

A CELEBRATION OF THE LIFE OF

SHIRLEY JOY BORSBERRY

26th March 1953 - 19th December 2018

held at

Banbury Crematorium

on 3rd January 2019



Humanist Celebrant

Ian Willox

01865 589 663

ian.willox@humanistceremonies.org.uk

Humanists UK

39 Moreland Street, London, EC1V 8BB

020 7324 3060

www.humanism.org.uk

Funeral Director

Humphris Funerals

Banbury

ENTRANCE

Fields Of Gold – Sting

OPENING WORDS

Good morning everyone. We're here to celebrate the life of Shirley Joy Borsberry who died on 19th December aged only 65.

INTRODUCTION

I should introduce myself. My name is Ian Willox. I'm a celebrant for Humanists UK. Shirley asked for a Humanist funeral - a non-religious funeral. That doesn't mean anti-religious. This is a ceremony for everyone – including those with a religious faith.

THOUGHTS ON LIFE AND DEATH

With or without religion, one of the purposes of a funeral is to remember – so that Shirley lives on in our memories at least.

So let's remember...

TRIBUTE

...except I have no memories of Shirley. I never met her.

Instead I spent a morning with her husband David, her big sister Jean, her boys David and Paul and her stepdaughter Vicki in the front room of Ribston Close. Oh and there was also Denzil the Labrador – but once he'd got over the initial excitement of a stranger he didn't have much to say. Unlike Shirley's family.

Here's as many of their memories as I can squeeze into the time allowed.

Shirley was born in a cottage in Creampot Lane in Cropredy. Her parents were Joyce and Eric Weller. Eric was a printer. She has an elder sister – Jean – and a younger one – Diane.

She began her education at Cropredy until the family moved to Banbury when she was eight. She switched to St Mary's in Southam Road, followed by Easington Secondary Modern for Girls.

She was bright enough to be offered a place at Grammar School but preferred to stay with her friends at Easington. Shirley's English Mistress Miss Gibson told her that she should teach.

But that would have meant further education.

Instead Shirley got a job with Lloyd's Bank in Banbury. After marriage and moves to Bicester and back to Banbury she ended up at the Midland. Which she didn't enjoy.

She became dental receptionist and bookkeeper for Martin Amsel. Her talent for handling people quickly proved her worth – especially when it came to persuading them to pay their bills.

And her keen wits proved vital.

One of Martin Amsel's patients noticed the initials PITA on his notes. It's code for Pain In The Arse. He asked Shirley what the note meant. Quick as a flash she replied "Patient In Treatment Already".

Sadly Shirley's marriage ended in divorce.

David says that the first time he and Shirley met properly was when he was deputed to give her a lift to a party. He was dressed as a pirate.

Shirley was dressed as a wood nymph.

David's work meant he had to move back North. Shirley went to visit him. And stayed.

Shirley and David were married at Sunderland Civic Centre on 28th July 1988. Which, the more mathematically adroit of you will have already deduced, means 2018 was their Pearl anniversary. David bought Shirly a pair of pearl earrings and a pearl ring.

The newlywed couple honeymooned in Sandy Bay in Devon. In a chalet. With the children – David, Paul and Lee – though Vicki was in the USA by this time. With the three children came the dog.

And in a nearby caravan Jean and her family kept Shirley and David company.

The boys have fond memories of the honeymoon. It's when they got their first skateboards.

So we have David and Shirley, living up north. Shirley is looking after four children, the dog, the cats and the garden. So obviously she had spare time on her hands.

She trained as a counsellor for victims of crime and volunteered for Victim Support.

She went back to school. To learn to teach. After four years of hard work she got a 2.1 with Honours from Sunderland University. She learned to love the maths she had hated as a schoolgirl.

At the tender age of 42 she started teaching in Sunderland, specialising in working with children with special needs – and – because she was the only teacher in the school with her computer turned on – she was made IT co-ordinator for the school. She became a Teacher Governor.

Those kids with special needs could be challenging. But somehow Shirley managed.

There's the story of the boy who didn't understand fractions. "Imagine you've a cake" said Shirley.

"If you cut it in half what do you get?"

"Two halves?"

“And if you cut in in half again so you have four equal pieces?”

“Four quarters?”

“And if we each take a quarter what’s left?”

“Two quarters.”

“In other words a half. Two quarters makes one half. And if we each take another quarter what’s left?”

The boy pondered for a bit.

“Crumbs Miss?”

