

A celebration of life

Bernadette 'Bernie' Mary Wilson

21 December 1933 – 27 September 2018

12 noon 15 October 2018, Briwnant Chapel

*a personal goodbye*

Humanist  
*Ceremonies*

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## Tribute

Bernie was born in Dublin on the 21<sup>st</sup> of December 1933 the third of four daughters born to David Brendon and Anne Byrne. Her father was an engineer who served in the British Army during the war and later in industry, working all over the world including South Africa. This meant that he was not always part of Bernie's life as she grew up. Bernie, her mother and sisters Patricia, Irene and Josephine moved to England when Bernie was two years old and for a time lived in Barnhurst, Kent.

During the war Bernie and her younger sister Jo were evacuated to St Clears in West Wales where they lived for about four years in 'The Corvus,' a public house run by three spinsters. Not all the memories of this time were good, and it would appear that this era had a profound effect on her for the rest of her life. Being split up from her mother and sisters, at such a young age, without most of the communication systems that we have today, must have been heart-breaking. Bernie always had a love of language and diction and as a result wrongly corrected her sister who said to a relative that they were going to Wales and Bernie said 'it's not Wales, it's Whales, you must pronounce your aitches'!!

Also, after all that time spent in the pub she could never stand the smell of beer, let alone the taste.

After the war had ended Bernie and her sister did not return home to her mother straight away. Ann said she thought Bernie had always wondered why and recent enquires led to the conclusion it was probably that there were no beds for them to sleep in and there was not the possibility of going to a shop to buy one!

As a result of a chaotic school life, due to moving around Bernie failed the eleven plus and as a result didn't get in to Grammar School. She was very disappointed at this, especially as she was then told that as a result, the expectations for her would be only secretarial or domestic work.

It is believed that these experiences resulted in a woman who was determined to be independent, a woman who always worked hard to earn enough money to give her and her family a good life, a woman who valued education as a way to improve yourself. She felt that she and others should strive to get a good job to ensure that they could provide for their families in order that financially compromising situations did not arise. Her desire to achieve this sometimes led her to be a serious person and a worrier even when everything was fine. She was careful with money, however generous with her family. She hated waste and she taught her children and grandchildren many of these values by her example. Many people today are now coming around to her ideas like recycling, reusing and mending; saving the planet.

When she left school, she attended Secretarial College and then worked as a secretary for an Insurance Company in London. Money was tight, and it doesn't seem there was much spare cash but leisure activities included attending a badminton club in Fleet Street, where she met the love of her life, George. George was twelve years her senior, had served in the RAF during the war and was an electrical engineer, continuing the family tradition of engineering carried on by his son Ian and grandchildren Adam, Dom and Jess.

They were married in September 1956 and moved into a flat with George's mother for some time after their marriage. They lived at several addresses near London after that and prior to Ian being born in 1961, they moved to Reading. Two years later they moved again with George's work to Cardiff and settled in Heol Briwnant, Rhiwbina where they were to live for over fifty years. Ann was born in 1964 and their family was complete.

They were very happy in Heol Briwnant, living amongst good neighbours, Jan and Terry, John and Shirley, Bob and Audrey, Roy and Ann and Bob and Lillian, sorry if we've left anyone out. They became great friends and their families grew up together in what became a close community.

At that time few women returned to work, but Bernie was not content to stay at home and look after the house, she was a woman of today, fifty years ago. She returned to work in secretarial roles for insurance companies as soon as she could, juggling the home, which was still a woman's responsibility and work. Driving herself to work and her children to all their out of school activities when she got home, cooking a meal every day, even though she didn't like to cook and, on the weekend, when she just needed to relax, organising everyone so they could go away for the weekend in the caravan. So that Ian and Ann had lovely childhoods, in a happy house where they never heard an argument, watching and learning from a mother who Ann describes as a force of nature.

In the early 70's Bernie decided she needed a change of direction, so while working and everything else, she studied for a Certificate of Education. This allowed her to become a lecturer at Treforest Polytechnic; where Ann also lectured years later, eventually being a senior lecturer in Secretarial Studies at Rumney College and later setting up and running the Gabalfa Campus. Bernie made some lovely friends of work colleagues- Jill, Rose, Sylvia, Barbara, Pam and Angela, again sorry if anyone's been forgotten.

An early advocate of Girl Power Bernie was a strong role model for Ann who has many of her mother's qualities. Ann remembers one song that her mum used to sing her; These Boots are made for Walking by Nancy Sinatra and they would wait for their favourite bit at the end where she says, "Are you ready boots."

