



Sandy Strang

To those who lived lives less ordinary

Tribute to departed greats

"STOP all the clocks, cut off the telephone", bewailed John Hannah, citing Auden in *Four Weddings and a Funeral*. Now I'll continue: "Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead/Scribbling on the sky the message/She is dead."

Megan Tressider, committed, gifted journalist, awesome cancer survivor, is no more. Departed in her 43rd year.

Funeral Blues for sure, but a time for a resounding celebration of a life so wondrously lived.

Megan, you put us all to shame. Stricken with rampant lymphatic cancer aged 19 just as you set out on your Oxford degree path, you endured surgery and concentrated chemo and radiotherapy followed by the loss of your womb, and latterly a leg, to survive against all odds. The beauty of your soul shone through it all.

"We're just out on parole", you emphasised, marvellously, as you extended your remission to more than two decades.

"Illness uncovers ferocious elemental emotions", you once declared as you rewrote the survival rules.

Terminal cancer was, paradoxically, liberating for you. The ticking time bomb, an omnipresent

reminder of the fragility of life, invested you with a deeper, no-nonsense perspective on what really matters in life, and a vibrant capacity to live your allotted, abbreviated span to the full.

Nor did you wear your life sentence on your sleeve. You refused offers to write a newspaper diary of your illness, preferring to focus at the end on your most arduous writing assignment; letters to your two adopted children to read later in their lives.

"Seize the day" was also the life-embracing philosophy of another ebullient character who has just shuffled off this mortal coil. He was 43 too. Les Sealey, extrovert goalie, occasionally comic anti-hero, came from the other side of the tracks from Megan Tressider. Almost exact contemporaries, they belonged to different planets.

Yet they shared a significant common denominator. They lived life on the extreme edge. They played the cards they were dealt by fate with an awesomely determined, self-styled stoicism.

Imagine you're immortal, but live each day emphatically as if it were your last.

"I'm a nutter when I play football", Sealey once acknowledged by way of public excuse for a deeply felt, sometimes wayward passion for his job. Megan would empathise.

"I'm not going off", he barked at the Manchester United trainer in a Wembley Cup Final, notwithstand-

"They played the cards they were dealt with a self-styled stoicism"



WINNER: Les holds up the European Cup Winners' Cup in 1991

ing that his knee was open to the bone. Sealey exulted in his 15 minutes of fame: The FA Cup Final replay of 1990 when he controversially replaced the ill-fated ex-Hibee Jim Leighton for Man Utd against Crystal Palace, and justified his selection with three crucial saves.

Uplifting

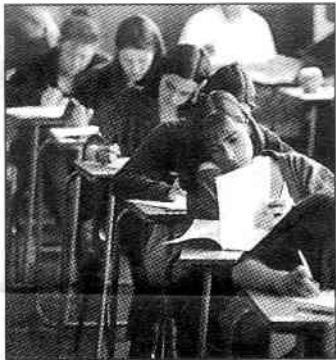
Even then he did things his own way, and didn't dally for the celebrations. "The other guys are the heroes", he declared, handing over his medal to Leighton as he left. Quite content.

Megan Tressider and Les Sealey:

Ben Johnson could have been writing about your attenuated, uplifting lives: "It is not growing like a tree/ In bulk doth make men better be/ Nor standing long an oak three hundred year? To fall a log at last, dry, bald, and sere."

What really matters is the quality of how we fulfil the terms we have. "In small proportions we just beauties see/ And in short measure life may perfect be."

Megan and Les, in your own vastly different ways, you have brought and taught us so much more than you could ever know. Stop all the clocks. The mourners have come with muffled drum. Rest well.



EXAMS: Pupils deserve better

SQA must get Bacca to the future

THE stale stench of inadequacy continues to hover over the Scottish Qualifications Authority. Not even that belated injection of personnel and £11 million could rebuild a credibility so utterly crushed in last year's life-blighting debacle.

And this year you can add further ludicrous data-management gaffes to add to the valid ongoing grumblings about absurdly complex assessment procedures.

It's a shambles. They've forfeited our trust. Irrevocably. Our youngsters deserve so much better.

Whither now? Help lies not across the Border. The English A/AS Level system continues to suffer from its

own credibility crisis. But what about the impressive International Baccalaureate?

Already vigorously embraced by three big-gun English independents – Sevenoaks, Haileybury and King's and Wimbledon – its admirably rigorously-structured five-subject exam allows pupils to follow a language, a science, and a humanity. Typical traditional Scottish breadth.

Nationalistic sensitivities apart, it begs a key question: which Scottish school has the wisdom and the courage to lead the way and grasp the huge Baccalaureate opportunity?

Bring on the Bacca.