

The Funeral of

Jennifer Ann Bradford Knox

4th December 1933 to 3rd December 2018

19th December 2018, East Sheen Cemetery Chapel

2.20 pm

Celebrant: Felicity Harvest, accredited by



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The Tribute

Jen was born on the 4th of December 1933, just down the road from here in Onslow Road. It is consistent with her love of things being well-organised that she died just one day before her 85th birthday, and that her ashes will be interred just a mile from where she was born.

She was the fourth child of Edwin and Eulalie (Lallie) Latham, the youngest daughter of a youngest daughter. It was from that side of the family that she inherited her Scots blood. Her siblings Stephanie (Steve) and David were much older than her, but Jacqueline (Jakes) was only three years older. Later on, they were joined by a further sister, Betty, when their father Edwin remarried, with whom Jen was very close

Edwin is described on her birth certificate as a “Crude Rubber Merchant”, who was clearly able to provide well for the family as well as being a pillar of the community, donating money to the founding of the Star and Garter home on Richmond Hill. Unfortunately perhaps for the family fortunes, Edwin kept faith with rubber, and felt there was “no future in plastics”.

They owned a converted Wealden hall in Fairlight, near Hastings, and there are many holiday snaps of them enjoying the beach as children. Jen’s very grand 21st birthday party, from which the menu and photos have been kept, was held in the Royal Victoria Hotel in Hastings, then a smart location.

Though her mother died young, Jen had lots of happy memories of her youth amongst her large extended family including various charismatic characters, such as writers and journalists, who perhaps laid the foundations for her curiosity and interest in the world, and she had huge respect for her father, who called her his “Little Jenny Wren”.

She ventured into the wider world from an early age, being sent to boarding school in Antwerp, where she made good friends who she visited for a long time afterwards in Belgium and France. Her 21st birthday present was a trip to New York on the *Nea Hellas*, which she described as a Greek rust bucket, to visit Jakes who was then working as a nanny in the States. Her fare cost £96 10s. The family Jakes was

working for lent them a car, and they had many adventures.

The creation of large families continued down the generations, with Jen's three girls and Betty's five boys meaning that the warmth of an extended family continued. Circumstances meant that Jen & her siblings went their separate ways as adults, with Jakes heading off as a nanny, first to the States and then to Kenya, and David spending most of his life sailing the world.

They got together again, though, when Jen took the initiative and traced Jakes, who was out of touch with all of them. This success sparked her interest in genealogy, and she has asked for the results of that research to be donated to somewhere it will be properly archived and become accessible to all.

Her first job was in a toothpaste factory, where she only lasted a couple of weeks. But her next job, one she really loved, was as a telephone operator on the French Exchange, making use of the language, which she had learned in Antwerp. She remembered once putting the King through a call from the King to someone in France! She spent a summer working in a hotel in Mevagissey where she was chased around by the landlord, before joining the bar staff at the Red Lion in Wendover which is where she met Richard, and made many good friends who she kept up with all her life

As you know, Jen was a great lover of Radio 4 (but not of "Humphreys' whom she deemed rude). She enjoyed the absurd puns of *I'm sorry I Haven't a Clue* but also mines of information such as *A History of the World in 100 Objects*. So, based on the memories of Vanessa and Judith, I am now going to channel Neil McGregor for a few minutes and give you the life of Jennifer Knox in 12 objects.

First, you will see that I have the props for this exercise in what is in fact **item one – a large plastic bag**. Jen was always well organized, and never wasteful, and this bag symbolizes that sense of order and thrift. Vanessa and Judith confirm that, like their mum, they never throw out a plastic bag either.

Item two is a pair of secateurs, to symbolize her love of gardening. She developed this passion when the family moved into their first house and

she planted the garden with fruit and vegetables, waging war against the local boys who wanted to scump the apples. She even grew mushrooms in the downstairs loo. In the many years she lived in her flat in Twickenham, she became the de facto head gardener for the block, and the arbiter of its style. If anyone introduced an unsuitable plant to the mix, she would say “well, someone’s going to have to maintain that, and we may not live long enough”. She played other organisational roles too, such as organising Christmas parties, trips and entertainment.

Item three is a spirit level. Unlike many women of her generation, and despite her slight frame, Jen was a dab hand at DIY. She is thought to be the first person in Ayrshire to construct a flat-pack wardrobe, though its scale and conti-board construction meant that it could never be removed from the room it was built in.

Item four is a pack of paper handkerchiefs. Jen’s simple words to her daughters upon leaving the house were “money, keys, handkerchief”, and this was a rule she always followed herself.

Item five is a cork, not because Jen was much of a drinker, an occasional whiskey mac was enough for her, but because in her years in Scotland she got into the 70’s hobby of wine-making. Lacking the climate to grow grapes, she would have her daughters collecting gorse flowers when they went to the beach, that is when they weren’t foraging for sea-weed for the garden. The demijohns of home-made wine lined her bedroom, but we ended up using a cork as our object, because a demijohn wouldn’t fit in the plastic bag.

