



## Remembering Jean Clark, 1926–2018

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When Jean Clark wrote about the ‘courage to risk being who I have become’ in an article for *Self & Society*, she revealed herself to be the explorer and pioneer that shaped her long and varied life – a life she certainly embraced with courage, as well as openness to what she might experience.

I first met Jean when I came to Norwich in the late 1990s to undertake a Diploma in Counselling. A few years later she became a friend. I did not see her often, but when we did meet our time was rich and full of a deep and authentic sharing that seems rare. But it is not only times spent in her physical company for which I am grateful, but also the words that flowed into her prose and poetry. She leaves us several collections of poetry, two in book form, as well as her autobiography *And Then It Happened That*.

In her autobiography we read that Jean started her working life, after gaining some secretarial skills, in the National Council of Social Service. This was just after the Second World War, and she recalled that this experience had a big influence on her, from which she went on to study Public and Social Administration at Oxford University. The fact that she did so against her father’s wishes tells us a lot about her determination to trust her own intuition and to follow her own path.

Then, after having a family Jean became the first student counsellor at Leicester Polytechnic, in an organization that at the time did not understand what counselling was. In this role she was truly pioneering, although it was a struggle. However, in the late 1970s she met Carl Rogers, who took an interest in the work she was doing in the UK, particularly her attempts to raise awareness of racism. This connection, and her attending a number of cross-cultural person-centred gatherings in various parts of the world, were significant experiences. Her therapeutic

work owed much to Carl Rogers and the person-centred approach.

When her marriage came to an end in the mid-1980s, Jean moved to Norwich where she started a new life working as a freelance therapist, supervisor and group facilitator, retiring eventually at the age of 78. In these roles she embodied a deep empathy and prizing of others. So many people, including myself, can reflect with gratitude on being the recipient of these qualities generously offered, as she faithfully accompanied us on our own journeys.

It was after retirement that Jean devoted more of her time to writing and came to regard herself as a poet. She had by then been writing poetry for many years, but her creative energies seemed now to be poured more fully into giving expression to her inner world, and a desire to share with others the insights and experiences of her life, along with her emotions and grappling with the profound questions of existence. Her poems reveal Jean to be a person who took immense delight in our created world and the people she encountered. They also reveal her intimate knowledge of darkness, brokenness and struggle, both from her own life but also because she was fully awake to those experiences in others and in our world.

Other themes that feature strongly in her poems and her other writing are change, transition, being on the boundaries and being prepared to sit with the unknown. Towards the end of her life she also wrote about the process of ageing, its gifts as well as her struggle with increasing physical frailty (she was diagnosed with myeloma in 2012), pain and dependence on others.

It is impossible to sum up how I will remember Jean. She was a woman of great energy, passion, sensitivity and love. For her there was no other way. It is only fitting that Jean should have the

final words from one of the many poems that reveal her wisdom, her heart and her soul.

**Love in Being**

Being in love  
is a madness  
a burning heat  
of passion,  
challenging, exciting  
sometimes demanding.

Love in Being  
Is of a different order.  
It grows out of stillness,  
compassion and giving  
of self to the grief  
and the pain and the rage  
in the world.

Truly to Be  
is a lifetime's journey.  
Truly to love  
is the heart of the matter.  
It will change you  
for ever.

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**Emeritus Professor Brian Thorne** writes:

‘Jean Clark combined a rare mix of finely honed empathy and robust authenticity. She could, by turns, be exquisitely tender and obstinately determined. She leaves an enormous gap but I am certain she will be mischievously alive in the minds and hearts of those many people who were changed as a result of knowing her.’

**Richard House** writes:

‘Jean was a pioneer, a woman of great courage, a poet, a hugely respected counsellor, and a writer – for both *Self & Society* and also with her excellent edited book *Freelance Counselling and Psychotherapy: Competition and Collaboration* (Routledge, 2002). The love that so many people felt for Jean was enormous, and her great contribution as practitioner, poet, mother, friend and active citizen showed how much she loved the world, and life itself.’