



The Funeral of

Brenda Pamela Pusey

3rd November 1937 – 23rd March 2018

Hastings Crematorium, 12th April 2018, 1.15pm

Celebrant: Felicity Harvest, accredited by

Humanist
Ceremonies



The Tribute

Brenda was born in Battersea in 1937, the third of Annie (known as Nancy) and Robert Graham's 4 children. Her parents ran a fruit and veg business, but her father's early death meant that Nancy had to cope alone with bringing up four children and running the business through the war and beyond. All the children apart from Joyce were evacuated to Lancashire, where Billy and Gwen were with one family and Brenda with another nearby. Both families treated the children really badly, and when Nancy went up to see them she was horrified, and took them back with her to London, Blitz or no Blitz.

Once Robert died Gwen, as the eldest, took on a lot of responsibility for the two younger girls, while brother Billy went to market to buy the fruit and veg.

At school, Brenda won prizes with her handwriting and was fascinated by the stories they were told in Scripture lessons. With Joyce, she was in the Brownies, and went swimming at Latchmere Pool. Her love of swimming carried on into her adult years, and she used to swim regularly with Lisa until she became ill.

When she left school, at 14, she worked on the deli counter for an Italian family in Tooting, and got interested in Italian food, an interest which continued throughout her life, and meant that the family were treated to some exciting meals over the years – though she was also capable of producing the very worst that English cooking has to offer – the stuffed hearts and the rissoles were particularly memorable for their awfulness, and the 5 cats regularly benefitted from them being quietly slid to the floor. Lisa remembers trying to flush a rissole down the toilet, and comments that it's no wonder she's now a vegetarian.

From the Italian deli, she moved on to run a salad stall on Tooting market, which is where she met Tony – he was working on another veg stall, and he asked her out. Their first date, in 1955, was to go up to Leicester Square to see *The Blackboard Jungle*, the film which brought rock and roll to Britain as it featured Bill Hailey and the Comets *Rock Around the Clock* over its opening titles. Their courtship was mainly

carried out by going out for meals, because Tony was no dancer, and Brenda used to go with her friends to the Streatham Locarno to dance and take full advantage of the new rock and roll craze.

They married when she was 21 and started their married life in the upstairs of his parents' home, not an ideal arrangement, but they made the best of it. They had three girls – Tina, Lisa and Mandy, and for a while they all lived in a maisonette in Tooting until Nancy, by then known to the girls as Nana Coo Coo, had to leave her home, which was being compulsorily purchased, and they decided to all move in together to a new home in Streatham.

Tony originally trained as a welder, but then re-trained as a heating and ventilation engineer, working for hospitals and other large-scale projects around the country, and then working with his mate at weekends on domestic central heating projects, when central heating was beginning to be something many people wanted in their houses. Soon after they moved to Streatham, mortgage interest rates soared, which meant he worked even harder. Brenda meanwhile was working in a children's home, which fitted in around the girl's school hours, and then took evening classes, getting OCR qualifications which got her a better job as a medical records clerk at St Georges. Over time, she worked her way up to clinic receptionist, then clinic manager, then unit manager, staying in the NHS for thirty years.

The girl's memories of this period are all positive ones, of spending the whole day on the Common with sandwiches which Brenda had provided them with, and of bubble baths made more bubbly with the help of a rotary whisk.

There was the occasional crisis of course, like when Lisa and cousin Tracey fell into a pond on the Common which was hidden by ice and snow. Tina rushed them home, and Brenda dealt with the problem matter-of-factly with a hot bath and hot chocolate.

She made sure they were always beautifully dressed, saving up the family allowance to take them to *Kids in Gear* in the Kings Road, or to Biba, not to mention making them clothes for special events – though

Tina, as the eldest, was always annoyed because she was expected to wear the same as her younger sisters.

As the girls grew, she offered them a different kind of support, always being there on the phone for them when they needed her – which they often did when they were first married when faced with an unusual food to cook or a problem with a recipe – Brenda had all the details in her head and could tell them exactly what to do. She made all their wedding cakes, adorned with royal icing and flowers, and all the Christmas cakes and Christmas puddings. And then there were the endless curtains and blinds she made for their various homes, using her wonderful sewing skills.

Tony had a stroke at 46, possibly as a result of all that hard work, so like her mother before her, Brenda found herself as the main breadwinner. And like her mother before her, and indeed her grandmother, who had raised 14 children while her husband was fighting in the First World War, she held the family together.

