

The Funeral of Judith Ann Saner

17th June 1949 – 8th March 2015

Hastings Crematorium, Wednesday 8th April 2015, 12.30pm

The Tribute

The story I'm about to tell is based on the memories which her daughters have of her – no doubt there will be gaps, possibly even mistakes – fortunately children rarely know everything there is to know about their parents! If you have alternative or additional memories, there will be lots of time to share them at the wake later.

Judith was born on the 17th June 1949 to Eric and Frances Haynes, in Didcot, and as the only girl with older brothers, Robert and Tony, it's safe to assume that she was very much loved and indulged.

Intelligent and academic, she did well at school and went to London to study English Literature at UCL, where her professor was Frank Kermode, the influential critic. Judith caught the whiff of revolution in the air, and strode round London barefoot, in home-made flares, borne along by the tide of optimism which so many of us felt at that time.

She worked for a while for the Greater London Council, but conventional work never appealed – she much happier making costumes for fringe theatre, and backgammon boards which she sold in Kensington Gardens.

At a party, she met her husband to be, Cengiz Saner, then a drama student. They must have been a glamorous couple, particularly during the trip they took across eastern Europe to Turkey in an old Jaguar – the dashing Cengiz, and his beautiful blonde bride, who was seen as so unusual in Turkey at that time that people wanted to touch her in the streets. Though they later separated, they remained close.

But back then, they lived with her brothers and their partners in a big shared house in Myddelton Square, which was a melting pot of artists, writers and musicians – and where many of you, her family, also lived at various points. When their first daughter, Emine, was born, the three shared a room, but this didn't feel like something that could go on forever. They decided to move out of London and while visiting friends, they spotted a little house being advertised in Uppingham in Rutland. And that was where they headed off to, and where Kate was born a year later.

The house, facing an open area of green, was where the girls grew up, and where Judith lived until she came to Hastings a year ago. And it was here that her ingenuity, creativity and what I would call her inherent humanism took over. She made all their clothes, wrote and drew picture books for the girls, grew vegetables on the allotment and filled the coalshed with

home-made ginger beer. She also created an amazing garden behind the house, a constantly changing riot of colour.

She helped with adult literacy, the PTA, and with a mobile youth group. This meant she knew many of the town's young people, and the house became a focus for both the girls' friends, and for others, who loved the freedom they discovered there, born of Judith's radical thought and her caring nature.

Visitors would have found her sitting at the end of the kitchen table, looking out onto the green outside, one of endless pots of tea still warm, a nearly-finished Guardian cryptic crossword in front of her and Radio 4 on in the background.

To an outsider, it looked as if hers was a simple, quiet life but that would be to underestimate the richness of her inner world. She loved literature and mythology, and was intensely creative. She made beautiful clothes for herself and others, including wedding dresses for friends and family members, including some of you here today, but it is her knitting for which many people will remember her best. For Judith, knitting was an artistic process, not just a hobby – she had a knitted box under the kitchen table in which she kept various emblems and symbols that were important to her life.

At one point, the kitchen featured a great pile of knitted rocks, complete with tiny knitted creatures and plants in the crevices. More surprising was the knitted severed head of John the Baptist in one corner, and a number of tiny, instantly recognisable knitted heads on spikes of those she intended to take down. Weirdly, it seemed to work – she saw off Margaret Thatcher, and both Rupert Murdoch and John Terry have had their troubles. Tony Blair, organised religion and Bono had better watch out.

Her talent for knitting anything, and her unusual style, was spotted by a filmmaker, Vera Neubauer. Judith's eccentric sense of humour was just the right fit, and they worked well together, winning two Baftas for one film.

Judith was extremely forward-thinking in her politics and outlook on the world, but was also resistant to the trappings of modern life, and was impressively self-sufficient. Her heating was coal-powered, her clothes homemade.

However, when she discovered the internet last year, she instantly took to it – emailing family and friends, becoming an enthusiastic online shopper and spending hours reading football websites. Because her other great passion, of course, was Arsenal. Kate and Emine describe the night in February 2011, when Judith went to the Emirates stadium and saw Arsenal beat Barcelona 2-1 in the 83rd minute, as probably the best night of her life. She waved her Arsenal flag all the way home.

In March 2013, when she first became ill, Emine and Kate immediately knew that they would look after her, and they did so in an active and loving way which brought them all closer together. When it was decided that she should move in with Emine, Kate organised selling the house in Uppingham and dealing with the mountain of fabric, wool and books that it contained.

Always one to look forward, she wasn't sentimental about leaving her home – and more importantly, her garden – of 30 years and was excited about moving to Hastings. During the long summer last year when she was feeling well, she would walk along the seafront each day. In her short time here, she took an interest in her new town, buying shares in the new pier. She was extremely fond of Daniel, and would sometimes join him and Emine for dinner, but only when he was cooking – Emine would nag her to eat vegetables, but Daniel made the kind of old-fashioned comfort food she loved.

Best of all, she got to see her granddaughter Juniper every day. When Juniper was newborn, she would sleep for hours in her grandmother's arms and Judith took immense joy from playing and reading to her. Juniper saved many of her firsts for her grandmother – she gave her first smile to Judith. I'm told there is a strong resemblance of Judith in Juniper, and through her she lives on.

Kate is now going to read one of Judith's favourite poems, *The Windhover*, by Gerard Manley Hopkins, and then tell us a couple of stories about her mum.

Kate:

The Windhover

*I CAUGHT this morning morning's minion, king-
dom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in his riding
Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and striding
High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing
In his ecstasy! then off, off forth on swing,
As a skate's heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend: the hurl and gliding
Rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding
Stirred for a bird,—the achieve of; the mastery of the thing!*

*Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here
Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion
Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!*

*No wonder of it: shéer plód makes plough down sillion
Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,
Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermillion.*

I remember mum stood at the Rayburn in Uppingham energetically reciting this poem, and she suggested that it could be a reading for today, but I wanted to share two stories that made it seem so relevant for me.

Hopkins writes about a kestrel, but I want to talk about pigeons. When mum started having

chemotherapy in Leicester it involved sitting in a chair for eight hours and you can't help but have to talk to the people next to you. Initially the idea of this freaked her out but actually she found she really enjoyed it – she was more sociable than she would ever admit and these new friends became known as her chemo crew.

One afternoon I went to collect her after her treatment, and she was laughing as she proudly told me she was now an expert in pigeon fancying. The poor man sat next to her was an avid fancier and had brought along lots of pigeon magazines to read quietly. Mum had spent hours bombarding him with questions and as she left, he kindly gave her the magazine with her favourite pigeon on the cover – the roller, which impressively spirals and tumbles through the air. When we got home she made me search online for rollers, and we spent ages watching amateur home videos of these pigeons. Mostly made by odd men in Uzbekistan. Actually these birds are brilliant – just as impressive as a kestrel.

And as the morning came just after mum died, Emine, Juniper and I went for a long walk on the beach. The sun came up and reflected brightly in the wet sand, and as the day went on, the sea was lit brighter than we'd ever seen before. It was like the shine that Hopkins writes about. We both instinctively felt that was mum – the gold vermillion of her fallen embers illuminating brilliantly for us.