

Tribute to Alexandra Raife

The novelist, Alexandra Raife, who lived for many years in Perthshire, Scotland, died on 19th January, 2021.

There is very little information about her life at the beginning of her books, possibly because she wrote at a time before the Internet and social media became so important, and writers could keep very much to themselves.

However, in a rare interview with Jane Scott, a journalist on the *Herald* newspaper, which took place in 1996 at her home in Perthshire, Ms Raife revealed that her interests included writing, walking, reading and gardening. She had lived abroad in several countries, among which were Brazil, the USA, Finland and Portugal, working in various jobs, as governess and teacher.

Married, and later divorced, she settled in Scotland and helped run a hotel in the Highlands. After a devastating fire, in which she lost everything, most notably her collection of books, and already nearly forty, she joined the WRAF on a six-year commission.

Her novels are set almost exclusively in Scotland, in particular the West Coast Trilogy (somewhere west of Fort William) and the Perthshire Cycle (in glens off the A9 somewhere beyond Pitlochry). In these novels she delves skilfully and penetratingly, but always laced with humour and compassion, into the lives and interactions of men and women, and the way they

cope with all kinds of situations. Examples of such situations are marriage to a gay man, living with an abusive husband, adoption which had been forced on a single mother, mental disability after a stroke, the search by a mother for a richer life than living in one room of her son's house, with a self-absorbed daughter-in-law and their awful children. By contrast, there is plenty of happiness and joy in her stories to lift the reader's spirits, for example a very tall black doctor who brings life and soul to a Highland village, who has to visit patients on islands in all weathers and who ends up marrying a local herbalist.

She interweaves the main characters from one novel into the background of subsequent ones, while introducing new main characters and new themes.

Her stories are mostly set against the backcloth of stunningly beautiful Highland landscapes, which she describes lovingly and evocatively – mountains, mists, sunsets, wind, stormy seas, snow, frost, flowers, trees, burns, lochs and all the variegated colours of the Highland countryside.

As an author who started writing as a child before she went to school, she is quoted as saying, 'It would be a terrible gap to stop writing. I would be losing the biggest pleasure of life.'

IN MEMORIAM

Jane Blanco, MA, Dip. Ed., MCIOL.
Translator Spanish/Italian/Portuguese/Catalan into English.