

*A Humanist Ceremony  
to Celebrate the Life of  
Shirley Patricia Simmonds*

*18<sup>th</sup> May 1936 – 29<sup>th</sup> May 2018*



*Conducted in the presence of her family and friends*

*Service taken by  
Hannah McKerchar  
Humanist Celebrant*

*Funeral Director*

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*(Music heard on entering: Cello Concerto in E Minor (3<sup>rd</sup> mvmt: Adagio) by Edward Elgar)*

*Good afternoon, and welcome to you all. We are here to say farewell to the remarkable lady that was Shirley Simmonds, to reflect on her life and celebrate all that she achieved. My name is Hannah McKerchar, and I am a celebrant accredited by Humanists UK. This will be a non-religious ceremony, a chance for those close to Shirley to pay tribute to her, and for us all to consider our connection with her. We are going to pause for a moment in silence, later in the service, to think of Shirley, and you are welcome to use that time for prayer if you wish.*

*Someone once wrote, 'The men and women whose names are written in history are few, but there are many whose quality of life is built into the fabric of our country, its traditions and its institutions. The good deeds of a person do not die with them. The work they did, the smiles they brought, the way in which they kept working through difficult times – these and other aspects of them cannot be erased. These gifts and effort have been added to the collective heritage of all humans; but it is not without tears that we watch them leave our lives.' Shirley gave of herself in so many different ways through her life, and the impact she made will be felt for many years to come.*

*She was born in Holme Valley Hospital, grew up in Thongsbridge, and always lived around Holmfirth, apart from her time at teacher training college at Goldsmith's College down in London. She enjoyed that time in the capital, developing a love of the theatre that continued throughout her life, and which drew her back to London many times. Shirley's time down there was not without incident; at the time of her final exams her leg gave way, thanks to a bone cyst leading to a fracture, and she had to spend twelve weeks in traction in New Cross Hospital before she was able to transfer back up north. That leg always caused her bother, but it never slowed her down; Shirley was something of a force of nature, and was heavily involved in extra-curricular activities, from table tennis to camping, at all the schools where she subsequently worked as a science teacher. In her retirement, if anything, she got even busier, and her friend and colleague at Friend to Friend, Isobel Holland, is going to tell us more.*

### ***Isobel's Tribute***

*Shirley was full of energy, fun, warm-hearted and often had a wicked gleam in her eye. She was also one of the most clear-sighted people I have ever met.*

*From her career as a teacher, to her work with the Samaritans, youth club, CAMEO, voluntary stewarding at the Lawrence Batley (a good example of Shirley efficiency – help the community and see plays for free, win win!) and of course Friend to Friend. Not only did she see a problem, she worked out how to resolve it and how to turn that into something of lasting worth.*

*That is the story of Friend to Friend. At its heart was a drive to create a place where volunteers and members could find friendship, purpose, and new experiences. Any group Shirley was involved with had no room for cliques or favourites. Every activity was designed to bring people together in groups large or small – everyone mixed in and was enabled to participate. The unofficial motto was “No bingo here!” Shirley didn't want to criticise groups that enjoyed that sort of thing, she just wanted more for us.*

*Shirley's vision included years of securing funding for Friend to Friend – no mean feat and taking hours of work, sometimes helped with the odd glass of wine. The funding enabled her beloved Project Group in particular to work with lots of local and national artists, musicians, storytellers, and to get out and about. Having run the group as a hugely successful volunteer-led organisation, she knew when it was time to become a registered charity and move forward.*

*Shirley was an inspiration to so many of us and always a big thinker. She always said she wasn't creative, but that was not true! She might not have been naturally crafty, but she had a gift for thinking of something extraordinary and making it possible – create a play, an opera, a jubilee garden party? No problem! We bring people together – why don't we work with other groups – in community spaces throughout Kirklees, in schools, in old people's homes, and always with that amazing memory for names and curiosity that broke down barriers. Shirley was the same with everybody – interested in you.*

*There is so much to say about this remarkable person – a steadfast support in time of need, always respectful and never patronising. All of our children can testify to that – she was loved by them because she treated them as people. I haven't mentioned Shirley's encyclopaedic knowledge of local history – who knew there were silk weavers in Holmfirth? Shirley did! And her stamina – after a high energy session with the Project Group, the rest of us were ready for a quiet sit down and she had her bag packed and was off to catch the train to Scarborough!*

*Shirley led a rich life and enriched many more – she was a true Local Hero.*

*Shirley was a lady of firm opinions, but she was a great sounding board, who would listen without judgement. She appreciated the value of each individual she met, making a personal connection however brief the encounter. She was also brave and determined, forging her own path through her career, and her life, with fortitude and humour. She always loved the spoken word, and had herself marked some of her favourite poems, one of which was Shirley Said, by Dennis Doyle.*

*Who write 'kick me' on my back?  
Who put a spider in my mac?  
Who's the one who pulls my hair?  
Tries to trip me everywhere?  
Who runs up to me and strikes me?  
That boy there – I think he likes me.*

*Shirley filled her life with the things she held dear; the causes she worked for, the arts she supported, and the friends she shared her time with, friends like Diana, Maggie and Janet, Pauline and Mary, Yvonne and Abigail, and of course so many more. Shirley was lifelong friends with Gwen, whose son, also Shirley's godson, Jon, is going to speak in a moment, and with her school mates, Molly and Anne. Shirley was also godmother to Anne's daughter Sal, and would often go and visit Anne and her husband Neil on a Wednesday, when they would look after Sal's children after school. In fact Shirley enjoyed lunch at Beatties with Sal and her daughter Nettle just the week before she died.*

