

# Celebration of Lorraine Gradwell

**Gorton Monastery, Manchester**

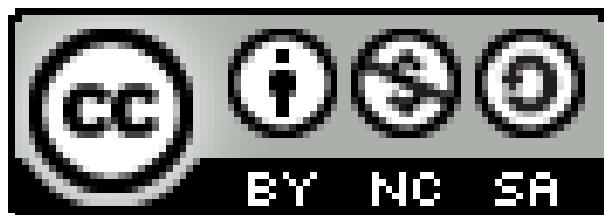
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**Books  
by Lorraine Gradwell**

More Together Than Ever (thesis, 1998)

Sometimes Only Rain Will Do (poetry, 2014)

A Life Raft in a Stormy Sea (collected works vol 1, 2015)

**Forthcoming**

Musings of a Knackered Activist (collected works, vol 2)

Lorraine Gradwell, a biography

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Dean Cavanagh, Jane Cordell.

BSL Interpreters..... Pam Jones and Tony Redshaw

With thanks also to Breakthrough UK staff for transcribing the video recording of tributes.

**Jackie Driver**

*Chair of BUK*

**Lorraine Gradwell MBE** was a phenomenal presence in Manchester, Greater Manchester, the North West, across the UK and indeed also had global reach. That is why we are all here today - taking a moment of stillness to remember her. You will hear this afternoon just some of the many tributes that have come in - some from people present, others from those that were unable to make it.

Just before we proceed, and because we gather from many different walks of life from the paths that Lorraine took - I would like to piece together some of her life so you may see it in the round.

Lorraine's abiding passion for grass roots organisations taking control was a mainstay throughout her life. After a life aiming for and reaching the pinnacle of Paralympic heights, Lorraine became a founding member of the Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People and Breakthrough UK - she continued her drive and involvement in both organisations right up until her untimely death.

She was instrumental in the setting up of the Trafford CIL - a proud and personal achievement - as it was her own ward. She wanted to ensure that disabled people had control where she lived - especially after she had nudged, cajoled, encouraged, supported and developed the presence of disabled people's organisations up and down the country.

Her life was so rich - a true people person - she used every opportunity to ensure every person she met went away with a nagging doubt that there more they could personally do to advance the life chances of disabled people - that along with her charisma and air of authority - meant that very few people indeed failed to follow up their 'tasks' to deliver.

And for those more geeky number crunchers amongst us -

Lorraine was a founder member of two organisations, won 99 athletics medals, had two husbands and two children (very neat), line managed a dozen or so staff, secured employment for hundreds of disabled people, published 32 poems, served on several government committees, attended countless demonstrations, inspired thousands. And to top it all, she got one MBE. Our Lorraine did all that. She packed several lifetimes into her 64 years and made an impact that stretched well beyond the quietly confident exterior that she presented to the world.

## **Emma Stone**

*From the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.*

I was so sorry to hear the sad news about Lorraine. Even though many years have passed since Lorraine and I worked together - when JRF was more directly involved in supporting the disabled people's movement and research - I still have such clear and fond memories of that time. Lorraine managed to be principled, pragmatic, persuasive and also very warm, generous and fun. I don't think those qualities come together in one person very often. I really enjoyed her company at the same time as feeling a little inadequate because she was so brilliant!

All these years since, I still promote Breakthrough when people ask 'who does employment support well'. And I truly hope that Breakthrough will go forward, strengthened and sustained by Lorraine's memory.

## **Jane Dean**

### *A friend*

Lorraine, I will miss you, my inspiration. I will miss that dry and gentle wit - sometimes not so gentle! I will miss that lilting Teesside accent.

Most of all I will miss bumping into you in Sale where we both live. I will miss my children chatting with you - you and Jessica talking about swimming, your great passion, and Alex being massively impressed by your gold medal, representing your country in New Zealand at the Paralympics.

To them you were a mermaid on a motorbike.

To me you were and always will be a friend and an inspiration.

## Ruth Gould MBE

*Ruth is the Artistic Director of DaDaFest - she has taken disability arts across the world to promote a vision of improving global recognition and challenging inequality through the arts by providing a platform for performers, artists, writers and many more.*

### Thank you Lorraine

I first knew Lorraine by reputation. In 1996 I was asked to apply for a disability arts job in Manchester – that is not an easy one for a Scouser – but I did, got the job and bit the bullet to start work in said city. I was also new to disability arts and the politics of disability empowerment. I started to learn about the Coalition and the mighty Lorraine – she was someone who hooked me into the movement. I first met her when on the planning team the first Independence Festival – I was actually nervous to meet her – she was a formidable woman and didn't suffer fools. I didn't know what she would make of me – a quiet and 'naïve to the movement' Scouser – but she immediately made me feel at ease.

I went on to be on other committees and developments, and also thankful for her clarity, her passion and her truthful statements which would often stun the room to silence.

I met with her on a few occasions in an informal mentoring type of meeting – me asking for advice on big issues in work. She was so wise and could see what I needed to do, but this was not always easy to do but Lorraine gave me strength to move ahead to undertake difficult things. She was there and encouraged when you least expected it. She got involved in the various

DaDaFest's, specifically supporting the awards – even challenging some of the work when needed. The last few years our relationship

has been mainly via social network – but she has never failed to encourage me.

This year has been a hard one for me as I became quite ill – I have been in hospital at the same time as Lorraine was and have so appreciated her support and Facebook banter – while she was so ill: she was still caring and looking out for others, and helped me enormously.

We will all be thinking of her influence into our lives and thankful that we knew her – we know she was one in a million and can feel quite nervous that we may not get the likes of her again. But I don't think that is true – as we have all been impacted and changed by knowing her – she imparted so much to us and as such I urge you to continue speaking her truths, challenging when we can and ensure we live her legacy to change this world.

## Val Stevens

*Former Deputy Leader of Manchester City Council*

I suspect a lot of people will want to talk about Lorraine, her character, and the sort of person that she was, but I am here to talk about what she did.

When I was a councillor in 1985, a little bit of history for you, about how things have developed in our great city and indeed the UK. In 1985 I was made the first Equal Opportunities Chair in Manchester City Council, and I was given a piece of paper called the Labour party policy document, about how to deal with all the various of groups that fell under the headline “Discrimination and Disadvantage.” And I was just given this piece of paper, no budget, and one officer.

But what did Lorraine do? She’d already been active, as many of you will know, in regards to disabled people. And what Lorraine did, most importantly for me as an elected member, is she made that paper come alive for disabled people.

Before that, the various groups of people, women being one of them, gay and lesbians, and the range within ethnic minorities, I know there are more groups now, but at the time it was LGB. What she did, was to tell us what we needed to do for disabled people.

What a lot of local authorities had done, in relation to equal opportunities was by the disabled sector, an easy one to get into. They ignored gay men, they ignored the difficulties with race. Because they thought if they put a few disabled ramps in, they’d dealt with it. And of course Lorraine knew better than that. What she did was to change the attitude: that disabled people didn’t have things done for them, everything that happened with disabled

people was **with** them, and in fact in many cases we were able to enable people to do it for themselves.

And that was for me probably, as an ex elected member was, the most important lesson. We don't do things for people, you do things with people.

And I was just saying to someone earlier on, I have the stripes on my back because Lorraine, as I said in my Facebook posting, was a ferocious character, and I was usually on the end of her ferocity.

We never did anything fast enough, or enough, and it was always perhaps too little. And it probably still is today as we know there are a lot of issues that still remain, not least what's been happening recently in regards to benefits.

