

Tributes to Vivienne Silver Leigh:



Joy Manné and Catherine Dowling

Vivienne Silver Leigh died on 14th June 2005

By Joy Manné

I met Vivienne at the meeting of Breathworkers in Sweden that led to the creation of the International Breathwork Foundation. We were instant friends, and Vivienne organised some workshops for me in London after that. She was a lovely person to work with and we became good friends.

Vivienne was a very rich character. She knew so much. She had a range of qualifications. She was a speech therapist, yoga teacher, and an early member of Relate, a rebirther. She was always extending her boundaries. When I met her she was teaching Counselling. She seemed eternally young. In her 60's she took a training in Spiritual Therapy. She taught and did supervision. Her website was a model of clarity for what she offered and what she charged. And with all of that, Vivienne was completely modest. She was small – of stature – and large of heart and imagination and giving.

Vivienne was a sensible, grounded member of the British Rebirthing Society and several times when arguments there threatened to create chaos, it was Vivienne who, in her quiet, way, brought people together. Once she even had the courage to organise a party for the BRS. I was lucky enough to be invited, as I was in the UK at the time. Her most recent project, which Claire Gabriel will finish in her memory, was a collection of articles by British Rebirthers. Making this collection was leading Vivienne to write her own book. Sadly, now, this will never be finished. It is not only Vivienne who the Breathwork community has lost, but all of her skills and wisdom.

Vivienne could find the good in, and be positive about every one and everything. She wrote an uplifting column in Positive Health. Her book reviews were kind, positive and erudite.

Vivienne is much mourned by her sons and family, and by the larger breathwork family

There's a very large hole in my life where Vivienne used to be and I miss her. There were so many things we shared, emails that quickly told the news, sharing the fun things on the web too, sharing our vision for Breathwork. I miss Vivienne. When, in a moment of great longing to tell her something, or to ask her advice on something, I looked up her name on the web. There was a tribute from someone whose whole life she had changed – the woman had had a heart attack, and Vivienne had got her speaking again. I did not know that Vivienne performed this kind of miracle. I think most of her friends and colleagues did not know either.

Vivienne had cancer for many years. She did not 'fight it.' She took it on with courage, determination and intelligence. She went for seventeen years from her first encounter with this illness to her next, and then there were several years of being resourceful and sensible. Not fighting – Vivienne was too gracious a person for that: I would choose the word – 'outwitting' the cancer as long as she could, not letting it dominate her life or stop her adventure with life and her creativity. She kept up her morale against the doctors who did not respect her body, and through whose carelessness, in the end, she died.

A quiet person, a mentor to many in Breathwork, an example of how to grow older.

(Joy's tribute was first published in *Breathe: the International Breathwork Magazine*, editor: Robert Moore. www.breathe-mag.co.uk/)

By Catherine Dowling

I first met Vivienne at the Global Inspiration Conference (GIC) in Spain. I had seen the brochure for the training course she ran with Mary McGlynn in London and approached her to ask her for more details. We sat by the lake in the sunshine for hours, talking about everything and anything, missing workshops and nearly missing dinner. It was my first conference, I was finding it incredibly difficult, and Vivienne's company was such a comfort. That conversation led to a lovely, gentle friendship that lasted until her death.

Vivienne and I worked together on a couple of projects. She invited me to London to help with the restructuring of the training course that eventually became the very successful In-Breath under the guidance of Gerd Lang and Jane Okondo. Vivienne was ready to

leave training behind at that stage and was pleased to hand over the reins to Gerd and Jane. She was getting into writing more and more and had an idea for a book.

Always generous, Vivienne's idea was to invite rebirthers from the UK to contribute a chapter each which she would edit and put together as a book about British rebirthing. I felt privileged when she asked me to make a contribution but felt obliged to point out that I'm not British. Vivienne was never very big on Anglo-Irish relations. I always thought she should be writing the whole book herself. If nothing else, it would have been easier than trying to coax other rebirthers to put pen to paper. But the real reason I thought she should write the book was because she had such a wealth of experience and knowledge which she herself didn't recognise. And because she didn't recognise it, she persisted in trying to encourage others to share their wisdom.

But the chapters didn't materialise. So finally Vivienne began to write some of her own. I was very pleased to receive them via e-mail and they were good. Vivienne knew her stuff but glossed over it so quickly she needed someone to tell her to write more, turn a single paragraph into a chapter, showcase all that she knew. Unfortunately she became ill for the last time and her book was never completed. It's a huge loss for rebirthing but more than that, it is such a pity that Vivienne didn't get to see her ambition fulfilled.

But my fondest memories of Vivienne have nothing to do with work. They relate to her wonderful sense of humour. It was gentle, but so sharply observant, respectful but so irreverent. And so unexpected from the gentle little 'English rose' she appeared to be. Vivienne was a great mimic. Those of us lucky enough to spend a long night in the bar with her at the Italian GIC, were royally entertained by her impersonations of everyone who was anyone in the International Breathwork Foundation at the time. We shared a not very politically correct opinion of the lectures and lecturers at the Wisconsin GIC. We tried them all, me sitting on the floor by the wall, Vivienne in the chairs. Then sooner rather than later, she would look over, roll her eyes and we would both get up and head for the bar. That was Vivienne's last GIC.

Vivienne came to stay with me in Dublin to attend a workshop by Wilfried Ehrmann. I still have the basket of plants she gave me then. They are thriving and remind me of her every day that I sit in my living room. I stayed with Vivienne in her lovely home in Wimbledon and met her every time I visited London. Our last meeting was over dinner in a restaurant in Putney shortly before she died where we laughed off the effect some of the hurtful unpleasantness that was going on in rebirthing circles at the time.

Vivienne was a lovely woman, a wonderful therapist and a friend who is sorely missed.