*Shirley was an incredibly independent, strong woman, but in recent times even she has needed a helping hand on occasion, and those close to her are very grateful for the care taken by her neighbours, Jean, Derek and Kenneth, and by Helen, who went beyond the call of duty in all she did for Shirley.*

*I'd like to ask Jon to come up now, to share some of his own memories of Shirley.*

### ***Shirley P. Simmonds – A proper Godmother***

*Thanks for taking the time to join us today to remember and celebrate Shirley. Knowing Shirley it is not surprising to find that so many have come together today to see Shirley off in this Humanist service. It is a pleasure to meet her cousins today, Gordon, Liz, Judy and Irene and so sad that Shirley couldn't have made your Annual Cousins Get Together this year. She did so enjoy those reunions each year.*

*So, it falls on myself and Sal, Shirley's godchildren, to say thanks for being with us today.*

*If I may I would like to share a few of my memories of Shirley, she was our family's best friend and my godmother. Shirley and my mum Gwen were neighbours and best friends from toddlers, and actually their mothers were best friends all their lives too. Gwen and family were the Scarborough connection that some of you may be aware of. Shirley was a huge lover of the East Coast of England and spent lots of time there over the years, from Youth Hostelling in Scarborough whilst at college, to camping at the seaside with the school kids, and regular visits during school holidays, and every New Year with us too.*

*As we all know, Shirley was not one for long speeches or unnecessary procrastination when a few well placed words or even better deeds would do. But it is surprising what you find out about someone when you think you have known them all your life; we found a brief history penned by Shirley of her early life and in it she says, 'My friends all know my middle initial is P and they all swore it stood for Procrastination.' But I would beg to differ and prefer to think of Shirley's 'P' really as standing for Practical..... Proficient..... or.... Positive! In case you were wondering, it is, of course, Patricia.*

*Shirley was kind, generous, and understanding, encouraging to both myself and my brother Nick, and I always thought of her as a Right Proper Godmother. She was always hugely supportive, and I always admired her ability to treat us kids as adults, but I must admit I didn't consider her as perfect; whilst I was young she would regularly take her pupils camping to Lindisfarne each year, much to my annoyance. This was just up the coast from us, and she never did take me..... I thought this soooo unfair and unjust too!*

*BUT we did get even on her. On her regular visits to Scarborough she would always ask us where we wanted to go, and my brother and I, true to form, would always come up with the same repetitive answer: Flamingo Zoo and Marine Land! And she was duly dragged off to Flamingo Land every three months or so for us to gape in wonder at elephants, giraffes and 'Cuddles' the killer whale. And bless her but she never complained..... well at least not to myself. I think these trips with Shirley obviously had a great effect on myself and Nick, as he moved to Africa at 21 years of age and has lived there for 42 years, and I have been fortunate enough to work and travel extensively in Africa for many years, so Shirley's teaching and education skills paid off very well for us.*

*As you know besides Shirley's many other skills, and various and numerous charity projects, she was always permanently busy; we joked with her that after she retired from school life she took on more work and more responsibilities than ever, but that was Shirley to a T. As well as all these various commitments she still managed to create time for her other love in her life, the love of travel. Shirley was a great traveller and loved her holidays and was constantly checking travel brochures, planning trips and seeing where she could get to next. I am so pleased that Shirley was able to make a trip over to visit Gwen only three weeks ago, and it was lovely to see her enjoy the sight and air of Scarborough, Whitby and the North Yorkshire Moors again.*

*I think that Shirley passed her travel bug on to myself at an early age; we regularly had long conversations of where we had been and perhaps more importantly where we were planning to go next. Shirley travelled extensively and her tick list reads like the index from an atlas, including such places as Alaska, The Rocky Mountains, Sri Lanka, Kenya, South Africa, Scandinavia, and all around Europe of course. She always had that charm and wisdom to listen intently to my various travel stories, usually of an adventure in Africa, but then she would always have that knack of ending my impressive travel yarn with a smile and a reminder of,*

*'Well of course Kenya's fantastic, but you haven't taken a hot air balloon ride over the Serengeti, ending with a superb brunch watching the Wildebeest migration, have you?' She always knows how to annoy me!!*

*Talking about Shirley's love of travel I must tell you that Sal asked Shirley only a few days ago what she would most like to do with her time and was there anywhere she would like to visit, expecting to hear about a wish to see family or friends in the UK.*

*But Shirley without hesitation came back with, 'I want to go to Iceland!' and then started listing the practical problems and challenges she would need to sort to make this trip happen. She remained a professional holiday planner and schemer to the end. Perhaps that 'P' in Shirley's name should have been for Pragmatist after all!*

*So, I think I should stand down now and hopefully leave you all with your own positive thoughts and remembrances of Shirley. This is a sad day for us all, but definitely one that Shirley would want you all to think of positive things and look forward to the future as she did with a strong and bright vision.*

*Finally let me leave you with a wonderful thought/verse from Brian Andreas on a birthday card that Shirley received a few weeks ago.*

*'In my dream, the Angel Shrugged  
And said.....  
If we fail this time,  
It will only be a failure of your imagination.  
And then She placed the world  
In the palm of my hand.....'*

*Thank you.*

*You are all missing your dear friend. But I am sure Shirley would rather you step out from here and embrace all that life has to offer, just as she always did. I will leave you with some excellent advice from Lucille Ball, that Shirley had picked out in one of her books, and certainly seems to have lived by:*

*The secret of staying young is to live honestly, eat slowly, and lie about your age.*

*(Music heard on leaving: Allegro non molto from The Four Seasons: Summer by Antonio Vivaldi)*