So Lorraine thank you very much you have taught me as a councillor a very good lesson.

## **Sue Murphy**

*Councillor and Deputy Leader at Manchester City Council*

I suppose I'm kind of speaking on behalf of the Council, I know Richard Leese himself wanted to be here today, but unfortunately he couldn't, so it's not just me that wanted to come here to remember Lorraine, I'm doing it on behalf of a lot of other people that have known her over the years as well.

I first met Lorraine when I became a councillor more than twenty years ago, it seems like two minutes, I know that quite a long time, and understood immediately what a powerful voice and presence that she was in Manchester, and how she was prepared to fight for disabled people. She was a real role model for me, she taught me about what strong women could do, so she was a role model for me as a woman, as well as a disabled person and I think that's really important.

And she made a difference to how the Council, and me, view disabled people. The importance of listening and an understanding of what we needed to do.

She was involved in wider things in the city as well, in helping us put together our plan for what we wanted to do for the city over the next ten years, and I think she will be quite proud of how that's turned out. Because at the heart of our plan for the city we have set things that we want everyone to do. At the heart of it we start from strength, we start from what people can do and not what they can't. We start with what they want and not just what we think they need. And I hope Lorraine can sign up to that as being a fundamental principle for everybody.

Things I remember most: she told us when we were wrong, she told us when we were doing things we shouldn't do. But she was just as

quick to tell us what we needed to do to put it right. She was even faster to step up and help us do it. It wasn't about criticism, it was genuinely about what we could do together to put things right. She helped shape the city and she helped shape the lives of disabled people in the city to make it a better place for them. But by doing that she helped make it a better city for everybody, and she will be very much missed.

## **Dame Anne McGuire**

*Former Minister for Disabled People*

There are people in this world who are just so impressive that they almost take your breath away. Lorraine Gradwell was one such person.

From the first time I met her when I was Minister for Disabled People, I knew that she was a force of nature. She was a champion of and for disabled people. She was a woman who knew how to speak truth to power and she never hesitated to do so, whether locally or nationally. I always welcomed her opinions and advice knowing that those were well thought out and rooted in her own experience as a disabled person.

She was proud of what disabled people had achieved in her own community in the Manchester area. She knew the importance of making a difference at local level as well as campaigning at national level. I remember well my first visit to Breakthrough UK to see what could be achieved. This was independent living in action.

Lorraine and I shared the view that people were disabled by a society that erected barriers and that our job was to break down those barriers. We believed that if the ambition was to have a more equal society, then we could not ignore the rights of disabled people to play a full part in that society.

I would have loved to be with you today to help celebrate the life of Lorraine. She was taken too soon. But she leaves behind a legacy which will live on on, not just in the minds and hearts of all those who knew her, but in the contribution she made to improving the lives of disabled people in Manchester and across the UK.

She was truly the embodiment of thinking globally and acting locally.

It was a privilege to know Lorraine and like others here today, I mourn her passing, but celebrate her life.

## **Mark Deal**

*Author and disability academic*

I was so sorry to hear the sad news about Lorraine. I served many years with her on the DWP's Disability Employment Advisory Committee and I say this without fear of contradiction, her way of cutting through the noise to get to the heart of the issue and her tenacity to ensure the rights of disabled people were always at the forefront, were second to none. She always livened up a discussion with charm and honesty, but I am sure you know that already.

The Disability Movement has lost an irreplaceable member – we will all miss Lorraine greatly.

## Vivienne Stone

*Trustee of Breakthrough UK, member of Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People and friend*

I miss Lorraine.

I should start with an apology. In preparing my tribute to Lorraine, having read all of the wonderful messages and memories, I decided that I wanted to say something different and unique.

However, very quickly it became apparent that that was going to be difficult. The reason being that one of the many wonderful things about Lorraine was her consistency. Whether you were meeting her for the first time or had known her for years, what you got was kindness, humour, warmth, respect. And, of course, always... a challenge of some kind. ... A gentle invitation to see things differently. She didn't wear a different face or a different heart for people. She was always **Gradders**.

I met Lorraine back in the 80s. We had both been told that we probably wouldn't get on, so spent some time nodding politely and smiling cautiously across meeting rooms. Eventually, we progressed to "hi". Usually as we passed each other...quite fast!

One of my earliest, maybe even the first memory of Lorraine was being at a meeting. During the break or end we somehow managed to lock our wheelchairs together. I don't remember the occasion (so many meetings! so many buffets!), but for some reason, whilst I didn't use a wheelchair then, I was in a wheelchair that day.

So there we were. Facing each other. Stuck. I knew her to be one the 'leaders', and as a newbie was quite overawed by the experience. Both of us had people behind us, so couldn't initially reverse, which would have solved the problem. The people behind

us instantly bonded and started to problem solve over our heads... No one saw the need to involve us in the resolution of this problem... why would they, we (the wheelchairs), were the problem. Bemused by the activity around us; we chatted briefly, cautiously. Eventually someone noticed that by slightly shifting our chairs, we'd sorted it out ourselves. Somewhat miffed by our lack of gratitude they left.

I'd like to say that on that day, I instantly realised that I was meeting someone who would be a lifelong friend, and mentor; that I sensed that this woman I'd so carefully avoided would become a central part of my life. But I didn't. I just left, thinking, "Oh she wasn't too bad. We obviously shared an ability to sit out anyone who tried to impose their help on us. Quite nice really".

At some point much later we ended up talking by phone. I don't recall swapping telephone numbers. Certainly not at our first meeting, but we ended up in touch and over a number of phone calls established that we had quite a bit in common beyond our politics!

During one of those early conversations, Lorraine mentioned 'someone called Tony', who she 'quite liked'. He seemed nice and she thought he liked her too. I was encouraging but suggested that she proceed with caution! You just never know do you!

On a later call, I told her that I think I had heard about the 'someone called Tony' and had only heard positive things. Having identified that we were actually talking about the same person, I said I thought maybe she should try and talk to him. Lorraine admitted that she had recklessly gone ahead and had a meeting with him. Actually what she said was that she had 'found herself in a meeting with him'. I did wonder if that was a euphemism for 'been on a date'.

Later, I met Tony in his role as information officer, and told Lorraine that although some people might have been a bit scared by the numbered, alphabetised, colour coded filing system of information in his office (I'm sure Google was modelled on his information system), I thought that she should marry him, and have mushroom *vol au vents*, chicken drumsticks with those little paper caps on the end, and smoked salmon mousse at the wedding.

“Oh no! It won’t come to that” she said. Several years later, in the middle of a conversation about something entirely different... probably a discussion about the standard of sandwiches at a Council consultation event.. Lorraine casually said. “I’m not sure about salmon mousse at a summer wedding reception... come to think of it chicken drumsticks in the heat... not good.”

“True. Best go for a winter wedding then.” I suggested.

The next time we spoke she was living with him!

Note: I didn’t find the *vol au vents* at their wedding, but it was a warm day, so I didn’t mention the absence of salmon mousse or 70s style chicken drumsticks.

The 80s and 90s whizzed by, a blur of work, meetings and children. Over the years, we discovered we had a lot of things in common. We were both swimmers, interested in writing, loved 60s music, had had the weird “coming home from residential school” experiences, we read Bunty as children, loved buffet food, and our children were the same ages and appeared to be thriving on ‘got this at the conference’ suppers.

My children remembered her as someone who was always there, and fun to be with. They remember the parties and her visits to the house. Years later, Tim and my grand-daughter Bailey also got to meet her and experience her kindness and fun.

There are so many things I loved about Lorraine:

Our first meeting had been one of bemusement, and humour remained a key part of our friendship.

