

# A celebration of life

# William James Western

3rd June 1932 - 3rd January 2020

*a personal goodbye*

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**Humanist**  
*Ceremonies*

William James "Billy" Western 3 June 1932 – 3 January 2020

Billy was born and grew up in Hunter Street, Cadoxton, the fourth of his parent's Billy and Nellie's eight children. There was over a twenty-year spread in the births of the children and Billy grew up surrounded by women, his elder sisters Dolly, Mary and Helen and his younger sisters Beatie Margaret and June, until Len came along. But being fourteen years younger Len wasn't able to give Billy much male support.

Billy always said that he was bossed around a lot by women as a child, which prepared him for his later life in a household of women, though his sisters maintain they always spoilt him.

Billy didn't speak very much about his childhood to Janice and Kathryn. His father, after who he was named William James, worked for a blacksmith and like most of those around them the family did not have much money. His childhood took place during the depression and the second world war, so we know he experienced a world very different to the one we live in.

He attended Cadoxton School and played football for the junior and senior teams. When not in school he played with his friends and ranged far and wide including, when he was about eight, playing with children living near the Witchell. One of them, a little girl called Cassie, told a friend that one day she was going to marry Billy. They remained friends as they grew.

Billy left school when he was fourteen and started work for a company that transported livestock from farms to market. Working on the trucks he was soon taught to drive the lorry. He told how when he was just fourteen he drove the trucks to Cowbridge and other places, though all without a licence.

When he was eighteen he was called up to do his National Service and joined the Royal Engineers. As he was going away for two years he wanted a pen pal and so Cassie and he exchanged letters throughout his time away.

He was trained as a transport driver on all vehicles and was posted to Egypt, serving in the Canal Zone. The only thing he ever said about Egypt was that it was freezing at night, baking hot in the day and that he was disappointed that he never got to see the pyramids

While he was there he received a message that his father was very ill, and he was to be sent home. But just before he got on the plane another message arrived that his father had died, and Billy was told he couldn't go home to attend the funeral. He never understood why this was and it weighed on his mind for many years. In 2007, his service was finally recognized when he was presented with a Canal Zone medal by the local MP John Smith.

When he got home he returned to his previous job but now driving the lorries legally. Shortly after he returned home he and Cassie started courting. They enjoyed an active social life going to the many dance halls and cinemas in Barry at the time. He had many friends and played snooker in several clubs including the Dockers and the East End.

For some reason that Len has never found out, Billy earned the nick name 'Whacko Western' about his time, and Len in turn became known to some as 'Little Whacko'. Billy loved being Len's big brother and was proud of him, though as a child he teased Len relentlessly for wearing glasses and wouldn't letting him hang around with him and his mates.

Len remembers he and his own friends helping Billy herd cattle and pigs, using sticks to lead them from a farm which was on the land opposite Cadoxton Train

Station, down Vere Street and up Gladstone Road to the slaughterhouse, on the land where the Council Depot is now.

Cassie and Billy were married in Cadoxton Old Village Church in April 1956 and lived for several years with Billy's mum, some of his sisters and Len in Hunter Street. A year later Janice was born and when Cassie went into labour Billy suffered stomach pains so badly that he was sent home from work. It was often joked later that the reason there were no more children was because Billy couldn't stand the pain of another labour.

Their first home of their own was a flat in Meirion Close. By now Billy was working as a class 1 HGV driver for British Road Services, which meant a lot of nights shifts, as the money was better and a lot of driving all over the UK and Ireland. He was often away for several days at a time.

There were few motorways, and nights away meant sleeping in his unheated cab. Years later he told the family how modern HGV drivers didn't know they were born with the better roads and all the mod-cons they had in their cabs. He took great pride in his driving and the pile of safety certificates he was awarded because of the professional manner in which he drove and operated his truck.

He was a hard worker, Cassie often joked that the only reason they stayed married so long was that he was always in work. He drove for BRS for twenty-five years and then for several other companies including Geest and Moretons before he reluctantly retired aged sixty-five in 1997.

