



A celebration of the life of

Patricia Mary Clark

24th February 1933 - 18th February 2019

7th March 2019, 12 noon

at

The Cemetery Chapel, Tunbridge Wells

Celebrant: Felicity Harvest, accredited by

Humanist
Ceremonies

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The Tribute

Pat was a proud Irishwoman. She was born in the tiny village of Corofin on a snowy night in 1933. Her father, Michael, worked on the West Clare Railway, and at the time of her birth he was away down the line, leaving her mother, Mary, to open the gates of the level crossing in his absence. A local farmer, out to feed his cattle, noticed that the level crossing gate had been smashed by a train, and realised something must be wrong. He dug his way into the cottage, and there was Mary in front of the fire with a tiny bundle at her feet. For a long time, Pat was known as “snowdrop”.

In her childhood, she spent much of her time with The Grandmother, who was a kind of “walking hospital” in the village, setting bones and delivering children, and dispensing wise advice. Seeing the young Patricia helping out her cousin Sonny when he fell over, and rescuing her brother from a lake, The Grandmother wisely predicted that the young girl would grow up to be a nurse.

There was little work to be had in Corofin for Pat and her siblings, so at the age of 15 she was sent off to stay with her sister in Cardiff to look for employment. She travelled alone, by train, then ferry, then train again, having never been out of the village before. She asked her father how she'd know what to do, and he said “follow the crowd”, which is what she did and ended up safely at her sister's. The fact she could achieve that was a sign of the confidence which she exhibited all her life.

She did several jobs in Cardiff, but it was when she was working in the auxiliary department of a big hospital that the matron spotted her talent, and suggested she train as a nurse, which she did, emerging from that training into the newly-created NHS. She loved nursing, and specialised in theatre work for many years.

And it was in Cardiff that she met Jim, in 1956, at the Victoria Palace Dance Hall. He was in Cardiff as part of his training, and staying in digs.

He spotted her at the top of a flight of stairs when he was at bottom, and apparently his first reaction was “She’s ancient!” – actually she was exactly the same age as him. Her first reaction was no more flattering, as she told him he stank of fish and chips – which he did, having just had a fish supper. However, having got over those first hurdles, the relationship flourished, though they had nearly 5 years long-distance courtship to manage before they married in Kensington High Street in 1961, having finally managed to both get themselves work in the same city. They had their wedding reception at the fashionable El Sombrero club opposite the church, with a very small wedding cake – Pat thought she was ordering a cake which would be 3lbs in weight – in fact, the £3 involved was the price!

Once married, they continued to move round the country, spending a while in Manchester where Pat worked at a private convent hospital, St Joseph’s. There she found herself nursing the stars of Coronation Street, and Manchester United players such as Harry Gregg and Maurice Setters. She ran the operating theatre at St Josephs, and also was de facto in charge of the ward which was nominally run by Sister John. Sister John didn’t really much enjoy nursing – she was much happier polishing the floors and dispensing whiskey to patients, but she was also a giver of wise advice, and it was her who encouraged Pat to see a doctor, a consultation which led to the birth of Patti in 1967. Patti was, of course, to find herself back in Manchester as an adult, and also working on Corrie.

Going back, though, to when Patti was five, the family set off for Singapore. Jim went first, with Pat and Patti following later – much later, as it turned out, because the engine fell off their plane in Rome, and they were delayed for several days, sightseeing and eating expensive ice cream. But a woman who’d travelled alone from a tiny village to Cardiff at the age of 15 wasn’t going to be daunted by such events.

Pat couldn't get a permit to work in Singapore, so she had five years in which she volunteered for various charities, developed her skills in decoupage, and had a great social life. They lived in a modern block called Crystal Towers, which had a different nationality living on each floor, and Patti loved to "perform" on the balconies. "That girl will grow up to be an actress" people said, and just like the prediction of The Grandmother back in Corofin all those years ago, this turned out to be true.

Patti will now talk to us about her Mum:

Hello everyone. Dad and I would like to just thank you all for coming today to join us and Mum. We really do appreciate it and thank you for all these wonderful flowers. Mum loved flowers. It always gave her the greatest pleasure to receive them so thank you.

