

*A Humanist Ceremony
to Celebrate the Life of
Mona Stakes*

19th February 1927 – 1st January 2019



*Conducted in the presence of her family and friends
on Tuesday 5th February 2019
at Dewsbury Moor Crematorium*

*Service taken by
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Tribute

Mona begins her autobiography back in 1926, when she was conceived, during the General Strike. As she puts it, she actually ‘came on the scene’ on 19th February 1927, and had a very protected childhood, as the only child of Leonard and Florrie Spurr. Leonard worked on the railways, and was able to provide well for his family. Mona remembers playing in the lobby of their home in Ravensthorpe, and feeling safe and warm being pushed around in her pram by her mum, which she continued to do until Mona was nearly old enough to go to school!

Her childhood memories were full of times spent playing with schoolfriends, in their gardens or the surrounding fields, making daisy chains, or dressing up. Her dad was always happy to join in when he was home from work; the other kids would knock on the door and ask, ‘Is Mr Spurr playing out?’ and he would join them to play ball. Or, if they were very lucky, he might give them a ride on his pride and joy, a Royal Enfield motorbike. Mona counted herself lucky as a child, as every year she and her parents got to go on holiday, taking the train over to Redcar. She also remembered being taken out in Leeds each spring, to get some new shoes or a straw hat ready for Whitsuntide, and being treated to afternoon tea in Collinson’s, which was ‘very posh, as also there was an orchestra – well, three ladies, on piano, violin and cello – playing while we ate.’

Unfortunately, Mona’s rather idyllic childhood came to an abrupt end at the age of 8 or 9, when her dad fell ill. He was unable to work, so money was tight, but Mona and her mum did all they could to keep managing the household. Mona described her mum as ‘a hard worker, who always held her head up proud’.

It was on Monday 10th January 1938 that Mona’s dad died; from then on, she could never bear the smell of hyacinths, as they had adorned all the bouquets and wreaths at his funeral.

Mona grew up almost overnight, becoming a very responsible young adult and pretty much looking after herself while her mum went out to work, making rugs, cleaning or weaving. Once Mona started senior school, she would do all the cooking for both of them, and the cleaning and shopping too, as Florrie was exhausted by the time she got home. There were moments of light relief, though; on a Saturday they would sometimes go to Dewsbury together and sit in the Gods at the Empire Theatre.

Mona was a bright girl, and did well at school, passing a scholarship to go to Dewsbury Tech Commercial School, but sadly she had to leave at fourteen to join the workforce and bring in some pennies, something she always regretted and was determined wouldn’t be repeated with her own children.

The Second World War came along after Mona had started senior school, and she said she actually had a good time during those war years; there was a sense of camaraderie, everyone helped each other and shared what they had. Mona would go out dancing with friends, making new clothes from old and managing to still look good; throughout her life she was a very smart dresser, and lived by the rule that hats, gloves and shoes make an outfit. She made her own contribution to the war effort working at the Vigil Silk Mill, weaving parachute silk.

Mona met her first husband, Desmond, through her mum, who was friends with one of Desmond's older sisters, Florence. They fell in love, and were married in August 1947 at St Saviour's Church in Ravensthorpe. They got a house just down the road from Florrie, on Foundry Street, and in 1951 began their own family, welcoming Janet, Margaret and Ruth to the world in fairly quick succession. Mona stayed at home to look after them, and had her hands full with three girls under five. She was a good homemaker, would bake her own bread, and always put a cooked meal on the table every dinnertime for Desmond and the girls to come home for.

She put her dress-making skills to good use, kitting all three of them out with clothes and knitted jumpers; they always had a new outfit made for Whitsuntide, just as Florrie had done for Mona. These outfits would be assembled on Mona's Singer treadle sewing machine, that she had acquired by selling her piano, much to her mum's horror; Mona's grandma had given the instrument to her when she was young, but she was prepared to take the practical view and give it up, and she certainly made very good use of the Singer once she had it. She even taught Janet, Margaret and Ruth to sew, and they all had their jobs to do around the house. Mona wasn't soft with her children, and was definitely the one in charge of discipline, not Desmond. But she took great pride in looking after her family, and they always knew they were loved.

The five of them would enjoy family holidays on the east coast, at Bridlington or Hunmanby Gap, or they would go and stay with Desmond's sisters, Nelly in Birkenhead or Nancy near Warrington. Wherever they went, there was always a high likelihood of Florrie appearing within a day or two; she still got free rail travel due to Leonard's previous employment, and she liked to make sure everyone was doing ok while they were away.

Desmond suffered with heart problems, and by the time Mona was in her late thirties he was unable to work. But she was never afraid of graft; she took up a job at the Spar grocery shop, and did some work assembling greetings cards for Rust Craft; she used to bring home all the parts, and sit with the girls round the dining room table sticking pop-ups inside the cards. Mona then became a nursing auxiliary at Dewsbury General Hospital. She worked Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights, which meant Janet, Margaret and Ruth always had to play quietly on a weekend, as their mum would be asleep, often on the living room sofa. But she loved the job, and was very proud of it, always telling tales of, 'When I was a nurse...!' She made good friends with the nursing sister on the ward, and also joined the local St John's Ambulance Brigade, going to weekly meetings accompanied by Janet.