I asked Janice what he was like as a Dad and she said that he was very caring and would do anything for her, though she also said that because he worked so hard to provide for her and her mother, he wasn't able to spend as much time with her when she was little, as she knows he wanted to. But as she got older

they spent more time together and he used to take her with him in his cab on some of his local trips.

The three of them often went to Portsmouth to visit his sister, but other than that he didn't want to travel when he wasn't working, preferring to stay close to home with his family. Cassie, Janice and later Kathryn used to go away together leaving him at home, happy with his own company, with his TV and his paper, having a well-earned rest.

He enjoyed gardening; working in their garden with Cassie, helping his friend Percy on his allotment or helping neighbours by cutting their grass when they lived in Hilary Rise. Helping neighbours by cutting their grass was typical of Billy. He had many friends and was always willing to help them and came to the rescue on more than one occasion.

Family was even more important to him. He took Cassie's brothers and sisters on as his own, so the family was a rather big one at one time with lots of nieces and nephews running around. Their house was always an open house and everyone would be welcome. In later years, when he and Cassie lived in Winchester Close, Cassie's uncles Natty, Charlie and Terry spent many happy Christmases and New Years with them.

When Kathryn was born he had more time to spend with her when she was young than he had with Janice, and he took advantage of that. He didn't want to be called Grandad as it made him feel old, so Kathryn has always called him Billy. And he always called her Flower, unless she was in trouble, the only time he called her Kathryn.

Billy spoilt his Flower, and she could do no wrong in his eyes and she was always proud of him. She was delighted that her friends also liked him and commented on how smart and dapper he was.

Like her mum before her, he used to take her on local trips in his cab, including when he was driving floats in the Barry Carnival and they spent a lot of time together when he wasn't working. He used to record all Boyzone's TV appearances for her, and they would watch them together, over and over again, for hours on end, despite the fact he was sick of them and their songs. He would do anything for her and operated a taxi service for her and her friends.

Though they were not unusual in this. He was always happy to pick up family and friends from airports, hospital visits and never complained at being the family taxi. He would happily pick Janice up every day from Barry Station when she'd finished work and he took Stephen to his to various appointments, all he ever wanted in return was a coffee and a chat.

One of the reasons he was so eager to help others, apart from the fact he was a very kind man, was he didn't like doing nothing. He wasn't someone who took easily to retirement and would have preferred to keep on working. He missed being busy and the camaraderie of his work mates so he enjoyed seeing his friends for a coffee in the Buck, a game of snooker and the occasional bet on the horses.

Billy has remained fit and well though age had slowed him down some in recent years and he occasionally needed some help. He was grateful to his friend Barney, who he had worked with at Moretons for many years, for taking him to various appointments and spoke very highly of him. He enjoyed their pints and chats over the years and he always said Barney was good company.

Billy still drove and he and Cassie enjoyed going out in the car with folding chairs in the boot so they could sit, walk or have a cup of coffee. Their favourite

trips being over the Island or to Porthkerry Park with Janice, Kathryn and Kathryn's new dog Ted.

Billy and Cassie have always been devoted to each other. In 2016 and they received a card from the Queen congratulating them on their Diamond Anniversary and they have now been married for nearly sixty-four years. But they have been friends for about eighty years, since they were eight-year olds, playing in the street and Cassie made her prediction to her friend.

Billy was devoted to Cassie, Janice told me how when Cassie was very ill Billy started every morning by making her a cup of tea and making sure she was OK, and sometimes helped her eat; Janice told me of the love and devotion that she saw in him as he did this simple act.

About four months ago when Cassie fell in the bathroom, Billy wasn't strong enough to pick her up so he got a blanket to put over her, a stool for himself and held her up by until Janice got there. She was taken into Llandough and has been there ever since. She is so unwell that she cannot be here today and is not aware of Billy's death.

On the third of January he was driving Janice along Court Road when he realized that something was wrong. He pulled safely over to the side of the road, where seventy-three years after he first learnt to drive, he died at the wheel of his car.