

*A Humanist Ceremony  
to Celebrate the Life of  
Jean Sykes*

*23<sup>rd</sup> February 1930 – 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2018*



*Conducted in the presence of her family and friends  
on Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> November 2018  
at Huddersfield Crematorium*

*Service taken by  
Hannah McKerchar  
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## **Tribute**

*Jean was born on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1930, the middle child of Eva and Charles Sutcliffe. She grew up with her older sister Peggy and younger brother Peter in Shipley, and used to speak of the air raids during the war, when the family would have to go and sit in the larder, down in the cellar. Jean wasn't particularly enamoured with school, except for a period when she was about twelve; she was diagnosed with jaundice, and prescribed a spell at an 'outdoor school', where she got plenty of fresh air, and was allowed to take a nap in the afternoon.*

*Jean was fourteen when she left education and went to work as a seamstress at the Meldina factory in Shipley, carrying her gas mark with her for the first year or so. She didn't really enjoy the piece work she was on, and things became harder with the death of her father, on her 16<sup>th</sup> birthday; Jean did what she could to help her mum, and to look after her brother. She still managed to find some time for fun, though, and often talked of the time she took the train to Malham with friends from Shipley. The weather was fabulous when they set off, but they were met with snow in Malham, which caused Jean's new and rather expensive shoes to shrink onto her feet. To really rub it in, when they got back to Shipley it had been sunny there all day!*

*Jean was in her twenties when she first met Donald, probably on the dance floor at the Mecca Ballroom in Bradford. They fell in love, and married on 10<sup>th</sup> March 1956; Peter gave Jean away in their father's stead, and Jean made her own wedding dress. She always remained a skilled seamstress, making clothes for herself and their daughter, Jackie, who Jean and Donald welcomed to the world in 1963.*

*Jean also used to knit clothes and teddies, including the much-loved Jumbo the elephant, who accompanied her to the nursing home in recent months, and George the teddy bear, who had his tonsils removed at the same time as a four-year-old Jackie. It wasn't only Jackie who benefited from Jean's skills with a needle; her niece, Wendy, wrote:*

*I first met Jean as a child - she was the very smart girlfriend (this was the 1950's) of my Uncle Donald. When they married I was one of their bridesmaids. Auntie Jean was a very gifted dressmaker and made most of my and my sister's dresses when we were children. We were some of the best dressed children in the neighborhood! I always enjoyed visiting Jean as she was interesting to talk to - taking a keen interest in current affairs even into her later years. I will miss her.*

*Jackie remembers her mum reading to her when she was young, and many childhood holidays spent over in Scarborough. The three of them always stayed at the Dorchester Hotel, and would potter around on the beach, looking in rock pools. Or they would go to Grasmere, staying in a guest house and enjoying some of the gentler walks that the Lakes offered. At home, too, Jean enjoyed walking; she, Donald and Jackie would get the bus up to Farnley Tyas then choose a route back home again.*

*Neither Jean nor Donald learned to drive, so they were both experts at the intricacies of the public transport system, and certainly covered a lot of miles over the years. From their home near Huddersfield they would set off to their favourite haunts in Ilkley, Harrogate and York. Betty's was always on the cards; Jean would have chicken sandwiches, with no mayonnaise! And they always enjoyed a trip to Harry Ramsden's at White Cross for fish and chips.*

*Jean gave up work once she got married, and she and Donald were prepared to cut their coat according to their cloth in order for Jackie to have her mum at home for her as she grew up. Jean was very happy in her role as housewife and mum, and Jackie came home for her lunches right through infant and junior school. When she moved up to secondary school, Jean did decide to get a part-time job, and became a dinner lady at Rawthorpe Junior School, or a 'Playground Supervisory Attendant', as her official title read. She worked there for twenty years, and saw a whole generation of children pass through, many of whom still remembered her years afterwards when they saw her out and about; in fact, Jean's window-cleaner and postman were both ex-pupils, and she remembered them just as clearly.*

