dam of Grundy?' And, if she said 'Word From Lundy', I owed her £2, and so on.

As her knowledge progressed the amount I owed her increased and I will remember lying in bed one night, in debt to her for £1 million, trying to think of a question to get me back to zero. I thought I had it and I rushed to her room first thing in the morning and started shaking her and saying, 'double or quits – who is the sire of Blazing Saddles?' She woke from her sleep, partially opened her eyes, and said, 'Todman. Two million'.

Sadly, I don't remember how I got back to zero, or even if I ever actually did.

IN my teens and Lyn's early 20s, as well as our interest in horseracing and punk rock, we shared a passion for fast cars. Our ultimate dream car of the time was the E-Type Jaguar.

One day, while wandering through what is now trendily called the Merchant City in Glasgow, we saw a pink (I think Jaguar called the colour 'heather') E-Type on a parking meter with the 'expired' notice displayed. We scraped around for a few coins, fed the meter, and left a note for the driver, telling of what we had done, giving our contact details, and saying that we would love to be taken for a drive in this delectable car. We heard nothing.

Thirty-five years on, Deirdre bought me a 1965 E-Type Jaguar for my birthday and I dream that one day I'll find a simi-

lar note on my windscreen. If I ever do, I will certainly seek out my benefactors.



ONE of Lyn's many talents, particularly in her youth, was writing humorous prose and poetry. She carried this on into the 1990s and for a while we featured one of her poems in each of my Sporting Life columns.

Unfortunately, I have very few examples of her poetry and we can only hope that she had kept copies and that we will find them.

One of the most memorable examples, which may have been reproduced in these pages before, was published in the Sporting Life in May 1994.

*Mister Baileys! He did it! Isn't he grand?
Truly he's one of the best in the land.
Mark was delirious, quite 'over the moon'.
Now we prepare for the big race in June.
Paul he was worse, nearly died of delight.
Bet you all wish you'd seen him that night.
They danced on the floors, they danced on the tables,
They danced with Gretas, with Anns and with Mabels!
They laughed and they drank and talked till quite late,
And all, they agreed, said the horse he was great.
But things settle down and it's back to the grind,
There are races to win and entries to find.
So it's up at first dawn and on with the fray,
Of mucking out horses and carting the hay.
So it's back to the yard and things carry on.
But none of the glory will ever be gone.*

I will miss her.



Lyn and friend Ricky Wheeler after one of Sweep's wins at Pelaw