I loved her modesty. She didn't like being told how great she was, but I did it often anyway and she kind of tolerated it.

Although Lorraine knew how to use her skills to influence people and did so often eg forcing them to meet loads of people! I don't think she didn't really ever fully recognised her influence on others. Lorraine did a lot in her life, and modelled the change she wanted to see, but it was her way of being 'Gradders' that sparked that desire in others, to follow her, and make that change happen. For me, whatever I managed to influence within my work, it was never fully signed off until it had Gradders' approval! (And it never got signed off by Gradders unless I could list a load of people I'd spoken to!).

I loved her way of thinking outside of the box, and her willingness to share her expertise and knowledge in a way that valued and recognised the experience of others.

There were two significant things we didn't have in common:

Lorraine was a keen and expert seamstress. I refused to revisit my childhood experiences of 'doing embroidery' on the basis that 'I didn't do handicrafts'.

The other thing was meeting people. Lorraine was fully committed to inclusion and networking. I was fully committed to writing about inclusion and networking. Lorraine was fully committed to changing this. Resistance was futile.

From the very start of our friendship if I asked Lorraine for advice or an opinion, it usually ended up with me going to a meeting, or meeting someone recommended by Lorraine.

"I keep thinking she's going to be at those meetings, but most of the time she isn't and I end up having to get advice from total strangers"

I said to Cathy Avison. Cathy just smiled and reminded me that was how we (Cathy and I), had first spoken. So maybe there was some point in going with it? On this issue, Lorraine was persistent and consistent throughout our friendship. At our last meet up (Slug and Lettuce) I sought her opinion on a script I'm working on.

"You know who you want to talk to don't you?" she said helpfully.

"Yes! You!" I replied with a sinking heart, knowing what was coming.

"Oh I will as well" she assured me. "But let me look out his contact details" she said.

"I'm retired now I shouldn't have to speak to anyone. Can't you just talk to me?"

"You'll find him very helpful".

"I'm going to be an enigmatic writer and must work in splendid isolation. Networking and enigma do not go together," I protested.

"I'll mention that you'll be calling him then," she said. "Are you having the platter, it's like conference buffet food on a slab of wood or slate."

This bringing people together, connecting people, sometimes even though they never actually met... this is part of the essence of Gradders and continues even now. Over the last few weeks it has pulled us together, perhaps even made us feel like we know each other, even though we never met before!

Lorraine lived by the values she talked about. Despite her vast experience and knowledge she actively sought out the views and opinions of others. Her expertise was vast, the total sum of all the people she connected with. I was always flattered when she called me and not always sure that I'd added a great deal. Sometimes

maybe I offered a new perspective. Other times I simply convinced her that she had been right in the first place!

I'm not really ready to say good-bye to Lorraine. Don't think I ever will be. So I'd like to say –

let's not slip away from here making vague promises to be in touch.

We are what we have left of Lorraine and if we want to honour her memory then let's commit to talking to each other, meeting each other, sharing our memories, and continuing to use our knowledge and experience to ensure that others know what it is like to be Graddered.

I think Lorraine would sign that off, but I know she would also say, "Good idea, and you know, thinking about it... there's a couple more people I think you might want to talk to!"

In finishing I would like to thank Tony, Jenny, John and their partners for getting us to get together over the last few weeks – and for sharing Lorraine with us all those years. Sorry for the interrupted meals, paused videos and the "I'm running a bit late, I'll be back soon" calls. She was and always will be, first and foremost, your wife and your mum and I think that's the bit of her I loved the most.

## **Brenda Hamlin**

*Chair of Manchester Deaf Centre*

I am here as a representative of Manchester Deaf community. When members of the Deaf community first met Lorraine, she was with her colleagues and they came along to the Manchester Deaf Centre and we were all thinking, “Who is this person? Who is Lorraine?” and she he was talking to us all and everything and she was quite confident with us.

She organised a workshop at the Whitebrook Centre and everybody went along and, from that workshop, Lorraine organised various things. We were fairly dismissive at that time and, I don’t mean you, I mean us as the Deaf community; we just had to listen to what everybody else had to say, the welfare workers and such like would tell us what to do but she was telling us “No, you mustn’t do that, you can do this for yourself!”

The Deaf community has suffered a lot of discrimination in the workplace, just as Lorraine had herself. She saw the similarities with her working environment and ours. She was encouraging us to move forward.

She was involved in the Sign Song group. Do you remember the ad on television *I’d Like to Teach the World to Sing*, the Coca-Cola advert? Lorraine was involved in that and she was signing ‘I’d like to teach the world to *sign*’. That was lovely of her to be involved with that, we were very happy that she wanted to be involved.

The Deaf community met a lot of challenges just as Lorraine had and she showed how she could be successful.

The Deaf community, remember, we had a Deaf march: we wanted BSL recognised and we had robots and all kinds of things! We were

on the news, I was very nervous myself but Lorraine encouraged us to get out there and march. It was wonderful for Lorraine to have experience of the Deaf community and we were very pleased to have her involved.

## **Martin Pagel**

*Former Deputy Leader of Manchester City Council, long standing disability rights campaigner and close friend of Lorraine*

### **The story of Joan and Jim**

As we all know Lorraine loved people, which is why we're here today.

I've been privileged to have had Lorraine in my life since we first met in 1984 at a meeting which led to the formation of GMCDP a year later.

Out of the many adventures we had over the years I would like to share with you the Story of Joan and Jim.

At the end of the 80s / early 90s, Joan and Jim visited the office that was shared by GMCDP and MDF, an old cabin on Anson Road.

They had come to see how we could help them.

They wanted to get married but the local priest refused to entertain the idea; partly because they were disabled people and partly because of their age (both were in their 70s).

Lorraine and I tried to explain that we were campaigning and information giving organisations with no obvious influence over the church.

Joan pointed out that she and Jim didn't have time on their side to wait for us to run our campaigns and challenged us to find a way to help them.

Lorraine agreed that we would think of something!

Once Joan and Jim had left, Lorraine set about organising. Flip charts were filled with ideas and tasks were allocated. We were going to do all that we could to get Joan and Jim married.

An added complication was that they lived in a care home run by the church. So not only would we need to find a priest who would bless the marriage we would also need to find somewhere for them to live; with single rooms before the wedding and a shared room after.

Changing the world seemed a much easier and more achievable option!

Whilst the rest of us doubted that it was possible, Lorraine remained determined that Joan and Jim would be together.

Lorraine, as usual, was proved right. We found a priest in Bolton who recognised the love that Joan and Jim obviously had for each other and agreed to help. But he couldn't be seen to undermine his colleague. Joan and Jim would need to move to his Parish.

We found a home that not only had vacancies but also bought into the love story and agreed to provide separate rooms and then a move into a shared room after the wedding.

Against all the odds all that remained was to organise the wedding and reception.

Ian Stanton readily agreed to perform and joined Lorraine and Tony and me and Cathy at one of the most beautiful and loving weddings that I have ever witnessed.

We have all been blessed to have shared the love that Lorraine had in abundance and to have benefited from her refusal to be beaten.

Thank you Lorraine, and thank you Tony, John and Jenny for sharing this remarkable woman with us.

## Claire Wilson

*Senior HR professional now living in Australia*

Ten years ago I met Lorraine as a recruiter. Just like a handful of others in my close circle, I targeted to keep Lorraine in my life for a lot longer than an hour-long interview. What is hard-work if it doesn't have its perks!

