GORDONSTOUN
Plus Est En Vous

# Liz MacKean

**Hopeman, 1982**

*Recognised for her fearless pursuit of truth through ground-breaking investigative journalism, bringing to light issues of national and international importance.*

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Liz MacKean was a renowned British television reporter and presenter, a fearless advocate for those needing a voice.

Liz was born in Hampshire in 1964, the second of four sisters. Her parents both worked in social justice; her father as a solicitor and later a judge, and her mother as a magistrate. Her early schooling was in Titchfield, near Fareham, until she moved to Wycombe Abbey at the age of 13. But the old-fashioned, single sex education didn't appeal to her. Having read about Gordonstoun, she asked to be transferred there in her 4th Year and she never looked back. Liz embraced drama, swimming, surf life saving and seamanship, whilst loving the outward bound element of the curriculum and the freedom on campus. She became a Colour Bearer in her final year.

After school, Liz took Drama at Manchester University before she set up a theatre company and earned her Equity Card through her year-long show touring repertory theatres - but a postgraduate degree in Radio Journalism persuaded her to change direction. A swift rise through the ranks followed, as she cut her teeth in roles in local radio and TV before moving on to the national news programmes.

Her natural talent was unmissable when she joined Newsnight in 2000, first as Northern Ireland expert and then fronting a series of special investigations. Yet in 2011, her exposé of Sir Jimmy Savile's paedophilia was controversially cancelled by the BBC at the eleventh hour - a decision which became the subject of the Pollard Inquiry. Although she and her colleague later won a London Press Club Scoop of the Year award for their work, months later ITV broke the story, and Liz left the BBC feeling the victims whose trust she'd earned had been let down.

After leaving the BBC, Liz continued to bring groundbreaking investigations to air, including Channel 4's Dispatches. Liz shared a Daniel Pearl Award for her Newsnight reports in 2010 about toxic dumping in West Africa before winning the London Press Club's "Scoop of the Year" in 2013 with Newsnight colleague Meiron Jones for their investigations into the Saville sexual abuse scandal. She was named Journalist of the Year in 2014 and of the Decade in 2015 by the charity Stonewall and was among the winners at the Grierson British Documentary Awards in 2014.

In August 2017, at the age of 52, Liz died of a stroke leaving behind her wife, Donna, and two teenage children, Alexandra and William. She went on to receive a posthumous Lifetime Achievement Award by the Diversity in Media Awards. Her sister Mags remembers her.

**My sister's fierce sense of social justice and strong moral values meant she sometimes had to make painful, lonely decisions.**

As a journalist she never wanted the exposure for herself - it was always all about giving a voice to the unseen, or the unheard. I know how devastated she was when the BBC axed the Savile documentary; it was not about losing the scoop, but that she felt she'd let down her sources, those who had trusted her to tell their story. In fact, she never got over it, and her integrity would not allow her to continue. The betrayal meant she felt she had no alternative but to walk away from a job she had so loved.

**Despite her incredible talent - and commitment to her work - she always put family first.**

Being a mother meant everything to her. The fact that she proudly put family before her career makes her achievements even more remarkable. Both she and Donna had high flying careers, yet they created a strong, safe nuclear family in which the children were front and centre. I remember there was a point when she was becoming a big name on the nightly news programmes, but she chose to move to Newsnight because the working patterns were more family friendly.

I think our childhood family life influenced her career too. Our third sister was born profoundly disabled and my parents juggled caring for her with serving their communities and I think these events inspired her to bring a spotlight on issues which would otherwise be hidden. She was heart and soul a storyteller, but social justice was what motivated her - she was a campaigner almost.

**At Gordonstoun she 'sailed close to the wind' on occasion - but teachers loved her spirit of slight naughtiness balanced with a strong moral compass.**

She just thrived on the sense of freedom and protection on campus; school wasn't stuffy and she was a free spirit. She could be very much true to herself and have the independence she craved. She had a natural curiosity for people, even back then, so she loved the mix of people she met at school. She played hard, yet also delivered on her grades and found the space to spread her wings.

That curiosity, independence and work ethic went on to serve Liz well in her career.  Gordonstoun had encouraged her to be her own person, and she became a leader in her own way. Her whole career was more like a calling, dedicated to give voice to those who might otherwise never have been heard.