Item six is a pair of corduroy trousers, Jen’s chosen garb in all weathers and all circumstances, though she could brush up very well when she chose, which is why **item six-and-a half is a lipstick,** which like the money, keys and handkerchief she was never without.

Item seven, of course, is a teaspoon, of the kind which would regularly stand up in her super-strong tea. John will tell us more about her tea-drinking habits later.

Item eight is a Kindle, to symbolize her love of reading, and the fact that she was a willing adopter of technology. Although there were literary figures in her extended family, she did not receive a particularly

“literary” education, but she did her best to make up for that. She was never without a book on the go, often several. She loved biography, and literary fiction, keeping up with new novels as they emerged. Indeed, Judith and Vanessa think they were named after two of the tiles in High Walpole’s *The Herries Chronicle*, which featured generations of strong women.

Item nine is a CD, to symbolize her love of music, in which she was again both eclectic and self-taught. She particularly loved choral music, hence the music chosen for today. We will hear another of her choices in a minute.

Item ten is a box of matches to symbolize her love of bonfires, particularly those made up of branches which she had hacked down in her various gardens. The family will gather in Buxton on Boxing Day to light a bonfire in her honour. Judith and Chris have a large pile of branches all ready to go.

Item eleven is a tennis ball, to symbolise her love of sport, something she picked up from her uncles, and from Betty’s boys. Her daughters remember her watching Test cricket on the BBC, with the sound turned down and the radio on, in the long-gone days when that was an option. Not long before she died she was asked who was her favourite-ever England Captain, and she opted for Alistair Cook, because he is also a sheep farmer and she had a great fondness for sheep. She developed a taste for rugby from Uncle Sam and the boys when she was living with them in Stevenage, and in her youth she would cycle from her work in the City over to Wimbledon to watch the likes of Billie Jean King in action.

And finally, **item twelve** isn’t in fact here, because we couldn’t get hold of it, but one of the enduring memories of her daughter’s childhood is being sent down to the shop to buy a packet of **Embassy Number 10**.

So there we have it, Jennifer in a dozen objects (well, thirteen really, you may have noticed that I cheated), though we could probably have selected dozens more.

Judith and Vanessa feel that they won the lottery as far as mother’s were concerned, and some of the messages they have received over the

past couple of weeks bear this out. Vanessa's friend, another Jennifer, wrote "I always remember visiting her in London...She was so friendly and open and engaging. I can always see her in my mind's eye at that visit...She was just the kind of friends' Mum you would want in your life". Jen adored her children and her grandchildren, and did all she could to support them.

Next we have a reading, chosen by Jen herself for this occasion, which will be read by Judith.

17th Century Nun's Prayer

Lord, thou knowest better than I know myself that I am growing older and will some day be old. Keep me from the fatal habit of thinking I must say something on every subject and on every occasion.

Release me from craving to straighten out everybody's affairs. Make me thoughtful but not moody; helpful but not bossy. With my vast store of wisdom it seems a pity not to use it all, but Thou knowest Lord, that I want a few friends at the end.

Keep my mind free from the recital of endless details; give me wings to get to the point. Seal my lips on my aches and pains. They are increasing and love of rehearsing them is becoming sweeter as the years go by. Help me to endure the tales of others' pains with patience.

I ask not for improved memory, but for a growing humility when my memory seems to clash with the memories of others. Teach me the glorious lesson that occasionally I may be mistaken.

Keep me reasonably sweet; I do not want to be a saint - some of them are so hard to live with. Give me the ability to see good things in unexpected places and talents in unexpected people. And, give me, O Lord, the grace to tell them so.

Thank you, Judith.

Her son in law John will now share with us his memories of Jennifer

I knew Jennifer, Jen, Grandma, Mum, Yoda for more than 30 years. I don't remember that first meeting but am sure it was in Dalry Rd, Beith – that big, comfortable house which Jennifer (literally) made a wonderful home. I am quite sure the welcome from her was effusive, that she made me part of the family immediately and was interested in my life and my family. That was the way she was with all of us.

Jennifer was immensely kind; her concern for others always superseded her own needs; particularly her family whom she adored – Judith, Vanessa and Shiona and then her beloved grandchildren Sam, Alex, Daisy and Jonah. Chris and I could do no wrong in her eyes which has, over the years occasionally frustrated Judith and Vanessa when it was clear as day to them that we were not perfect - apparently. That is not to say that she was above the occasional wry comment on any public figure or bureaucratic incompetence.