I was lucky enough to be invited by Lorraine to be a Breakthrough Board Member. I did not feel qualified given the amazing achievements of Breakthrough, but Lorraine convinced me to give it a go. And just like that, I became one of the many that Lorraine brought a life changing opportunity to.

Lorraine, I am proud of you. I am inspired by your legacy. You made change look easy by holding true to your passions but communicating with such a balanced and objective style. You never intimidated. You had an amazing ability to persuade and influence people to think the right way.

I wish I had a tenth of your composure and calmness. You reassured us all that whatever it was, we had this.

You always, always asked about my Mum, and I'm so glad I got to introduce you to her.

You made me laugh with your wit, your irony and the sideways glances you gave to me, Jackie and Dean. For supposedly mature professionals, you indulged our humour and the cheeky kids within us.

I think we all owe you a payback in keeping your legacy alive, with the paths you laid for others to further achieve. In whatever way we all can, and are able, we will go for that quick win or a long-term major change.

Last but not least; the relationship between you and Tony was awesome, I'm so glad I got to witness such a love and respect between two individuals.

Lorraine – I've been looking for a poem or lyric that fits and found Victoria Wood – *Reincarnation*. I hope to see you again, somehow, somewhere, you were far too special to just live one life:

Well, I'm sorry God, I have to say,  
one life per person is not enough, Not enough.  
I would like to live more times than this,  
If you don't agree, then tough. [T-U-ough.]  
There are other lives going on, I haven't lived,  
And this gives me a sense of frustration, frustration frustration -  
frust, ra, a, a.  
I'm not bothered about being Mary Queen of Scots or Joan of Arc,  
I just fancy Twentieth Century Reincarnation.  
I'd like to keep coming back,  
And trying a different track;  
I'd like to go round and round, 'cause I never feel I've got this right.  
It isn't a proper scheme,  
I just want to let off steam;  
We all have to have a dream, and I'm following my dream tonight.

## **Richard Currie**

*Richard is a disability rights activist, a member of the coalition and a board member at Breakthrough UK. He is also well on his way to becoming a distinguished social policy academic.*

When I think about losing Lorraine it is very difficult to describe the sense of loss and the sadness that I feel.

However words come flooding back to me when I think about how lucky I am to have had Lorraine as a friend and mentor over the past few years.

I don't think that I am exaggerating when I say without the help and support of Lorraine I wouldn't have been who I am today. Her tireless campaigning of civil human rights for disabled people and the right to live independently in our own homes would not have been possible, so for that I am incredibly thankful.

Lorraine wore her brilliance lightly she had the uncanny ability to help you feel better about yourself. Whenever I was struggling with issues around social care and self-confidence Lorraine was already to be a guide for a stormy sea that is life.

## Dr Jenny Morris OBE

*Jenny Morris is a disabled feminist and freelance writer and researcher. Her policy analyst work included working with the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit to produce *Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People*. She then led the development of the Labour government's 2008 *Independent Living Strategy*. She was specialist advisor to various select committees concerned with disability issues - most recently to the Joint Committee on Human Rights' *Inquiry into Independent Living*.*

Lorraine was, is and always will be, one of those women that inspire me. I can't remember when I first met her - it must have been at one of those gatherings in the late 1980s and 1990s which were becoming increasingly common - where disabled people were getting together and demanding their rights to a decent quality of life. As someone who acquired an impairment in my early 30s I learnt so much from Lorraine who had been fighting disabling barriers all her life. I say fighting and that is what she was doing, but she did it with such intelligence, such charm, and such confidence. She could nail an argument with a brief sentence; she could burst a bubble of ignorance with a few well-chosen words which never sounded angry but which were completely devastating. And she could do it with humour as well.

When I started working with the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit on what was to become a 25 year strategy on 'Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People', Lorraine and Breakthrough UK were key to getting civil servants to understand what empowering services could look like. Lorraine organised a visit to Breakthrough for the small group of civil servants working on the Strategy and even the woman from Treasury was impressed! We used

Breakthrough UK as an example of good practice. Then during the development of the Independent Living Strategy which followed the Life Chances report we used case studies of what Breakthrough was offering as examples of what holistic and empowering support should look like.

Lorraine made an impact, not only through her personal example of how to fight for disabled people's rights, but also through the organisations that she helped to establish. She added value to the lives of not only those who knew her but also to the development of policies and practices which make a real difference to the lives of people who never met her. We've got a long way to go before we achieve the vision that Lorraine had for disabled people's place in society but all that she was as a person, all that she achieved, will continue to make a contribution to our struggles.

## **Penny Germon**

*Activist in the disabled people's rights movement*

It's 1990. We've had eleven years of Tory Government led by Margaret Thatcher we were to have another seven under John Major.

But, there was a 'rumblin, coming through the land' (Ian Stanton). To my delight and amazement I had landed the job of Community Development worker for the Avon Coalition of Disabled People. It was our first paid role.

I had my very own computer with the latest Wordperfect software. We marvelled at the wonders of the dial up connection and the messages that popped into the inbox.

I looked around for people doing a similar role. I needed to work out what on earth to do.

Making contact with Lorraine was the obvious thing. She had been the Development Worker and was now team leader at GMCDP. In Bristol we unashamedly stole leafs from the Greater Manchester Coalition book.

I made my way up the motorway to a business park in Manchester somewhere. The woman I met was welcoming, warm, inspiring and encouraging.

I came to know a

Mentor

Teacher

Guide

Thinker

Activist

Creative

Change maker

and

wise, powerful, woman.

I admired her greatly.

I loved her chuckle.

In time we both got involved in the world of regeneration and neighbourhood initiatives. Of course the lives of disabled people were entirely absent from any mainstream discourse or thinking. Lorraine took action. She wrote about it, spoke about it and built Breakthrough UK.

I wasn't at all surprised to hear green was her favourite colour - the colour of growth and new energy.

Through Lorraine all disabled people had a voice in some of longest darkest corridors. Places most people thought we had no right to be.

Lorraine is one of the great titans of the disabled peoples movement. Her impact and legacy are immeasurable.

We all live in a better world because she lived the change she wanted to see with humility, conviction, integrity and fun.

Lorraine's impressive capacity for words and story telling has so often given voice to a jumble of random thoughts in my own head. How did she do that?

With Lorraine and so many of you, I too have clung to the life raft in the stormy sea. I'm so glad we were clinging on together.

Penny Germon, life raft companion

## **Paul Cassidy**

*Former Director of Social Services at Manchester City Council*

### A Geordie's Appreciation of Lorraine

In the North East, where winter is never far away, people from Teesside are affectionately known as “smoggies” in a nod to their industrial heritage and its lasting effects on the quality of their air. Smoggies are well known for their strong sense of communal support and irreverent sense of humour, to help them through both hard times and cold winds.

Not surprisingly, Lorraine being a Middlesbrough lass had both these quantities in abundance.

Thirty years ago, when we both worked for Manchester City Council, Lorraine was charged with the task of getting council staff to regard disabled people as the latter rather than the former. I was initially impressed by Lorraine’s quiet sense of determination that social workers, planners, architects, lawyers and so on would see people first, and clients second. I was more impressed when she persisted with this approach in the face of some considerable indifference and occasional outright hostility. As I was in a similar changing people business at the time, Lorraine and I would have some entertainment by poking fun at the middle and senior managers, who wanted their past to be our future. It took me some time to realise that I had been unwittingly recruited to Lorraine’s network of community support. I reflected subsequently that Smoggies are usually bit quicker on the uptake than their Geordie cousins, and possibly because of their upbringing are more aware of the environment they have to work in.