When that boy heard of Shirley’s death he sent David this message:

“The most inspirational and amazing woman I ever did meet! the world is worse off without her in it! Rest in peace Mrs Borsberry”

He wasn’t the only former pupil to remember Shirley. His message was just one of many David has received.

But let’s hear from a responsible adult about those teaching years. Shirl’s longstanding friend Liz Headley. Shirley asked if she would speak to day.

LIZ HEADLEY:

In some respects, this has been one of the hardest and yet one of the easiest things I’ve ever had to say – hard because it’s Shirl and it shouldn’t be happening, but also easy because I could talk about this amazing lady for days! That said I can imagine Shirl laughing at me now saying, ‘Just say it how it is bab!’ as she said that to me a lot. Well hopefully I’ll be able to do her proud today - it’s just a matter of where to start...

I first met Shirl in the June of 1999 – fresh out of Uni and about to embark on my first teaching post at a school in Witherwack in Sunderland. To say I was completely naïve was an understatement – I had no idea how rough of a ride it was going to be, so it was no surprise that within weeks of starting I had my resignation letter written and was considering a career change. It was Shirl who changed all of that.

She had the classroom next door to me and she instantly took me under her wing. She saw the best in everything, always had a smile and could always bring round a seemingly dire situation to have a positive outcome no matter how ridiculous.

The staff, parents and children all respected her, liked her, looked up to her – she was like an oracle – and from there our friendship blossomed – she became a best friend, a second mum, a mentor, an inspiration and, twenty years on, I’m still a teacher in a

managerial and respected position – having helped and educated many a child, and hands down I owe it all to Shirl.

She literally helped me set my life on track but not just that – she really cared with every bone in her body, every fibre in her being – what happened to people and how she could help them. Dave also became a second dad (bless him). He had to put up with me becoming a permanent fixture – taking up garden space – although I still can't tell the difference between a flower and a weed, or keep a plant alive for longer than a week (no matter how hard she tried to educate me). I tended to sit and pretend to work while she potted round the garden – a place she loved and I'll always be able to see her – sitting with a glass of red wine -or maybe even the box!

We cooked together (I'll never be able to think of tikka wraps with cream cheese and mango chutney without thinking of her), we shopped together (can't get a better bargain than the stalls in the 'InShops' in the Galleries), and we even tried every diet and exercise regime together! I even remember after one particularly trying day we went for a ride in my little Peugeot 206 where we blasted Madonna's Immaculate Collection album and screamed at the top of our voices until we collapsed in fits of laughter – this is the kind of thing I want to remember when I think of Shirl.

Shirl always thought of others and the messages I've received – and will pass on – from past pupils, parents and fellow members of staff unable to make the journey to be here today – show this in abundance. Words like caring, comforting, thoughtful, passionate and magical are just some that have been mentioned. I asked about some of their favourite memories and there are a few I would like to share with you. I may point out that rarely were any of these academic. They were all linked to her personality, her warmth and her soul - that she shared willingly. Many mentioned her constant looking for her glasses - that could usually be located on top of her head! Another was when she bent down to pick up a pile of books out of the bottom of the cupboard and accidentally let out an enormous pump – instead of getting embarrassed Shirl and the children laughed 'til they cried and when finally able to get her breath, declared that even the Queen pumps! We laughed about it for weeks.

Dawn her TA of many years told me how she remembered that she kept silly notes from the parents pinned to the inside of her cupboard and when things got hard she stuck her head in the cupboard, read them and always came out smiling. I don't know why it sticks with me but I can even remember her favourite note – 'Raymond says he can't do PE today because his legs say they are hurting him'. It always brought a smile to her face. Above all – the children she helped over the years – all said that it was knowing that she truly cared, that she told them she'd be proud of them if they tried their best no matter what the outcome was and that she made them feel safe, was what they most remembered most about her. If that's not the best legacy to leave as a teacher then I don't know what is.

Like I said to you at the beginning I could go on forever with the wonderful memories as I'm sure many of you could too – her surprise 50th birthday at the Greyhound

stadium, our trip to Stansted for teacher training (I do have photographic evidence she wanted me to burn), her Ann Summer's party, her love of art and impromptu family BBQs to name but a few. But I think we all know though that what made Shirl happiest though was Dave (her rock) and her family. She was so immensely proud of you all – I felt I knew most of you before we even met. She had so much love to give and revelled in the special times you spent together; birthdays, Christmas, marriages, births, new partnerships, holidays in the South of France and returning to Banbury to be with family – particularly Jeanio - after retirement.