*Fragments of Jennifer's past slowly began to **emerge** the longer I got to know her, including the early death of her mother, and dispatch to a French speaking convent in Belgium at an early age. Her memorable 80th birthday celebration was spent in Antwerp when we visited her old school and the memories came flooding back. Her 4 elder siblings were all devoted to her. Betty's 5 "boys" were all close to her heart and she loved to keep up with their - and their children's - news. Steve, David & Jakes each lived out their retirements in Lilliputian homes with lovely gardens. In Wilton, Majorca and The Black Isle there was not one of them in which a grown person could swing their arms around without banging into a wall but each had great charm. Indeed we spent a number of happy summers on the Black Isle with our young children in tents. They learned so much about the natural world from their grandmother, the Firestarter.*

Her working life appears to have been lots of fun – at The Exchange in London where I am sure her courteous and kindly manner drew the attention of her employers, then at the Red Lion where she met Richard. Early married life took them to destinations all over England, Scotland and Wales resulting in Vanessa unfortunately having Basingstoke in her passport as Place

of Birth. Richard's work took him overseas and Jennifer did an incredible job bringing up the 3 girls who quickly all towered over her, headstrong and shall I say opinionated, yes I think I shall. Summer holidays were often spent in Wiltshire putting up 2 ton heavy canvas tents in a gale from what I can gather.

Her working life continued in Ayrshire by keeping Mr Cunningham in a "Country squire of the Scottish Manor" lifestyle as housekeeper, cook and head bottle washer cooking Fanny Craddock style feasts which seemed to involve plucking peasants, juggling hares and flambeeing pancakes.

On the subject of food I think I eat more in a month than Jennifer ate in her entire life and as many here will testify I don't even have a big appetite ! Herrings, hob-nobs and leeks in white sauce were favourites though not all together – that would be quite a combination – and she ate like a bird. However no-one could hold a candle to her on the consumption of tea. Daisy and Jonah estimated that she consumed 142,350 cups in her lifetime. Apparently shares in PG tips have halved since she passed away.

Jennifer was immensely practical and didn't mind getting her hands dirty. It's rare for a lady of her generation to be so familiar with the workings of a car engine, digging drainage ditches, putting up shelves or laying a patio. She rarely proffered advice on any subject being too self-deprecating as we all know, sometimes maddeningly so, but very happy to share once prompted. She had a wide ranging intellect on any number of subjects often demonstrated when doing a gigantic Christmas crossword with a ginger wine and tea chaser close to hand. Her gardening knowledge, one of her passions was of course worn lightly but encyclopaedic in its scope. She took great joy in tending the big garden both at The Cottage in Scotland and James Darby House in Twickenham and the residents there were very lucky to have such a devoted expert.

Not for her a quiet old age. She took a strong interest in her family genealogy and enjoyed Open University courses, becoming an accomplished silver surfer and loved her photography too.

In her last years she coped resiliently and with good humour and patience with the multiple hurdles her health placed in front of her. Concern and love was always placed forefront for her beloved daughters and grandchildren who adored her.

It is so appropriate that we are celebrating Jennifer's life at Christmas. A time of goodwill, consideration of others and love. Qualities I know we will all agree that Jennifer had in abundance. Christmas is a season not only of rejoicing but of reflection. As she is now laid to rest, reunited with Shiona let us now together rejoice in the life of Jennifer and reflect on what she means to each of us here.

And Jen's nephew Edwin added the following at the graveside:

I feel most privileged to be able to claim that I have known my aunt Jen, or Auntie Jenny as I first knew her, for longer than anyone.

Jen was the Big Sister I never had, for she and I attended the same school, at the same time. We went to The Sacred Heart Convent in Hastings.

I can remember very clearly travelling to school each day by taxi with a young Miss Jennifer Ann Latham, with her hair in plaits and wearing her school uniform.

And I felt so grown up in her company; I was four and she was fifteen. Jen played in the Big Children's playground while I was confined to the infant children's playground.

My first recollection of my Auntie Jenny was of being pushed by her on a toboggan in the winter snow of 1948. We were both living with her parents, my grandparents, in Fairlight near Hastings, and from thereon I knew her throughout my childhood and, despite our lives taking us in different directions, we have always kept in touch.

Jen was always so enthusiastic and such fun to be with, like her

father Edwin, she had a great sense of humour which, despite her suffering and discomfort during this last year, sustained her to the end.

Judith has reminded her of her humour when mentioning that Jen, in her will, has requested that her ashes should be scattered where Shiona is buried "but not on a windy day in case I come back at you".

But beyond her engaging and witty nature Jen's personality and character had far greater depths.

She was kind, she was modest, she was sensitive to the needs of others, she was self-effacing, she was always happy for people seemingly more fortunate than her, and above all she spent her entire life not wishing to be a burden to others.

And without any self-pity she showed great fortitude and courage at difficult times, and particularly in the last year of her life. A year which took her to the very eve of her 86th year, for she died on the day before her 85th birthday.

Throughout her entire life Jen set us all a very fine example by which we should all strive to live. Jen was a very good person and Judith and Vanessa and their families have every right to be most proud of her.

Today we celebrate and remember with great affection a life which has inspired us all.

Only last week, and with our dear Jen in mind, I chanced to read an "in Memoriam" notice on a park bench which included the following verse:

*Those we love don't go away
They walk beside us every day
Unseen, unheard, but always near,
Still loved, still missed, forever dear.*