

Claire Prosser was one of the kindest, generous souls I, and many others, had the fortune to meet.

What she did with the journalism trainee scheme, wasn't just hire people for the BBC. She founded a support network bringing together people who would go on to become friends, colleagues, companions and she was even unwittingly responsible for a spot of matchmaking.

She was a woman who changed the world around her for the better, no matter her own struggles and grief.

She treated us all as equals and her high standards meant she drove us to become the very best journalists, and people, that we could be. Her passing has shocked us as we all thought Claire would be around forever. Whenever we'd do something brilliantly or needed a bit of support, she'd be there for us, championing, counselling and career coaching us.

For every one of us who has been through the trainee scheme, Claire changed our lives when she would call us to say, guess what – you've been accepted – you are officially a BBC trainee. In some cases, her mischievous nature would be apparent from the forefront, as she would call and draw out the tension. But it's fair to say that that moment she rang, for all of us, no matter the year we were selected, was unforgettable.

She lost her son Tom in 2007, shortly after she hired her first batch of trainees – my year. Months later, despite her grief, she helped us to start our new lives. She never once let us down and continued to be a mother hen to us even years later. As each new generation turned up, she would introduce us all and whenever one of us would come across other JTS member, whether inside the BBC or in many cases out and about, we knew we'd have a trusted friend in hand – after all Claire had vetted them.

It has been said that Claire did more for real, open diversity across the media well before anyone else picked up on it. But she didn't choose people because they were brown, black, rich or poor. No she picked us because she spotted something in us that she knew would shake up the BBC. And damn right we have. We're spread out all over the world and we're making a difference in the way stories are told. I know we are doing Claire proud. Speaking to those who have been lucky enough to have Claire in their lives longer than us, we see she had those very same traits we have.

What made her stand out was that she cared about us, she worried about us and she would be like a Rottweiler when it came to defending us and promoting us. I know of several occasions where the BBC was in danger of letting someone go, and Claire found out the right name, the right opportunities and sprinkled her magic. She was a charmer, a flirt and a woman you didn't want to mess with. She was 'our Claire' and we loved her for it. We all have our own anecdotes and memories of Claire because she was memorable, she was one of a kind. One set of trainees said they would compete to go to the pub with her 'because in any room, Claire was always the best company'. She's was always up for a bit of gossip, lunch and the odd glass of champagne. She'd make the effort to visit us wherever we were scattered and check in with us, even if we hadn't been a trainee for years.

Claire wasn't just our 'work mum'. She'd be there for us no matter what – weddings, deaths, just when we needed someone – Claire – to talk to. That's what made her so different, that's what made her Claire.

Claire brought out the best in people. She made people feel good about themselves. It's not that easy a skill but she was a natural at it. We marvelled and drew inspiration from this remarkable, resilient woman who did all this for us, while also coping with her own loss and also having the strength to raise thousands for charity. She was a superwoman.

She was extraordinary and our lives, the BBC, and journalism generally will be poorer now she is gone. She was our mentor but most importantly she was our friend. She will never be forgotten and her legacy is us.