Ten years later in 1997, Lorraine was charged with the task of

setting up a disabled people's employment agency - Breakthrough UK. The council's political leadership decided this was to be funded by social services, using the budget and buildings previously used for an adult training centre. Sadly, and perhaps surprisingly, many staff in the council and particularly in social services were unhappy with this radical new arrangement. Somehow, I was levered into position by Lorraine to act as the buffer zone between the council's bureaucracy and Breakthrough, and like most buffer zones had to withstand incoming fire from both sides. Fortunately, Lorraine had made sure she had far bigger guns on her side, and the war was short lived.

The peace was well worth the fight, Lorraine was determined that Breakthrough quickly found proper jobs for a lot more people than Social Services had ever provided training opportunities.

Furthermore Lorraine's vision of a disabled people's organisation that provided its own community of support, rather than being dependent on others, was soon established. Breakthrough started getting contracts from other boroughs in Greater Manchester, and then the wider North West. Within a few years Breakthrough had a national reputation and Lorraine was increasingly called on to advise ministers and their civil servants, as to how best to transfer the decision making skills to disabled people themselves, rather than through intermediaries. We would still meet up occasionally and Lorraine would poke fun at both of us, in our now exalted positions, to make sure we stayed well grounded, so to speak. I will miss Lorraine for her drive and determination, her warmth, humour, and sense of community wellbeing. However, I'm sure she's making changes wherever she is, and those changes better happen, and they will be better.

## **Dennis Queen**

*Local queer disabled campaigner and songwriter*

Yes, I'm afraid it's true, I was still putting my shoelaces back into my boots on the way here this morning, and for anyone that doesn't know, that's activist speak for 'I got nicked again' and was released around midnight.

I haven't brought a pre-prepared speech, I've been quite busy organising protests recently because the Tory party are in Manchester, but what I wanted to say first of all, is that there are not many celebrations of somebody's life that you will ever go to and see a room full of the particular people that are here, where we have council leaders, we have disabled activists still putting their shoelaces back in, and I'm not the only one, a number of us in this room were there yesterday, so I can't take the credit for the trouble all by myself! I'm going to take this out cos I'm struggling to speak into it correctly, but there are not many people who would raise an audience like this at the celebration of their life, and there's a very particular reason for that, because Lorraine is an amazing individual and listening to one of the speakers before listing some of Lorraine's qualities I thought it was never going to end, I think she had them all which must be why the rest of us only have a few each.

One thing I learned from Lorraine is that all of us have a place in activism, it doesn't matter whether you are protest organiser like Brenda or Rick, it doesn't matter whether you are an activist in local council, it doesn't matter whether you are an activist working in social services and all the other different places where people work to create change for disabled people.

And for me, I'm 44, so Lorraine to me is one of the elders in a radical disabled people's movement for liberation and whilst we are very lucky to live in a city that we have made so much progress in, and although, we can see that from who's here, there is still a long way to go but I know that between all of us in here we are going to get there in time and one of the things that I have learnt from Lorraine is that it does take all of us with all our many, many skills to make this happen.

But something really special I learnt from Lorraine is that our skill isn't always the first thing we first thing that we might try so when I first met Lorraine at training at the Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People where she did some training on the history of our movement with me, stuff, information that I now lecture in and pass on to younger, another generation of students at one of the universities here.

She also trained me in committee skills and how organisations work which was great for me because I learnt doing that that really wasn't going to be my place in everything but what I did learn from Lorraine was that I would find my skills and I think there are lots of us in this room, for whom Lorraine's influence has been phenomenal, but we are just a few of the hundreds and hundreds of people who Lorraine has affected over her lifetime, and between us we're going to get there - it's going to take time, but we will keep fighting for change and although we've lost Lorraine, each one of us now, is responsible for carrying Lorraine's love forwards, because that is biggest thing she gave to all of us is love, knowing that we're ok and knowing that we can all fight back and I think that the best tribute we can all pay to Lorraine, not just with our words, is to keep taking forward that love and passing it onto other generations like Lorraine has done, to make sure between us that we eventually see a day when disabled people are free.

## **Gary Timperley**

*Former employee from Breakthrough UK*

I remember meeting Lorraine in 1995 when I was recruited for the role of Assistant DEA for Department of Work and Pensions and Lorraine was challenged with training this person about how to be aware of disabled people and be able to support them to get their jobs.

When I first started working with Lorraine in 1996, I worked with Manchester City Council as a Marketing Officer. I remember one particular day when I was based in Beswick and at three-thirty in the afternoon there was an emergency phone call because Lorraine had barricaded herself between the two doors at Breakthrough because she was being attacked by the local residents of Ardwick and it “was shut the shop get over and help me get out of this closet!” - her words, not mine.

The building got shut and we raced across Manchester to save Lorraine and get rid of the people that were outside. It was something that, when I heard Lorraine had passed away, it just came straight back because I can remember it as if it was yesterday.

Lorraine’s passion and skills for projects were fantastic and I just remember a few:

Launching Breakthrough, I know, was one of Lorraine’s passions and I am proud to be one of the people, who worked with Lorraine to interview a lot of the staff and there were lots and lots of late nights and hundreds of application forms and I stayed working for Lorraine for quite a long time.

In 2002, we did an event for the Commonwealth Games which was quite dear to Lorraine's heart. Lorraine said let's do an event for disabled athletes at Breakthrough: 'You'll know what to do, just put something on'.

So we put on a major event and, I can remember another funny story, I arrived at Breakthrough at seven o' clock to meet Manchester City Council's Health and Safety officer to be told the marquee was condemned. Half past seven in the morning, on the phone to Lorraine: 'What time do you call this?!" and, for people who know me, I can get quite upset, not knowing what to do, and on the other side of the phone: 'Just calm down, we'll move it, we'll put it in the hall'.

So from seven o' clock, major things happened. Everything got moved and, I have to say, it was one of the best events I think I have ever organised. And the secret came out of that that we had a gold medallist working for Breakthrough.

The *Landing A Job* project was another project that I know Lorraine was very passionate about and to get images of disabled people doing jobs that everybody else would do and get them across the country and I have to say that there is still a poster up today at BUK on that Manchester Airport project.

The Liverpool employment project was another project which I know was dear to Lorraine's heart and I know it was really sad that it had to close.

And the Centre for Independent Living in Trafford, I know people have mentioned about Trafford CIL. I worked with Lorraine, and a lot of people to set it up and, with Lorraine being a Trafford resident, it was the pride of that, Trafford, open and it still goes from strength to strength today.

I left Breakthrough to work for DWP in their new role but it didn't work out. Lorraine said 'why don't you apply for a job back at Breakthrough?'

I became her assistant for about a year and a half. I have to say, what a challenge, trying to be an assistant to Lorraine. In a nice way, not a nasty way! And I have to say, a lot of what I have learnt over the years has come through Lorraine.

So, to sum up, Lorraine gave me a great grounding in the issues facing disabled people, how we need to keep challenging the issues to ensure that everyone is treated equally and with respect.

I know that with everyone here today keeping the passion going, Lorraine's memory will live on for years to come.

## Baroness Jane Campbell

*Jane was Commissioner of the Equality and Human Rights Commission from 2006–08. She also served as Chair of the Disability Committee which led on the EHRC Disability Programme. She was the former Chair of the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE). She was Commissioner of the Disability Rights Commission until it was wound up in October 2006. Jane goes on to play a hugely influential role in the House of Lords championing disability rights.*

My friend and fellow freedom fighter - Lorraine.