Desmond was a very keen gardener, and won prizes, for his dahlias and chrysanthemums especially. Mona was happy to leave the cultivation to him, but she loved arranging the blooms, joining a flower-arranging club and sometimes teaching the other members. She also won prizes for her displays, and enjoyed the company of the other ladies, some of whom became good friends.

Mona cared for Desmond for several years as his health declined, until he died, leaving her a widow at 45. She was stoical about this, as about the other hardships she had suffered, and she continued to work for her family. She moved to work in old people's residential homes, becoming Assistant Matron at Austin Friar's in Dewsbury; Ruth was training as a student nurse at the time, and would come down after a night shift and have her breakfast at

the home. Mona became Deputy at Rectory Park in Thornhill, under the matron there, Sylvia. The two of them became good friends, even going away on holidays together. When Sylvia moved to work over in Selby, Mona went with her as Deputy, staying in the flat on site and only coming home alternate weekends.

Janet, Margaret and Ruth were old enough to be independent now, and Mona started to think about herself a little, deciding to place a small ad in the Yorkshire Post and see who she might meet. That was how Les came into her life, and Mona had a second chance at love. They married over forty years ago, and enjoyed so many happy times together.

Les had a caravan over at Stamford Bridge, and he and Mona would head over there most weekends, or go out for a run in the car, equipped with a flask and some sandwiches. Mona never learned to drive – Les did try to teach her once, but gave up when she reversed into a wall! – but she really enjoyed getting out in the car. They had a great social life over at the caravan, seeing friends on site, and liked exploring the moors, or going shopping in York, Scarborough, or their great favourite, Pickering.

Les always liked to listen to Classic FM, but Mona was not a fan of that ‘scratchy’ music! Luckily, they did share a love of brass band music, and were regular attendees at competition days all over, especially the annual event in Brighouse. Mona and Les would get there early and find a place just outside the fish and chip shop, where they could sit and enjoy the spectacle.

When Les and Mona were both retired, they took the opportunity to go a bit further afield, spending the winter months down in Spain for several years. They would take an apartment, somewhere new each time, and enjoy the warmer weather as they walked and explored the area. Les was a keen Rambler back home, and, though Mona wasn’t such a serious walker, she was very happy to join in with the other activities laid on when the rambles went on holiday together. She and Les also used to holiday with members of the OWLS group – Older Wiser Local Seniors; they greatly enjoyed the Warner breaks the club organised, as well as all the activities, like aerobics and swimming, that were put on each week. Mona, especially, liked the social side of it.

Mona used to love reading, especially in dialect; she attended the Dewsbury Dialect Group, and also used to go to the Knitter & Natter group at the local chapel where, as her arthritis was too bad to knit any more, she would read to the others. She put pen to paper herself over the years, and when out shopping would often quote from one of her favourite poems, that I am going to read to you now.

Thoughts of an OAP – a poem by Mona Stakes

*It’s a funny old world we live in
I’m glad I’m no longer young
There’s so much greed and corruption
No wonder people look glum*

*No one seems to sing any more
As they go about their chores
Only heavy trodden footsteps
All the houses with closed doors*

*What happened to the simple life
The innocence of living
The hands of friendship everywhere
All the loving and the giving*

*The trend is now to take, take, take
With very little thought
For those who've tried and worked hard
Yes! And even fought*

*It will be up to our children's children
To sort out all the mess
I wonder if they'll manage it
I'll leave you all to guess*

Mona was not particularly emotionally expressive with her children, but she was very proud of all three of them, and was delighted to become a grandmother, or Nana, to Matthew, Helen and Robert, as well as a great-grandmother to Phoebe, Lottie, James, Tom, Annie and Naya. It was lovely for her to see all six of the little ones together at her and Les' 40th wedding anniversary last year. In marrying Les, Mona had also become step-mum to Les' son David, who lives in Australia, and Mona and Les flew out there three times to see him and his family. This was much further than Mona had ever gone before, but she turned her excellent organisational and managerial skills to the task, and planned the whole trip each time, including stop-overs in exotic destinations like Hawaii and Kuala Lumpur. She embraced the chance of new experiences, though their stay in Jakarta for David and Lala's wedding was certainly an eye-opener. One of Mona's long-held travelling ambitions was to go on a cruise, but Les didn't fancy it; so, in 2010, Margaret accompanied her mum on board, and they toured the coast of Britain together.

Les may not have been a fan of boats, but he helped to expand Mona's horizons in so many ways, and she did things and went to places she never would have imagined, because of him. He also successfully tempered Mona's cautious approach to spending; she liked the finer things in life, but would often see something she wanted, then exclaim, 'I'm not paying that!' Les would just tell her, 'If you want it, have it.' They were a very close couple, and enjoyed forty wonderful years together, though the past few months were difficult for them both. Mona spent most of her life looking after people; she and Les helped care for Florrie to the end of her life, and she cared for Les when he started to suffer with dementia. She was very pleased when they got their flat in Woodland Court six months ago, and appreciated the extra support she gained from the fabulous staff there, and from her own family, who did all they could to help. In the end, Mona passed away how she wanted, at home in her chair, watching the telly.

She was a resourceful and intelligent woman, who got on with things without complaint, though she was not one to suffer fools gladly. She was a good friend, encouraging, kind and thoughtful, who gave useful and valued advice. And she loved her family deeply, though she chose her own way to show it. She lived a full life, and a happy one, despite the difficulties she faced, and she is greatly missed.