

Chris Harrowell

Like many of us here today, I read the news that a woman had been hit by a cyclist in London and then turned to the next page. It was only when I was contacted by Lynne Dubin, a close colleague of Diana's that the news became reality.

Di was one of a cohort of trained lipspeakers who support those of us who are deaf or hard of hearing. She would silently repeat in clear lip patterns exactly what was being said at business meetings, conferences, training courses, court procedures and arts events. She covered a wide scope of work with a natural talent for clear communication, delivered with charm and professionalism.

Diana defied lipspeaking convention because she would use sign language to support her lipspeaking. This would clarify words such as Paper, Baby, Maybe, which all look the same on the lips. She believed in adapting her approach to suit people like myself who benefit from additional use of sign.

I first heard about Di years ago from a deaf friend who used her at business meetings and spoke highly of her. Every time I tried to book her for an architecture project meeting she was booked up, because she was so popular. When I finally did manage to book her she made a definite impression with everyone in the room.

Although she was tiny and stick thin, Di had this wonderful presence. Her stage background enabled her to bring this quality to her work. At any meeting or event, in a line-up of speakers she was the one that your eye would inevitably be drawn to. She also had a way with clothes, hair and makeup which was distinctively hers.

The measure of Diana is that when you speak to different people from separate parts of her life, they will smile and say the same things. She was kind, funny, feisty, with a dry sense of humour, loved her dog Bertie and was passionate about her work.

In business meetings she would be completely professional, but could express with a discreet roll of her eyes or pursing of the lips exactly what she thought if someone was speaking out of turn. She would have no compunction interrupting a speaker to ask them to speak up or slow down in order to do her job. I have seen hardened businessmen reduced to obedient schoolboys when she did this.

Diana particularly enjoyed lipspeaking for me on the judging team for the Civic Trust Awards, assessing new architecture around London. This gave her access to wonderful buildings that the public do not normally see. She loved architecture, art galleries and London walks.

Nine years ago she helped set up Walks and Talks for Lipreaders. This enabled deaf and hard of hearing people to enjoy access to guided walks around London and practice their lipreading skills in a relaxed social environment, particularly those who had recently become deafened. This is part of Di's legacy which will continue. There is a walk in Bethnal Green this Sunday.

Life threw Diana challenges which she successfully overcame. Surgery for a brain tumour in her 40's resulted in damage to her vocal chords. This terminated her singing career but brought her into lipspeaking and opened up a whole new field of opportunities both for her and for those of us that she supported.

Diana, from all of us, thank you. You've certainly given life your best shot. Now it's time to relax in a hot bath with a glass of prosecco. Sleep tight. Lots of love.