Like many of us in the Disabled Persons Movement, I was deeply shocked to hear that Lorraine had died. This may sound strange as I knew she has been seriously ill, on and off, for some time. If you're steeped in the disability movement, one of the sadder sides, is we all experience the loss of close friends more often, and a lot younger than the rest of society. It is not only a constant shadow, but an expectation. But like so many of our strong civil rights leaders, you expect them to be invincible; hence my shock.

Lorraine was very important to me, not just as a friend who had been highly active in the same civil rights struggle but as a female role model who revealed to me the secrets of operating within a dominantly male political environment. Her steely strength, combined with kindness and understanding towards those in struggle was truly remarkable.

I deeply admired her unwavering commitment to the emancipation of disabled people. She gave us all such strength and clarity about how we must go forward. This at times was very challenging! Like most civil rights movements we don't always agree, and I remember many heated discussions around the BCOPD Council table as we

thrashed out policy and strategy. Indeed her strength of force could be quite scary at times, and as a young recruit in the mid-80s, I was not let off the hook!

Lorraine was one of the few women who made our civil rights movement so effective in the late 80s and 90s, especially in Manchester, which, I think we can all agree, became the bastion of the disability rights movement.

Many, many years later (two summers ago), Lorraine, Tony and I couldn't stop laughing in my garden, as we reflected on the good old days of BCODP conferences where we fought and embraced each other in the same measure, followed by evenings of great mischief. This is where I felt my happiest and most inspired.

The movement has lost a great warrior and so many of us have lost a very important friend. In my eyes she is our Angel of the North – and I'm an atheist!!

**Dave Regan**

*Director of Public Health in Manchester*

Lorraine was a fantastic friend to public health in Manchester over the years.

She supported our Healthy City Programme and our efforts to reduce health inequalities through the work of the Manchester Joint Health Unit.

She has contributed so much to our City and we all owe her so much.

We will all miss you Lorraine.

Love, David

*on behalf of all the people and teams who have worked in public health with Lorraine and Breakthrough over the years.*

## **Brian Hilton**

*Brian is another long standing disability rights campaigner, and former Chair of the Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People.*

I think I first met Lorraine in 1987 at the 'Arts and Disabled People' conference in Manchester Town Hall. However, I only got to know Lorraine after joining GMCDP's Executive Council in the early 90s when she was the Team Leader. Over the following years and through various jobs, committees, campaigns and demos, Lorraine remained a constant source of support, advice and friendship, both personally and professionally.

During my time as Chair of GMCDP, whenever i'd have a rather knotty problem, of which there were many, Lorraine was always on hand to help me unravel the threads and occasionally even managed to turn them into a wonderful bow. Professionally I think Lorraine's greatest asset was her ability to not only to analyse a problem, but also to identify the way forward.

GMCDP's recently completed the *Greater Manchester Disabled People's Manifesto* had an introduction from Martin, sections from Pam, Joe and myself as well as various contributions from individuals and organisations from across Greater Manchester.

However, it was Lorraine who suggested we produce a manifesto in the first place. It was also Lorraine that took all the threads and themes, suggestions and corrections and wove them into the final cohesive document. That document is now on the GMCDP website and will be used to hold the new Greater Manchester Mayor to account.

And so, Lorraine has left us now and the disabled people's movement has lost another warrior, a mighty, fearsome

courageous, kind and caring warrior. As a movement you might think we would be used to losing our friends, our partners, our comrades and our colleagues. No, not so. Each new loss hits us just as hard and leaves us just as bereft.

I hope the many tributes produced over the last few weeks have brought Tony, Jenny and John some comfort, to know the lasting impact Lorraine has had and will continue to have on the lives of so many people.

## **Liz Sayce OBE**

*Former Chief Executive of DRUK, Former Director at the DRC and author of the Sayce Report*

The first time I really talked to Lorraine was at a seminar in the early 2000s, where she and I had a fierce debate about the disabling barriers faced by people living with health conditions – and I knew at once that Lorraine was someone passionate, driven by deep understanding and commitment to liberation of disabled people. She demolished at least some of my arguments with razor sharp insights. As I got to know her better, my respect grew and grew. In meetings with Ministers and officials she was a highly effective influencer, with that rare combination of being able to build warm and constructive relationships so people listened; and being totally unafraid to speak truth to power when needed. She was brave.

She spanned local and national work with grace – demonstrating in the North West what Disabled People's Organisations can achieve; and drawing on all her experience to influence national policy. She became a Trustee of Disability Rights UK in 2012 and helped shape the organisation's early phase, through her constructive critiques, always delivered with humour and humanity.

There was a consistent thread running through everything Lorraine did, rooted in values which she articulated with crystal clarity. This helped so many people understand not just the language of rights and independent living, but what they really meant. The disability movement has lost a star, a true leader. We will miss her deeply, but those of us influenced by her will build on her wisdom about what it means to work for rights in practice.

## **Agnes Fletcher**

*Disability consultant and activist*

She was an incredibly inspiring person. Not in some airy-fairy fine speeches sort of a way (though she was very articulate and persuasive) – but strong, kind, funny, principled, practical and pragmatic – getting the right things done in the right way and supporting others, including other disabled women. She will be remembered and much missed by many.

## **Dorothy Whittaker**

*Friend and colleague*

In the mid 1980s Neville and I went on holiday to Southerness in Scotland with Lorraine, John and Jenny.

There are three things I recall about that holiday which maybe exemplify some of Lorraine's character traits.

Firstly, she borrowed Neville's Meyra chair one evening and as it was the first time she had used an electric wheelchair, she went as far as she could along the shore, before being "rescued" by John and myself as the waves got a little too close, the light faded and the wheels began to sink.

Secondly, she beat us all hands down at swing-ball in the local pub garden.

And thirdly, she left a prized possession behind – her hot water bottle.

So, intrepid, competitive but also warm!

## Glynn Anderson

### *Tony Baldwinson's brother-in-law in Canada*

I have thought about Lorraine quite a lot over the last few weeks and wanted to let you know of a perhaps unexpected impact that she has had half way across the world. I teach students ages 8 to 18 all subjects, in a one room classroom on a Hutterite colony (Christian based communal setting). I get to know my students very well, as they do me, so I speak very honestly with them on many issues, both personal and social. It seemed a very natural step for me to share with them my thoughts, feelings and admiration for Lorraine. Over the space of a week and a half we have engaged in daily discussions of between half to one hour in length. Together we investigated many issues and attitudes around impairment, equality and bereavement. Through Lorraine's achievements the children have gained a deeper insight and have been able to question their own prejudices, terminology and the disadvantaging structure of society and to relate them to some personal experiences. It has been amazing and quite powerful to see young people for whom English is a second language (their own is a low German/Austrian mix) discussing the merits of the social model of disability and getting used to the term 'impairment'.

I use daily quotes from many sources to motivate my students and learn about world and local issues. I must say that, for the numerous and admirable people we have discussed, Lorraine has proved to be a very inspirational figure for my students, and a significant role model, intellectually and from what they know of her as a person. On a lighter note, it has been somewhat amusing seeing the confusion of one or two of the younger less linguistically capable children as they try to work out why Lorraine was sitting in

the road blocking traffic – I still don't quite know what exactly they have processed from that!

Thank you Tony for the tribute page which linked us to so many places to help us on our small journey. My thoughts are with you all for your loss, as are those of some very wonderful, and thanks to Lorraine, slightly more educated and developed young minds way out here in rural Alberta. May Lorraine's influence long continue to move them and countless others towards creating fairer, more inclusive societies where all are valued and empowered.