*Jean and Donald were glad to see Jackie grow up, make her own life, and find love with David. Jean may have found it hard to say to her daughter, but she told all the neighbours how proud she was of her. It was a bit tricky on the bus to get to Jackie and David's home in Worksop, but Jean and Donald did come over to visit when they could, and enjoyed seeing their pet ferrets. They weren't ones for stopping out overnight, though, and always preferred to be back within the day.*

*They were both very content in their own home, and in each other's company; Jean enjoyed pottering round the garden, planting up her colourful pots and window boxes every year. She had an array of self-set raspberry canes in the garden that yielded the most wonderful fruit; for many years Jean made jam, and more recently would freeze the berries for Jackie, who said they always tasted ten times better than any you could buy. When it came to flowers, Jean always had a soft spot for daffodils, and on those trips to Grasmere would often quote William Wordsworth:*

*I wandered lonely as a cloud  
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,  
When all at once I saw a crowd,  
A host, of golden daffodils;  
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,  
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.*

*[And] oft, when on my couch I lie  
In vacant or in pensive mood,  
They flash upon that inward eye  
Which is the bliss of solitude;  
And then my heart with pleasure fills,  
And dances with the daffodils.*

*Jean enjoyed the simple things in life: arrowroot biscuits, which she had tucked away all round the house, reading her many magazines, from Gardener's World to Good Homes via Countryfile, or sitting down to one of the old musicals, hence the choice of Bali Ha'i, from her great favourite South Pacific, as the music we entered to today; Jean also loved anything starring Fred Astaire and Ginger Rodgers, and was adamant there was no finer Robin Hood than Errol Flynn. She was just as clear and categorical about the things she didn't like, too, which included bad language, bad manners, and Theresa May! She also felt strongly about pensioners having to pay for their care, and Jackie likes to think her mum would have been extremely gratified to know that she died on the very last day of her free NHS entitlement.*

*Jean was strong-minded, stubborn, even, and very independent. She spoke regularly to her sister, Peggy, and to her sister-in-law Muriel and her husband, Richard, who would sometimes get together with Jean and Donald at Christmas. But most of the time it was just the two of them together, which made it even harder when Donald died, on 7<sup>th</sup> June 2006. They had been married for fifty years, and Jean never stopped missing him.*

*But she continued to manage on her own, under the watchful eye of her neighbours; Jean greatly appreciated the help provided by Charles, who would cut her grass and hedge, while Sue and Ivor would fetch her her newspapers on a Saturday, and they and Emma all offered to help at other times – not that Jean would take it, of course. She was quite determined to look after herself. She and Donald had always been careful with money, having spent the early years of their marriage on a very tight budget; sadly, even when they had a bit to spare, they wouldn't spend it on making their own lives easier. Jean did convince Donald to invest in double glazing, but they never installed central heating, preferring to manage with oil-filled radiators.*

*On 17<sup>th</sup> June Jean suffered a life-changing stroke, which took away her ability to swallow, talk and walk. After four weeks in Calderdale Hospital she moved to Astley Grange Care Home in Fartown; there she regained the ability to talk fairly well (though as her speech came back it did seem to make less and less sense). Jean may not have actually realised she was in a care home, but wherever she thought she was, she was very happy, and Jackie and David are very grateful to the staff who took such fabulous care of her, both at Astley Grange and in Calderdale. They were all lovely with her, making sure she was well looked after and maintaining her dignity at all times.*

*Jackie said that, during her mum's time in the care home, part of the reason Jean was so happy was because of the wonderful journeys her mind took her on. These included:*

- going horse riding and managing not to fall off (having never knowingly been on a horse in her life)*
- travelling by train to watch Leeds United, and witnessing a fight on the way home (Jean couldn't stand Leeds United, and didn't even like football)*
- ordering wine online from Birmingham (Jean had never used a computer and didn't drink alcohol)!*

*And yet, despite her mind obviously not functioning all that well, Jean could still remember what a lousy violin player Jackie was as a child!*

*Thankfully Jean spent her final days comfortable and content. She was a private, independent lady, but also kind and caring. She was a devoted wife, and a loving mum, and she is very much missed.*