I'm a Buddhist as you may know and I've found great comfort in this piece written by Daisaku Ikeda who is the President of the Buddhist organization I belong to-

"Buddhism identifies the pain of parting from one's loved ones as one of life's inevitable sufferings. It is certainly true that we cannot avoid experiencing the sadness of separation in this life.

Shakyamuni, the Buddha who lived in India over 2,000 years ago, lost his mother when he was just one week old. As he grew up, he always wondered, "Why did my mother die? Where did she go? Where can I go to meet her? What is this thing 'death' that has robbed me of my mother? What, after all, is life?"

His sorrow at the loss of his mother became a powerful driving force which enabled him to have deep compassion for others and to seek the truth of life.

One day he met a woman whose child had died; she was wandering about in a grief-stricken daze with the tiny body clutched to hers. "Please give me some medicine to save my baby," she begged Shakyamuni, her eyes red with tears.

He knew the child was past saving, but wanted somehow to

encourage her. He told her to fetch some poppy seeds so he could make medicine, but only to collect poppy seeds from families which had never known bereavement.

The woman hurried off into town and called on every household. But although many had poppy seeds, there was not a single house in which there had never been a death. The distraught mother gradually came to realize that every family lived with the sadness of lost loved ones quietly concealed somewhere in their hearts. Through this experience she realized she was not alone in her feelings of grief....

In the Buddhist view, the bonds that link people are not a matter of this lifetime alone. And because those who have died in a sense live on within us, our happiness is naturally shared with those who have passed away. So, the most important thing is for those of us who are alive at this moment to live with hope and strive to become happy.”

In the last few months of her life I was so fortunate and now am so grateful that I was able to spend a lot of time with Mum. I have always loved to make her laugh and I think that will be an abiding memory of her for me.. of lying next to her on the bed and laughing and laughing.

We also talked about life and death too and agreed on what we thought would happen next. I told her I deeply believe I would meet her again and I remember her nodding and saying, “ That’s what I believe too!”

I can begin to tell you what a fabulous, inspirational woman she was...she has been such a profound influence on my life and I know on many of you here too but where do you begin?? She was wonderfully unique, passionate, fearless, scarily intuitive, maddeningly right {most of the time} and above all the most compassionate woman I have known. She taught me a lot about compassion.

So

How lucky am I to have been able to call her Mum.

Thank you.

And now Jim:

Most of you know Patricia from previous years and know the make up of her personality.

From her background she developed an appreciation of strong women who could not only look after themselves but had compassion for other people, hence her success as a nurse and human being.

One of Pat's favourite books was about a woman called Oonagh Shanley-Toffolo (nee Shanley) who had a similar background to Pat being brought up in rural Ireland and then going on to become a nurse.

In that book there was an insert of a poem called "A Strong Woman vs A Woman of Faith".

"A strong woman isn't afraid of anything.

A strong woman won't let anyone get the better of her.

A strong woman makes mistakes and avoids the same in the future.

A strong woman has faith that she is strong enough for the journey.'

Pat has always believed in all of these ideas and used them through out her life.

In other words, Pat was a strong woman but a compassionate woman too.

When Jim moved back from Singapore to London for work, they bought their house in Tunbridge Wells and Pat went back to nursing. She found though that in the years she'd been away, practices in operating theatres had changed, and she felt she was no longer up to date. So she moved on to geriatric nursing, a role in which she was in constant demand. She loved the work, and had that great knack of making people feel better and more comfortable, just as a result of her presence.

Away from work, Jim and Pat had a much-loved cottage on the Burren, not far from where Pat had grown up. But they also travelled the world. They were sun-seekers, and they loved meeting up with family members in Canada, Australia and New Zealand, and being visited by those family members in return. They fell into a pattern of always going away as a family at Christmas – at first to the Burren, but after one particularly trying winter, they started to go further afield, to Venice, and to Singapore, and sometimes to London to stay in a posh hotel and do a couple of shows.

Pat was a woman of strong views, who was never reluctant to share them. Having left the Catholic church, she was always up for a good debate with a Catholic priest – or indeed, anyone else who would like a meaningful conversation – she was never one for small talk. Indeed, Jim described his last conversation with her as “gentle bickering” over whether or not it was a problem that her carer had not arrived.

She touched the lives of so many people, and her care, her love, and her insights will be much missed.