Finally, I leave you with just a couple of thoughts from my students in response to me asking them for a brief statement of what they have learnt and felt.

“Being disabled is a hard thing to live with. I am amazed that some people with impairments are stronger than unimpaired people. But they are not disabled, we as society are making them impaired. I am so glad that Lorraine Gradwell stands up for herself and others. Yours, Lisa.” Grade 8, age 13.

“Lorraine Gradwell was a good person. She helped lots of people in the world. She tried to change people’s lives.”  
Marlene, Grade 4, age 9

“I realize society is working together having a community working on life. It amazed me. She has a good place, don’t worry God will take care of her.” Angeline, Grade 6, age 11

“People should start thinking about people with impairments so they can be as equal.” Kurtis, Grade 5, age 11.

“We should make changes to make life easier for all people who are struggling.” Aleesha, Grade 9, age 14

“People with impairments can do more than we think. Some people think they can do nothing and they’re wrong.” Bailey, Grade 4, age 9

“All people should be treated fairly to change society.” Destiny, Grade 5, age 9

“Society should stop staring at impaired people and start doing something that includes them.” Mathew, Grade 7, age 12

“She helped lots of people. She stopped traffic to try to change people in society.” Hayley, Grade 4, age 9

“Being impaired is not easy and most people know that, but do people see that society needs to change? We are so used to seeing people who are disabled by society that we think it is fine, but it is not. Society needs, and will change for the better!” Kaitlin, Grade 8, age 13

“Dear Lorraine. I am glad that you did what was best. Well, I feel sorry that you are gone. I am sure other people will continue the good things you did. I’m sure it’s very important what you did for other people. If you see a lady fall you don’t just stand there, you help her. When you see someone who tries to change the world just be inspired by them to make change too.” Hannah, Grade 6, age 11

“She helped people understand themselves and other people understand them.” Amber, Grade 5, age 9

“Society should stop looking at impaired people as if they can’t do anything; impaired people can do it if society would let them.” Justin, Grade 8, age 13

“When society lets you down be strong, stand strong and try your best on the things that are important. Lorraine Gradwell was a good person, her heart was made of gold. She inspired

thousands of people and she helped people that needed jobs. She helped people get good jobs so that they could live independent." Klarissa, Grade 6, age 11

"Impairment does not knock you down, it helps you find who you are, through every obstacle." Susan, Grade 7, age 12.

## **Robert Punton**

*Disabled Activist, including DAN (Disabled People's Direct Action Network, DPAC (Disabled People Against Cuts) and Former Chair of Birmingham Coalition of Disabled People*

First of all, thank you for allowing me to speak today.

I first met Lorraine Gradwell over 25 years ago when she was commissioned by Birmingham to come to Birmingham to help set up the Coalition of Disabled People of Birmingham. Many years later, she said it was an experience she never quite got over. Neither did I. Not only did I meet a lifelong friend, role model and mentor. Over many years, at times, I felt like giving up. She would say “You cannot give up. How dare you?! If I have to carry on, so do you.” And through that, I did.

For many years afterwards she was unable to do the direct actions that we were up to do but every time I was storming Parliament or blocking the road she would always share my posts and comment and say what a great job it was.

I would just like to finish by saying her spirit will never leave any of us, not while she lives in our hearts and our heads.

Thank you Lorraine for being part of our lives.

## **Adele Hoskison-Clark**

*Disability rights campaigner*

Lorraine a strong woman with a heart of gold and morals to match. We may not have seen each other often, but when we did it was like no time had passed.

For those of you who don't know, Laurence and I met though Breakthrough UK and later this month it will be our 14th wedding anniversary.

We also have two wonderful, if a little mischievous boys. In the early days of being a mum I'd talk to Lorraine about the challenges being a disabled parent and some of the handy hints and tips she shared I still put into practice today.

Lorraine, you will be missed by many, and we all fight to make the change.

## Christine Burns

*Equality and human rights activist and campaigner*

I first met Lorraine Gradwell over fifteen years ago. It was perhaps not the best of circumstances for me: she was recruiting for a senior manager to help run Breakthrough and, much to my initial chagrin - fresh out of a large consultancy company - she didn't pick me! I suppose that could have been the end of it there with some people but, when I asked for feedback from my interview, she responded not with the usual kind of non-answer that some recruiters will give, but by inviting me to lunch. What's more, she paid!

That was the beginning of knowing and respecting Lorraine. Over the years we had many more occasions in which to work together. She was very much involved in the work towards a regional equality strategy — always advocating firmly but very reasonably for disabled people's inclusion. And not just lip service, but genuine involvement. I don't think any official in their right mind would dare to try and palm her off with anything but the real McKoy. She never missed an opportunity to explain the compelling logic of the social model. And she really 'got' the idea of intersectionality, years before that term entered the lexicon.

It was always a great pleasure to engage with Lorraine. She always had an intelligent perspective on whatever issue would come up, but she always struck me as intensely mischievous too. She saw the absurd. She saw through the show that people often put on to cover for inadequacies. So it was very unwise for any official to try and bullshit her.

A few years ago I recorded an interview with Lorraine. For that I had to research her background. Going in to her childhood I found even more to admire.

So, it was with profound sadness that I learned of Lorraine's untimely death. Why doesn't death relieve us of life's jerks? Why is it so often humanity's jewels? No matter. We have her legacy. We can remember a fellow activist who put in far far more than she ever took. A true heroine whom we can all remember with great fondness.

## **Elaine Noad**

*Former Commissioner at the DRC in Scotland and member of DEAC (Disability Employment Advisory Committee)*

If Lorraine is looking down on this celebration event she will be saying “Oh no, surely all these people haven’t come together for me!” Lorraine never liked a fuss to be made over her. She won’t want tears but lots of laughter.

I met Lorraine in 2006 when I became Chair of the Disability Employment Advisory Committee, of which Lorraine was a longstanding member. She never ducked work on the committee, was a fountain of knowledge, used her wide networks, and was totally committed to improving life chances for people with disabilities. My abiding memory is of the time when Lorraine agreed to come with me to meet a Government Minister in London to explain our concerns about the proposed Work Programme, and changes to Disability Benefits. The Minister was less than convinced of our arguments and warnings, and Lorraine so patiently and concisely piled evidence on evidence to try and convince the Minister of our concerns. That sums up Lorraine for me, Her tenacity and patience to carry on with her work and campaigning on disability issues was selfless, and her commitment to Breakthrough UK and her colleagues was clear to see. They say that leaders should lead from the front, and Lorraine certainly always put herself out front to give leadership, confidence and hope to others.

I smile as I remember Lorraine’s sense of humour, calm in a crisis, and complete steadfastness throughout the work and campaigns that she led and contributed to. She was a private person in relation to her family, but I know from the odd conversation that she was so proud of them all. Whilst all of us who knew Lorraine will miss her,

I'm just glad we had Lorraine in our lives, and are left with such fond memories of her and her legacy work on disability issues. As we say in Scots Gaelic, *slainte* (cheers), Here's to you Lorraine, we'll work hard to follow your shining example.

## **Rose Hallam**

*Member of DEAC (Disability Employment Advisory Committee)*

I too was a member of DEAC at the same time as Lorraine. I have very strong and really good memories of Lorraine.

My immediate thoughts are her cheerfulness and pleasure to see people, it was always good to be welcomed to DEAC meetings by her smiley lovely face.

She was always so strong and determined to create better opportunities and greater equality for disabled people. She participated eloquently in debate and always stood her ground. She will be missed hugely.