She stepped in at times of crisis, like when Tina and John moved to a rented house in Derbyshire when Tom was just 8 weeks old, and Tina got ill. Brenda brought the tiny baby back down south on the bus, so there was one less thing for Tina to worry about.

Tina will now tell us a story about Brenda's approach to life.

Whilst going through mum's bits and pieces we came across this [tape measure]. Mum was always prepared – her handbag would be a bit like Mary Poppins' bag. I remember going to Bell House Fabrics to choose material for curtains. The rolls were huge and weighed a ton. No sooner had I seen something I liked – mum had the tape measure out checking pattern repeats, widths etc. etc. BUT there was a problem. As you can see this is a rather limited device! Another jumble sale purchase that proved to be somewhat useless (but not to Mum). An assistant offered to help but mum was insistent that she was fine. The curtains were beautiful. That was mum – stubborn as well as talented. I've only just passed the curtains on to our son for his new home.

When Tina moved to Sussex, Brenda and Tony came to visit, and really liked what they saw, so they moved to Battle, where Brenda later became clinic manager of the Arthur Blackburn Clinic.

The birth of her seven grandchildren, and the acquisition, over time of eleven great-grandchildren gave her enormous pleasure. She adored children, and the children in turn adored her. Granny Brenda often looked after the children when they were poorly – they spent the time watching films like the Wizard of Oz and the Sound of Music, and baking massive cookies.

Food forms a large feature in all the grandchildren's memories – Lisa's children would go round for dippy eggs and there was also mention of egg mayonnaise sandwiches and many cakes. She was inventive in creating activities for them too – one summer several grandchildren were kept very happy painting the shed with water. By the time they got all the way round it, it had dried, and they started again.

Later on, when she took up painting herself, she enjoyed teaching her grandchildren how to paint and draw. She also took them with her to charity shops and jumble sales, from which they would return with all sorts of treasure which was not necessarily welcome at home.

And they would head out in procession down the lane opposite to wave at the train drivers from the railway bridge. The children would take their scooters, prams, and other wheeled things that were then their favourites, but when it came to climbing back up, they were less keen, and Brenda used to rope all those wheeled things together and pull them back up.

Lucy, one of those grandchildren, will now read to us "I'll Love You Always" by Mark Sperring.

How long will I love you? A second is too short. A second is no time for a love of this sort.

A minute is no better, for minutes fly by! They're gone in a moment like a sweet butterfly.

An hour's still nothing-it whirls by so fast. I'll love you much longer than hours can last.

A morning is so brief, an afternoon too. From sunrise to sunset, I'll keep loving you.

Will I love you when night falls? Of course, and beyond....will I love you tomorrow? Oh yes, on & on....

I'll love you for whole days stretched out in a line. I'll love you for weeks and a much longer time!

I'll love you for months heaped up to the sky.

I'll love you through seasons as they bluster by.

I'll love you for whole years and through things might change... as you grow bigger my love stays the same.

How long will I love you? If you need to know, I'll tuck you in tightly, then whisper it low...

I'll love you for years and for months, weeks and days. I'll love you for hours and minutes...always.

I'll love you forever, not one second less. For that is what mummies and grannies do best.

In addition to the cooking, and the sewing, Brenda had many other skills. She was a great knitter, and all the family benefitted from knitted gifts, as did the various dolls. But it wasn't just these arts that she excelled in – the girls remember her knocking out a fireplace in the bedroom and bricking it up, with them helping to operate the bucket which she used to haul the mortar up through the window. “She was like a stick of dynamite” said Lisa.

But gradually she became ill, and both her body and her mind began to let her down, a process extraordinarily frustrating for a woman who had been so capable, so active, and unbearably sad for her loving family.

Two years ago, Brenda became too confused to stay at home, even with all the support she'd been getting from her daughters. Mandy travelled from Horley repeatedly to stay with Brenda and Tony. She often slept with Brenda when she'd become confused and terrified. Sadly though family could no longer look after her and she moved into Saxonwood Care Home. There she received the most outstanding care, not just practical, physical help, but also real love. They would try to tempt her to eat with peaches and cream, and let her spend the night on the sofa if that was what she wanted to do. When the family visited, there was

always tea and biscuits, or a glass of sherry if something stronger was required. Even when her condition deteriorated further, they kept her on, with the support of St Michael's Hospice in the Community.

We often think of death as a cruel enemy, taking away those we love, but for those who are suffering or who have reached the end of their endurance, it can come as a quiet friend, closing the curtains, blowing out the light, and settling us into a last sleep, free from pain and weariness.

I hope it was so for Brenda.

