

Bernice Kathleen Cartwright, Bernice - all of us here today knew her; - as a daughter, a sister, a family member, a friend, a fellow musician, someone who needed our support during her illness this last year.

She was vivacious, sociable, generous, talented, kind, a really good laugh, witty, gentle, and extremely stubborn. These are some of the comments I've heard this week talking to people, and I recognise all these qualities as parts of my sister.

One of the most important things in her life was and always was music. She began playing tunes on the piano at the age of 3. An older friend and I made her go in for the talent competition held on the Southend on sea front. Our parents were extremely surprised when we arrived home with our prize - a compendium of games; but even at that tender age when she got on stage she assumed the self-possession of a much older person.

She began regular piano lessons and a real talent began to shine through. She won all the local piano competitions, an examiner at the Royal Academy realised she had perfect pitch and how I envied the way she would manage even those tricky passages of Chopin with her small hands.

It wasn't just classical music that Bernice loved. We grew up listening to the Beatles and the Rolling Stones and we started our first pop group in 1971 with T.Rex and Slade songs. Bernice was to play keyboards of course but synthesizers were in their infancy at that time and there was really no comparison between a real piano and a Crumar electric piano. She needed a pop instrument to play. I decided that we needed a bass player - she was not pleased but she had to play it to be in the band - the boy across the road and I already had the guitars and so she became our reluctant bass player.

Two years later, at the age of 16, she left school and turned professional with the Ivy Benson Showband.

Now all this is not to suggest that Bernice and I did everything together. I liked to think I had a profound influence on her but she had a very strong personality of her own.

And she was so popular at school. Every term she would be elected Form Captain or Vice Form Captain, or Games Captain, swimming captain, captain of the Netball 1st XI, the Hockey 1st XI, school discus champion.... not quite so applied academically. Why do homework if you could go out to the disco at the weekend. She loved dressing up, she loved dancing - I can still see her leaving the house in one of her self-made satin suits, make-up on, heading for Cheeke Pete's in Richmond. You were supposed to be 21 to get in there (she was 13!)

By the time she really was 21, she had left Ivy Benson, and our rock band "Tour de Force" had signed a record and songwriting deal with EMI. Now she would go out to West End clubs with members of Queen - probably one of her all time

favourite groups, I think she was really in her element at this time.

Bernice had a great sense of humour. A few years later, recording the music for a programme with a particularly untalented singer, she re-wrote the words of one of the songs and with a friend playing rhythm on kitchen utensils we recorded a version of the song with Bernice playing bass and doing a hilarious impression of the singer - out of tune vocals etc.. The next morning in the studio the band laughed 'til they cried as they listened secretly to the alternative version on headphones.

Bernice loved animals - or should I say, Bernice loved her dogs (She was absolutely phobic about spiders and insects) but she loved dogs. Many of you know Elsa who's now been adopted by Mum and Dad but her big love was Yogi. I bought Yogi for Bernice, as a puppy from Battersea Dog's Home. When she was fully grown, Bernice often described her as a cross between a black Labrador and a Vietnamese pot - bellied pig - she adored Bernice and when Yogi died at the age of 16 a couple of years ago, Bernice was heartbroken.

What's surprising about this is that Bernice was badly bitten by our family dog when she was 4 years old - she nearly required plastic surgery but her first words were "Is Rover alright?"

Bernice, what a performer, always 100% professional and when she came on stage, she shone.

Over the course of this last year, she was still shining - so brave, joking, making light of things. "I'm fine," she would say.

She did have extra-ordinary psychic abilities and I'm sure many of you have felt her presence this week. She led us and gave us signs about what she wanted today from the music, to the photo on the front of the card, through to finding a story in a notebook. She is here today and she'd like this.

One injustice is that most of her wonderful music exists only on home tapes. I'd like to be able to change that situation - I'll let you all know. I'm so proud of her, my sister Bernice, I leave you with one of her songs - she lives on in our hearts and through the music she left.

~ Deidre Cartwright



Deirdre and Bernice, 1973