To me these are the times she would like us to remember – perhaps with a tear while it's still all raw, but eventually with a smile or even a laugh, to go with the heavy heart. She gave so much love to me personally - I'm so aware of the profound effect she had on my life (although I don't think she did) and that I'm a better person for having known her. I'll never be able to thank her enough for that but I'll try, by living by her ideal, treasuring loved ones and making time for them, and trying to look for the good in every situation. But Shirl, it's so hard 'cos you're such a big miss already – love you bab!

As Liz has told you, Shirley had plenty of time for her family. She became surrogate mother to all the children's friends. Friends who renamed the house "Endor" – after the lush forest moon in Star Wars, home of the Ewok. The teenagers would pitch up, play David's LPs, order pizza and hang out with a beer. Shirley would let their families know they were safe.

One of those teenagers sent Paul this message:

"She was awesome and I know how much she'll be missed. I have nothing but great memories of her and will never forget her understanding and hospitality of having a bunch of pissed virgins in her house weekend after weekend!"

In 2008 David's work brought him back south – to get a new factory established in Buckingham.

David and Shirley preferred to buy a house in Banbury though. To be close to family. Though Shirley's father sadly died just before the move.

David and Shirley's children had all left home by now. Shirley was thinking of teaching in Banbury, but ended up looking after her mother instead. During which she decided she'd done enough teaching. It was time for holidays.

Nearly three decades before, Shirl and David had bought a touring caravan. They took it to Scotland. They took it to Cornwall. They took it to France. And left it there. Because the campsite and the people suited them. They went back year after year. 2018 was the first year they didn't go to France.

Though their French holidays were hardly going to be a solo effort – given the family heavy honeymoon.

When Jean was staying Shirley tried to teach her a little French to get by. So when the man at the toilet block said "*Bonne journee Madame*" – "Good day Madame" – Jean replied confidently "My name is Jean" – and Shirley dragged her away in embarrassment.

And when she tried to teach the boys some useful basics like "*Je ne comprends pas*" – "I don't understand" – it came out as "*Jolly bon bon bah*".

It was one of those stories that Shirley could barely tell for laughing.

David and Shirl took three or four holidays a year. Tenerife, Lanzarote, Benidorm. They were planning on Gran Canaria in 2018. Shirley's sudden illness meant they had to cancel. She spent the money they saved on a new front door and told David to order a new TV.

She knew how to keep house.

She knew how to be a mother.

She knew how to be a grandmother. Nanny Shirl.

And Nanny Shirl still knew how to teach.

When Jean's granddaughter Naomi, aged 6, was struggling with her sums, Shirley sat down with her at the kitchen table and explained things. That hour or so with Nanny Shirl was all that was needed. She's never looked back.

Last March David celebrated Shirley's 65th birthday by taking her for a meal at the Falcon Pub – a long standing tradition.

The next day she was rushed to hospital. Cancer. A major operation. Chemotherapy and Radiotherapy took up the months of June to August.

And all looked well. Then, in the middle of walking the dog with David, Shirley became breathless. Back into hospital. But this time it wasn't cancer. In fact what it was was so rare it took some time to diagnose. Antisynthetase syndrome. An autoimmune disease.

By the time the disease was identified and treatment started Shirley's lung capacity was severely compromised. Shirley's doctor warned her she must not fly or scuba dive. Snorkelling was apparently ok. It amused Shirley.

I get the impression that a lot amused Shirley. "I'm a tough old bird" she would say.

She loved cooking, music, reading, walks, the gym, her garden, her birds, and her family. All of them.

And she was loved back. And not just by her family.

Bowen, Aubrie and Kalandie live at the top of Ribstone Close with their parents Donna Marie and Matthew. They'd say hello to Shirley when she was working at the front of the house. It ended up that the children would ask to be allowed to knock on the door to say hello to Shirley if she wasn't outside.

It was Bo's 5th birthday last Christmas Eve. Shirley told David to buy him a birthday present. A JCB digger and a Police Emergency Vehicle. Shirley wrote the gift label herself. Even though she was very ill by this stage. She knitted dolly blankets for Aubrey and Kalandie.

And she looked after her own family. She sat them down and made them have a serious talk about her funeral. She wanted a Humanist funeral because she wasn't religious and she liked the Humanist ceremonies she had seen. She wanted a "flash of colour" at her funeral. She wanted it to be uplifting. She chose the music. And asked Vicki to read and Liz to give a tribute.

