

*A Humanist Ceremony
to Celebrate the Life of*

Iris Blake

7th December 1920 – 28th September 2018

*Conducted in the presence of her family and friends
on Friday 5th October 2018
at Pontefract Crematorium*

*Service taken by
Hannah McKerchar
Humanist Celebrant*

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Eulogy

Iris was born Iris Holgate in Wakefield on 7th December 1920, growing up in Stanley with her big brother, Harold. She was a good student, progressing through Wakefield Girls' High School and going on to do teacher-training. It was during her school years that she first met Ian, the love of her life. He went to Wakefield Grammar, and the grammar school boys and high school girls came together for various occasions throughout the school year. Iris and Ian courted during and immediately after the war. While Ian was posted overseas with the army, ending the war in Germany, Iris volunteered as a fire-watcher back home.

On September 2nd 1946 they were married, in Stanley, before Iris moved out to join Ian in Düsseldorf. It was a big change for Iris, one she was not altogether comfortable with at first; being part of an occupying army was difficult, and having a maid in the house, which was standard practice for families of the occupying force, was not something Iris was used to. However, in the five years they lived there Iris and Ian made many friends, both within the army and also within the German community, and that experience informed their outlook throughout their lives. Becoming parents in December 1947 also helped tremendously in forming new friendships with other young families. On returning to Wakefield in 1951 Iris and Ian both joined the International Society and greatly enjoyed the company of people from many different countries. They became close friends with their neighbours, John and Margaret Switalski, and shared many happy evenings and weekends round at each others' flats and later houses, or at the International Club. Paul has some memories he is going to share with us of his mum.

Paul's Tribute

Ian's job in the civil service necessitated several moves round the country for the family, first to Birmingham, then Carlisle and lastly Winchester. Wherever they settled, Iris always found work as an infant teacher. She really enjoyed her job, and the contact with the children. From the big inner-city school in Birmingham to the village school outside Winchester, Iris liked the variety and the challenge of her work, and put her piano skills to good use accompanying the children in concerts.

When Paul was young he remembers family holidays spent near Nevin in Wales; summer days staying in a caravan, walking the cliffs of the Lley Peninsula or exploring the castles of North Wales with his mum and dad. Iris and Ian continued to enjoy travelling to the continent throughout their lives, often taking the car on the ferry across to France, or through to Switzerland. They shared many of those trips with Ian's brother, Michael, and his wife, Geraldine, or would go with Iris' brother, Harold, and his wife, Olwen.

After several years in England, Paul and Ellen moved to the United States, where Iris and Ian came out to visit. They thoroughly enjoyed spending time with their grandchildren and were able to travel around, especially enjoying their tour of Washington DC. At home the two of them liked listening to music, and would go to orchestral concerts, and plays. They frequented the local theatre, and would also travel up to London with Harold and Olwen to see performances there.

Iris was lucky enough to become a granny, to Daniel and Zoë, and even a great-granny, to Kayla, Austin, Noah, Christian, Madison and Lincoln. Daniel's earliest years were spent in England; he would come to visit and sometimes stay with his grandparents, and he remembers the fun they had cavorting around in the garden, going horseback riding behind Granny's house, the constant supply of Orangina, and his granny playing the piano and them making a small band in the living room. Both Daniel and Zoë came over to see Iris after they had moved to the US, and Zoë especially remembers picking the raspberries on her granny's driveway. Iris was always delighted to see her grandchildren, and have the chance to read them bedtime stories, and she wanted to know all about how they were getting on during her weekly phone conversations with Paul. Iris was also godmother to Michael and Geraldine's daughter, Sally-Anne, and was close to their sons, Nick and Julian, as well.

She was a very sociable lady, making friends wherever she went, and was incredibly generous with her hospitality; she and Ian would meet people on holiday, and happily invite them to visit their home in England. Iris was generous with her time, too, and glad to help anyone she knew if she could; she would often take her neighbours Brenda, Myra and Mrs Perry out for a coffee or run them to the shops when they needed it.

Iris enjoyed the company of others, but it is fair to say that she was never happier than when she was hand in hand with her beloved Ian. The two of them were genuine soulmates, and were just as much in love at seventy as seventeen. When Ian died Iris was heartbroken, and never really got over the loss, though she rallied with the support of family and friends. She saw Harold and Olwen often, and spoke to them daily, and would come up to stay with Geraldine, who was sadly also widowed. She even travelled out to America on two more occasions, once accompanied by Olwen, and the other time brought over by Paul, who would also fly back to England to see her frequently. When Iris' health began to fail, she moved up to Yorkshire, to be near to Geraldine, Sally-Anne and Julian, all of whom came to visit her regularly in the care home.

Paul said how pleased he and the family were with the care given by Lydgate Lodge; Iris was the happiest she could have been there. She was renowned amongst the staff for her sweet tooth; Paul sent flowers and chocolates every week, and the carers kept him up to date with how well his mum's teeth were holding out. By her last few weeks she couldn't really manage anything harder than chocolate buttons, and the care home made sure she had her provisions, even at the end.

Iris' life spanned 97 years, a lifetime not without its difficulties, but filled with far more happy times than sad. She leaves behind so many memories, and it is in these that she will live on. Take a moment to think of Iris, and how you will remember her, as we listen to the Huddersfield Choral Society sing.