

A celebration of life

Joan Esther Joy

20th June 1935 – 28th February 2020

Friday, 27th March 2020. St Faiths Crematorium, Norwich

a personal goodbye

Humanist
Ceremonies

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REMEMBERING JOAN

Many of you will know that Joan's favourite colour was red, and we can see that colour around us this afternoon. Indeed, Joan is wearing her favourite red jumper, too. You will also see a pair of knitting needles, some wool, and a frame with Scrabble letters spelling out family names on her coffin. These items symbolise things in Joan's life, which we will hear about later.

Many things happened in 1935. In the United Kingdom, a speed limit of 30 miles per hour was introduced for ordinary vehicles and the driving test became compulsory. The first Kit Kat chocolate bars went on sale. Stanley Baldwin became Prime Minister. Elvis Presley, Julie Andrews, and Pavarotti were born, and another baby, called Joan Esther Wymer, was born in Norwich. Her Mum's name was Rose, and she was mainly brought up by her step-Dad, Bill.

Joan was one of six children. Two of the children, Jack and Margaret, suffered from a genetic condition called spinal muscular dystrophy. The Wymer family set up a small toy library in 1972 in Norwich, which, with family support and fundraising, went from strength to strength over the years, benefitting many children.

When Joan was eighteen, she married Peter Ward, and their first daughter, Marilyn, was born. Six years later, Anne was born, completing the family. The marriage lasted for eleven years, following which Joan met and married Mick Joy in 1969. This marriage lasted until Mick's death several years' ago, and Joan attributed its success to fact that Mick knew she was the boss and did as he was told.

Mick, who already had his own son, Ady, took on the role of bringing up Marilyn and Anne. Although Ady wasn't a large part of everyday life, he showed great care and kindness towards Joan. In later years, when she was living in the care home, he would visit every week. Marilyn and Anne always knew when he had been because he would leave behind a gift of a plant or flowers.

Joan's working life was mainly spent as a school dinner lady, but she also spent time as a school cleaner. She liked to get on with the job and would start as early as possible, often scraping the ice from the car in the dark winter mornings, until she finally decided to retire at the age of seventy six. Joan worked hard for what she had, and enjoyed herself in many ways throughout her years.

But life wasn't all plain sailing for Joan. She and Mick faced the sadness of a still-born daughter called Michelle, and, as these were the days when less care was given to parents in this situation, they were left to deal with their grief in their own way. So deal with it they did, and life moved forward.

For example, she loved socialising with Mick in local pubs, where they would meet up with friends, and Joan would enjoy her favourite drinks of the time – Cinzano or a martini. Later, Joan developed a taste for Bailey's. One year, Anne, a friend, and Joan set off on holiday to one of the Canary Islands. They stayed in an apartment, and were regular visitors to a local café. Joan found that the numerous glasses of Bailey's slipped down very nicely, and the staff made so many trips backwards and forwards to refill her glass that it was decided the best plan instead was to give Joan the bottle and a very large glass so that she could serve herself. That plan worked out well as far as Joan was concerned. A man called Pepe was a regular entertainer in the cafe, playing his keyboard for the customers. And so it was that the three women embarked on a short-lived singing career. They sang along with Pepe with such enthusiasm that they decided to be named Pepe and the Pepettes. It's a shame there is no recording of this venture.

Joan and Mick both enjoyed their holidays. They had many visits to countries such as Spain, to Majorca and Minorca, and memorable family holidays, when many of the family went along, such as to Disney World in Florida and some memorable Christmases at Center Parcs.

Family was vitally important to Joan, and her relationships with her daughters were strong. Of course, they were parent and children, but they were also firm and loyal friends, who genuinely loved spending time together. Regular shopping trips were shared, including the annual Christmas shopping. Even when Anne lived in Kings Lynn, Joan and Mick were regular visitors to her home, often staying over. They just all liked each other and wanted to spend time together. Marilyn and Anne described Joan as the “perfect Mum”. They knew that she would do anything for them, and often did. Anne certainly tested her Mum in her younger days, but Joan’s love always remained strong. These three women were open in the way they felt about each other. They would always say, “I love you”. And that is something to celebrate.

So what else do we know about Joan? Well, we know that she had many talents and interests, and that whatever she did she did it to the best of her ability.

She was a talented knitter, the type of person who could follow a complicated pattern whilst watching television – often her favourites Coronation Street or Emmerdale. She was so good at knitting that when she babysat for Oliver and Sean, the family cat, Lucy, would do anything it could to sit on Joan’s lap. Joan detested cats, and so she would spend the evening knitting, following a difficult pattern and watching television – all the while standing up for the entire time in the middle of the room.

Joan knitted for her own family, including her beloved grandsons, Oliver and Sean, and also for her great-grandson, Hugo. She once knitted a quite awful but memorable lilac skirt and jumper for Anne, who can’t quite believe she actually wore it, but thought she looked the bee’s knees at the time. Joan would knit baby clothes for other people’s children; sometimes so many that Anne would take them to work, where staff at the hospital were really pleased to buy them. At one time, Anne had a doll that would probably be a collector’s item now. Unfortunately, Joan decided to discard the clothes that came with the doll and knitted a whole outfit for it, even down to socks and knickers, thus devaluing the doll’s worth by quite a large amount of money.

Her garden was a passion. She and Mick had a large garden in Pilling Park Road, and Joan taught herself what to grow, when to grow it, and what went with what. Her garden and hanging baskets were a beautiful sight. She seemed to have a natural eye, and was able to give advice to others, too. If Joan was missing for several hours, her garden was often where she could be found.

Joan was a good cook and a great baker. Her daughter’s absolute favourites were her raspberry buns, closely followed by her savoury minced beef and her corned beef and potato patties. Once again, Anne would take extra cakes to work at the hospital for staff to enjoy, until there came a point when Anne was actually taking orders from people who enjoyed Joan’s cooking so much. Neither Marilyn nor Anne has inherited Joan’s talent for cooking, although Marilyn has got Joan’s old Be-Ro cook-book, which came from the milkman. So, Marilyn: it’s never too late to start.

Joan was keen on crosswords, and would sit each Thursday afternoon with her copy of Take a Break. Everyone knew not to ring her for those few hours. She was also passionate about bingo, and was a regular at Top Rank and Mecca. Holidays at Hemsby always included bingo. It wasn’t really about the winning, but more about the playing of the game. Joan and her friend Jenny had good times together with their bingo cards and “dabbers”, and, even up until two years’ ago, Joan was able to enjoy a game, until her memory started to make it too difficult.

Joan's Alzheimer's disease progressed slowly. She was a tall, slim, fashionable woman, who liked to look her best. Her hair was always done, and her clothes always matched. This remained important to her, even when she was struggling to recall other things. She eventually had to leave her own home to be cared for in a nursing home, with frequent visits from family.

Marilyn and Anne know that Joan had a full and happy life. Her family will miss her greatly, but they know that she was able to die with dignity, still being able to do some things for herself. This was extremely important to Joan, and, in that way, her family can view her death as a loss but also as a blessing.