Shirley was a rare woman. With a very rare disease. And apparently an equally rare blood type. When her rare disease reasserted itself she was taken to the Horton then rushed to the JR in a special ambulance at speed with blues and twos going using the back roads to save time.

She wanted her sister Jean to tell Jean's daughter Rachael who used to take 999 calls that it was the most exciting ride of her life.

She texted her family once she got there to say she was just chilling.

Her family visited and kept watch over her. She died at the JR on 19th December.

Time for Vicki and that reading:

VICKI:

I am very honoured that Shirley specifically asked me to read something today. I agreed mostly because I couldn't actually believe she was going to leave us and I wanted to keep her happy. Being a great organiser, she also left me very specific instructions for what I should say. Shirley had kept a diary of her experiences throughout her medical treatment, and the last few pages were written on the night of Friday 14th December. She wrote to me

"A little project for you darling. Look up Caitlin Moran and the words on my phone message from my friend Jeanette Hesketh who sent me these comforting words. It will help everyone. Profound yet simple."

Thankfully I had visited Shirley that night, I had been driving down to Cornwall when I had a very strong urge on the M3 to change direction and head to Oxford and go see

Shirley instead. We spent an hour chatting and she seemed so determined, and she was in the best possible care, that I left with hope in my heart that her health was going to improve..... but this is what she wanted me to read to you.....

Here is a promise, and a fact: you will never, in your life, ever have to deal with anything more than the next minute. However much it feels like you are approaching an event - an exam, a conversation, a decision, a kiss - where, if you screw it up, the entire future will just burn to hell in front of you and you will end, you are not.

That will never happen. That is not what happens.

The minutes always come one at a time, inside hours that come one at a time, inside days that come one at a time - all orderly strung, like pearls on a necklace, suspended in a graceful line. You will never, ever have to deal with more than the next 60 seconds.

Do the calm, right thing that needs to be done in that minute. The work, or the breathing, or the smile. You can do that, for just one minute. And if you can do a minute, you can do the next.

This advice is an extract from a letter to a teenage girl....but I think this is a universal concept....to live in the now, live in the moment. And I also think over the coming days, weeks, months we will all have plenty of opportunity to put this into practice, and it will help us manage our grief and find strength to take the next step, to face the next day. And it is an entirely typical caring act that Shirley would want to give us these words of comfort and advice today.

You will never, ever have to deal with more than the next 60 seconds. And if you can do a minute, you can do the next.

QUIET REFLECTION

We're coming to the end of this celebration of Shirley's life. But before we do we're going to pause for a moment of reflection. A chance for you to digest all you've heard. A chance for you to recall your own memories of her. A chance, if you wish, to pray silently. A chance to listen to the lyrics.

Say You Won't Let Go - James Arthur

COMMITTAL

Just as we welcome a child into our lives we must say goodbye to those who leave us. This celebration of Shirley's life is complete. It's time to say farewell to her. This may be difficult but it is important. I hope the memories we've talked about here may give you some comfort.

FINAL FAREWELL

Our atoms and molecules come from the earth;
Are ordered by ancestry;
Are fired into life by union;
Are sustained by the earth and powered by the sun;
And return to the earth when life ends.

John Stiffin

Shirley Joy Borsberry. Daughter of Joyce and Eric. Sister to Jean and Diane. Former wife to Spencer. Wife to David. Mother of David and Paul. Step mother to Vicki and Lee. Much loved Aunt to Marcus, Rachael, Adam and James. Grandmother to twins Amber and Rowan, to Myles and Taylor, and to Billy and George. I say Grandmother. To Billy and George Shirl was actually Nanny Squirrel – from when Billy was a baby and she introduced him to a squirrel at the bedroom window.

Nanny Squirrel - we commit your body to be cremated. Rest in the hearts and minds of all you love and all who love you.

CLOSING WORDS

Please be seated. We've celebrated Shirley's life. We've said our goodbyes. But we have our memories. And the rest of our lives to remember.

If you want to share those memories – or just some refreshment – you're warmly invited to join the family at the Hanwell Arms. You'll find details in your order of service.

As you leave you'll see that you can make a donation in Shirley's memory to Cancer Research UK and to The National Organisation for Rare Disorders. Again you'll find details in your order of service.

Please take good care of yourselves and each other.

Thank you for coming.

EXIT

Last Of The Mohicans - Promontory – Trevor Jones