



# Olivia MacDonald

**27<sup>th</sup> September 1934 – 18<sup>th</sup> August 2018**

## The Tribute

This next section of the ceremony, known as the tribute, is usually a fairly linear story of someone's life, starting at the beginning, finishing at the end. But Livvie's life was not entirely linear, so I am going to start in 1990, and work forward and back from there, hopefully in this way giving appropriate weight to all parts of her life.

By that time she and Iris were no longer together, and Livvie was living in Cornwall, first in Lostwithiel, where she started a decorative wrought iron craft business called Windmill Crafts. Then she moved to High Cottage in Bodmin, and moved the business to Charles Town and shared premises with other like-minded craftspeople.

In 1990 she had a stroke, which began a process which she later described to her son, Brian, in this way: "Although I usually say my story started with my stroke in January 1990, looking back there were various occasions throughout my life when things didn't feel right, somehow,

but I hadn't the vaguest idea why. But the stroke seemed to change all that. For several years after the stroke my feelings, and my whole outlook on life, slowly began to change...[and by] the late 1990s, the strength of these feelings had grown so strong that I was having difficulty living two separate lives and I knew I would have to make a choice."

In those years following the stroke, Livvie didn't go back to full time work, but worked part time while she was still in Cornwall in a haberdashery shop. And that's when she really discovered her passion for costume-making, combining her love of the folk tradition with her love of making things, to produce great costumes for the Bodmin Riding.

Livvie and Teresa first came into contact in the year 2000, on an on-line forum for people going through gender reassignment. It was when Livvie asked for advice on B&Bs in Hove, because she was visiting a consultant there, that Teresa, who was in Seaford at the time, emailed straight back and said "I live nearby, you can stay here". She got the offer in exactly 10 minutes before Grace made a similar offer, and the moment she met Livvie, she was glad she had – they immediately became firm friends.

Over the next year or two, Livvie and Teresa visited each other several times, and when Teresa got the flat in Hailsham in 2002, which had a spare room, Livvie left Bodmin and moved in with her, gradually filling the flat and the shed with tools, fabric, electronic gizmos and all the "stuff" that a creative person accumulates around them.

In 2005, Livvie described their relationship to Brian: "She is the reader, writer, thinker, financier, whilst I am the maker, mender, creator, DIYer": in other words, a great, complementary partnership.

Livvie settled quickly into life in Hailsham, making costumes for the Hailsham Theatre Group, and even appearing in a play herself once, apparently stealing the show as a deaf and dotty knitter. As one of the

few skills Livvie didn't have was knitting, a kind friend, Liz, prepared for her knitting in various lengths, so she could appear to be knitting more and more as time passed. She progressed to making costumes for Hailsham Community College, and through the friends she made at the theatre group, particularly Sandra, she became a pillar of Herstmonceux WI, going on courses at Denman's College, on overlocking, and of course baking, which helped her to indulge her love of cake. Even if she had her headphones in, and her hearing aids switched off, Livvie could hear a cake tin open at 100 paces.

Of course, her passion for making things didn't come from nowhere: it had informed her whole life. Her earlier working life was in electronics and engineering, with Bakelite, Rover, and Lucas Aerospace, the now mostly vanished giants of the West Midlands engineering industry. She had several hobbies during those years which involved the ability to fix and improve things – anyone who has owned a boat or a motorbike will tell you how much creativity is involved in keeping them in tip top condition.

She had started sailing when she was in Cyprus as a radio operator with the Royal Signals in the early 50's, and boats remained a major part of her life. Her interest in canal cruising began with a small fiberglass boat, Snoopy2, and then, after taking up electric arc welding, she built two steel narrowboats, Aquarius and Tramontana, in which she cruised the country's waterways striving to obtain the Inland Waterways Silver Sword Award. She also enjoyed the Isle of Wight powerboat racing with cousin Dennis and brother John.

And Brian remembers how she used her creativity and ingenuity to support his brothers Alan and John. Iris gave birth to quads in 1959, two of whom, Kenneth and Stephen, died as babies, but Alan and John survived till 1970. There was very little support available to families of disabled children in those days, and Livvie built the two boys wheelchairs, devised tools they could use to feed themselves and play

their favourite music, and generally put all that creativity and all those construction skills to good use.

I heard from Jackie and her family how much Livvie and Teresa became part of their lives, once they were all in Hailsham, picking the children up from school, taking them to dance classes, going off on trips together to the miniature railway and Arundel Wildfowl Centre, and on holiday together. I also heard about her “wicked lavatory humour” which regularly had the whole family in stitches, and the way she and Mags used to wind each other up. And Livvie was always at hand to help in an emergency – when Olivia fell off a wall in the park, Livvie was just walking past, so Mags thrust Emily at her, saying “Hold Emily, I’m taking Olivia to the hospital”

And she will long be remembered as a terrible cheat at the game Uno, always offering to keep score and always getting it just a little bit wrong ... in her favour, of course.

Livvie grew up in Birmingham during the war, an unsettled existence, as the family were driven out of several houses by bomb damage. One of the family’s homes in those years was near Austin Motors, in Longbridge, which was building Lancaster bombers, and Livvie was fascinated by watching the giant beasts roll off the production line and head off to war in the hands of the women of the Air Transport Auxillary.

She always remained interested in planes and flying. For her 70<sup>th</sup> birthday, she had a flying lesson at Shoreham airport, and for her 75<sup>th</sup>, a VIP weekend at the Lincolnshire Aviation Heritage Centre, which styles itself as a living memorial to the Lancaster Bombers and their crews.

Her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday present was a steam engine kit, which was never quite finished, as she began to feel too cold working out in the shed, and the living room was already full of sewing kit and the birdwatching equipment she constructed for Teresa. Among other things, she built an enormous directional mike for use on birdwatching expeditions, but

when it was finished it looked like a huge gun, and she never took it out in case she got arrested.

In her younger days, Livvie had learned to play the acoustic guitar, and folk music became her thing. With friends she met in guitar class, she formed a small group who gave concerts in old people's homes and elsewhere. Her sister Ruth used to sing with them, and thus met her future husband, Bob, who was a member of the band. Livvie's passion for music became more and more eclectic as she got older – she left 12 hours of her very favourite tracks on her ipod – pity poor Teresa having to select just 3 for this ceremony.

Livvie had so many passions and interests that it's hard to fit them in in a short ceremony. She loved shopping (which was a good thing because Teresa doesn't like it at all), and would regularly go off to Sainsburys with their much-loved neighbour Sheila, always slightly perilous expeditions as they would get chatting and forget to turn left on roundabouts. And she loved animals – I noticed that almost every photo of her I was shown involved her cuddling a cat or a dog. In earlier years she made home-made wine, and worked part time as a cinema projectionist. And I'm sure much, much more.

Above all, she was a kind, caring and compassionate person, and many of the messages which Teresa has received reflect that, particularly the one from her former neighbour, Jeanette, in Cornwall, who she supported through serious illness.

One of the girls once asked Livvie what her favourite colour was. Her answer was "I don't have a favourite, I'm just a very colourful person".