## **Evelyn Asante Mensah OBE**

*Evelyn has worked at senior level with a wide spectrum of organisations and partnerships for over 20 years, tackling inequalities and promoting equality.*

I was deeply humbled to be asked to speak here today and to honour and celebrate Lorraine's life. It is a real privilege to be here. Lorraine and I worked together for many years, when I was at the North West regional development agency (NWDA) when I worked with Breakthrough UK to look at the economic impact of disabled people and then when we were both on the Manchester Board.

I was always in awe of Lorraine, her passion for equality and not just equality for disabled people but for everybody, for making sure the quiet and sometimes silent voices were heard where it mattered. She put others need before her own and used her experience to improve the lot for others less fortunate than herself.

She never let being disabled stand in the way of what she wanted to do and achieve. Lorraine lived her life by her own rules. She had compassion and passion about what she believed in and what she wanted to do and achieve and Lorraine lived her life by her rules.

She had a passion for people and a passion about what she believed in, what she knew to be right. I always remember her with a smile on the Manchester Board, particularly when she was telling the Chair something he didn't particularly want to hear.

She never shied away from saying things that were difficult for others to hear, and I used to just sit and think, why can't I say those words? I found her personally inspiring and deeply, deeply sorry to hear of her passing.

The Lorraines of this world don't come along very often and when we have the chance to know them and to be involved with them it is a true privilege.

Thank you for giving me the honour to say a few words about my relationship with Lorraine and to share in this wonderful celebration of her life. I'm very proud to have been able to be here today.

## **Jo Somerset**

*Governor at Manchester Health Academy, Director at BikeRight!  
and personal friend ...*

... would like to share from a poem by another mighty warrior, Sue Napolitano:

So rest easy my sisters and brothers.

Lie peaceful in the earth

or scattered in the air.

Your rage on earth blew up a storm.

We will inherit your thunder,

your lightning,

your love.

We will fight on.

## **Jenny Gradwell**

I first met my Mum in in July 1981, just about. I arrived two days before her birthday, putting into place a tradition of making her life difficult, I think.

Today there has been a lot of talk about her legacy, and it is heartening to hear all your stories about how her legacy will live on.

But, as my Mum, she also transcended all of these massive, precious achievements. I began to think, what was her legacy to me?

So I wanted to share some of the many things that she taught me, to some degree in their order of importance:

How not to suffer fools, gladly or otherwise.

How to be an unapologetic voice of dissent.

How to question everything and think critically.

How to be a better ally.

To hate Tories.

How to try, try again.

She gave me an appreciation of stationery. And buffet food.

She taught me,

How to swim.

How to crochet, and sew.

How to play backgammon.

How to bake potatoes (properly).

How to roast parsnips (properly).

And perhaps most importantly...

How to decorate a Christmas tree.....*properly*.

I want to extend my thanks to everyone here today, and to you all for sharing your stories. From Lorraine's family, thank you very much.

## **Michele Scattergood and Jackie Driver**

*Chief Executive and Chair of Breakthrough UK, to conclude the afternoon on our thoughts of our personal friend, mentor and colleague*

Michele:

First of all, I'd like to include a story from someone here today that Tony would very much like us to share with you, about buses:

"We arrived at a bus stop while coming here today and we spotted another wheelchair user who was unable to get on our bus. The driver was on the radio to HQ saying, she had one wheelchair user on the bus and another wheelchair user was waiting to get on too.

The bus moved on and then stopped at the railway station, where another wheelchair user was waiting to catch the bus. Once again the driver got on the radio. 'There is another wheelchair user trying to get on the bus, to go to Gorton Monastery. *They all* seem to be wanting to go there today.'

So it is good to know that Lorraine was able to disrupt public transport even today." (applause)

\* \* \*

It's an honour to be able to speak here today. We would like to touch on four things that we learnt from Lorraine - transformation, building foundations, the social model and fighting the good fight.

They say "history is full of people whose influence was most powerful after they were gone".

Yet we have heard so much about Lorraine this afternoon that demonstrate she was and will always be influential to many.

Her remarkable qualities enabled her to lead a movement in remarkably hard times and places.

The northern powerhouse of the disability rights movement may not have even got off the ground without Lorraine.

I was lucky - I worked with Lorraine for over 20 years - I feel privileged to have learnt from our best - she shared how she built and sustained our movement and how most things from a campaign to a meeting can be organised with a good list !

We will try and capture just some of what she shared with us.

Jackie:

## **Transformation**

The changes we've undergone in the last 30 or so years, both wonderful and terrible, are astonishing. This is an extraordinary time full of vital, transformative movements that could not be foreseen.

It's also a nightmarish time, where grave and systemic violations and human catastrophes have been enacted. Full engagement requires the ability to perceive both. She was able to do just that.

Lorraine taught me that we find ourselves by getting lost in uncertainty is the room to act.

When you recognise uncertainty, you recognise that you may be able to influence the outcomes — you alone or you in concert with a few dozen or several thousand others.

Michele:

### **Building foundations**

After a rainfall mushrooms appear on the surface of the earth as if from nowhere. Many do so from a sometimes vast underground energy that remains invisible and largely unknown.

Uprisings and Revolutions are often considered to be spontaneous, but the less visible long-term organisation and groundwork — or underground energy — often lay the foundations.

This was the everyday ordinariness of Lorraine - to lay foundations.

She understood that many people with many methods could result in changing ideas and influencing values - she understood that writers, scholars, social activists, and participants in social media all had a role to play. She played them all and was an exceptional writer and communicator.

Debate and discussion was at the heart of Lorraine's approach - 'A Rose by any other name' was a seminal text for myself and I know many others too.

As the great woman said,

“people often reveal one of their greatest worries as ‘saying the wrong thing’ – don’t let this stop you exploring the issues with others – by ‘saying the wrong thing’ you will enter into discussion, exchange ideas and widen your understanding”

Jackie:

### **Take the social model**

Ideas at first considered outrageous or ridiculous or extreme gradually become what people think they've always believed.

How the transformation happened is rarely remembered, in part because it's compromising: it recalls the mainstream when the mainstream was rabidly ableist in a way it no longer is; and it recalls that power comes from the shadows and the margins, that our hope is in the dark around the edges, not the limelight of centre stage.

Our hope and often our power.

Take the social model, said Lorraine, and when eventually everyone did, there became a new battle to win.

Michele:

### **Fight the good fight**

Some activists are afraid that if we acknowledge victory, people will give up the struggle. But Lorraine was quick to acknowledge and celebrate victory.

I believe Lorraine was *more* afraid that people will give up and go home or never get started in the first place if they think no victory is possible or fail to recognise the victories already achieved.

She taught us - a victory is a milestone on the road, evidence that sometimes we win, and encouragement to keep going, not to stop.

Lorraine invokes for me James Baldwin's famous proclamation that:

*not everything that is faced  
can be changed,  
but nothing can be changed  
until it is faced.*

\* \* \* \* \*

## **Lesson from Lorraine (poem)**

*written by Jo Somerset*

Prepare for death by living life, I say.  
Make every exhale return a breath each day;  
Let painful tumbles presage a rise again.  
While days will buffet, weeks will yawn and years will crumble,  
Suck life-juice from puddles of despair.  
It's yours. It's there. Prepare by living.

Prepare by giving succour to hope's flicker  
And find a hairs-breadth crack of light  
To guide the little paths that make the whole  
Endeavour valued, precious; only yours to hold.  
In darkness feel a hint of dawning day,  
Where lost gets found, and fears will founder.

One day it ends. But only when the life  
Was had, the breaths were drawn, the mark you made  
Never to be erased.