As her children grew she always supported them, ferrying them to various activities and events, sitting with them as they learnt to drive, as George refused, and emphasising the importance of education. But she also worried about them when they didn't follow what she thought was the safer path for them. When Ian left a good job to return to university for a Masters' Degree or when Ann joined the police instead of going to university or having a nice job, like being a nurse!!, she told them exactly what she thought. But then she continued to support them and gained great pride from their accomplishments.

In the 1980's with the children now independent she wanted more to do and so she started to volunteer on the Samaritan's phone line. There she met a lovely lady Pam and they became firm friends.

Bernie told of one adventure she had when she could hear worrying noises in the background while she spoke to a woman who was threatening to kill herself. Unable to get anyone else to help, Bernie got in her car and went to pick the woman up herself. Bernie would tell of how when she got there the woman was in a terrible state and unexpectedly started loading many suitcases into the car. "But it got worse" she would say because then the woman squeezed her Alsatian dog into to the back of the car, (Bernie was not a fan of dogs) and off they drove. "But it got worse" she would continue because as they drove around Cardiff, in the middle of the night Bernie stopped the car at a set of lights and the lady tried to kiss her!

The whole family were surprised when she took up this role because in some ways she was quite naïve about the ways of the world. Ian and Ann once took her to see the Tom Sharpe film 'Wilt'. During one scene, which had an adult theme, Ian and Ann laughed at a rude joke and saw Bernie also laughing so they asked her why she was laughing and she said 'Oh I don't know', which made it all the funnier. This just added to her gorgeous charm. You'll have to watch the film to find out if you're interested.

On the arrival of her first grandchild, Bernie deliberated as to what she would like to be called by them. i.e. Grandma, Nana, Granny, but no Adam had other ideas and having difficulty with any of those called her Bar and this has stuck and she is called Bar by many family members and friends.

When Bernie retired she kept herself very active, attending gardening classes, French classes and joined the WI, becoming treasurer for several years. She had always helped with the grandchildren but now was able to help a lot with Eloise allowing Ann to attend a course so that she could also become a teacher within the Police. Much later, continuing her supportive role in relation to education, she would take Eloise to her extra classes to help her achieve the grades she needed in her A levels to get in to Medical School. Eloise has said that she wouldn't have got into Medical School without the help Bar gave her.

She was proud of all her grandchildren and their achievements and loved spending time with them, enjoying visits to Centre Parcs with the whole family and holidays with Ian, Susan, Dominic and Jessica.

She also went to support Adam when he was dropped off at Army Officer Training at Sandhurst and was sat next to Adam's Commanding Officer at a welcome lunch. Adam's face was a picture when he overheard Bar telling him that she didn't agree with war and didn't really want her Grandson joining the Army!!

During the grandchildren's teenage years, Bar's house was a safe haven for many a sulky/disgruntled child, where Bar would provide cake making, cooked dinners and an opportunity to offload about annoying parents,(where appropriate) or stay when camping equipment had been misplaced!

George died in 2011 having been ill with a number of conditions for the last ten years. During this time Bernie had looked after him constantly which included taking him to at least weekly hospital appointments and was still active outside the house, shopping for, what she called, elderly people who lived nearby, even though some of them were only a few years older than her.

It is said that to reduce the risk of developing Alzheimer's one should do crosswords, word puzzles, learn an instrument or another language, keep active and mix with people and Bernie did all of these, a lot (however Ian and Ann think that the only tune she played on the keyboard was 'when the saints go marching in' and George was glad that he could turn off his hearing aids!!) But when George died Bernie appeared to lose some of the focus of her life and never really recovered, slowly her confidence diminished as did her interest in the many activities she had previously enjoyed. Her house became too much for her to manage and so she moved to a flat a quarter of a mile away and looking back this was probably the onset of Alzheimer's.

As the illness progressed it became necessary for her to move to Tower Hill, a care home in Penarth where she received fantastic care; living here for a year. During that time a man came to the home to sing and play for the residents. Ann witnessed her reacting to the music and enjoying it. He played the Hawaiian version of over the rainbow. She was happy and smiled more than she had for years.

At the end of June of this year Bernie became more unwell and was hospitalised until she moved to a new care home in Torquay where she could be close to Ann and Ian and where she stayed until she died on the 27<sup>th</sup> of September.