

A celebration of life

Joan Marie Dodgson

22nd August 1930 - 6th October 2020

4.00-4.30 pm, 21st October 2020, Cam Valley Crematorium

a personal goodbye

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Joan was born on 22nd August 1930, in Chirk, near Wrexham in North Wales. She had a wonderful childhood and later shared with her extended family happy memories, of long walks with her Dad and elder brothers Syd and Jim and younger brother Stan, gathering nuts and berries with her Mum and cooking family meals.

She and her husband Les, Leslie William Parnell Dodgson, moved to Welwyn Garden City in 1960 with their one year old daughter Ann. Their second daughter Carol was born there in 1962. Joan continued to live in Welwyn with the girls after Les died in 1971. Les was only 41, they had been married only 13 years. Joan looked after her mother there, nursing her through ailing physical health and dementia. Then in 1995 Joan moved to The Cobblers in Hadstock with David, Ann, Joe and Ellie.

David is going to lead the Tribute, David....

The Tribute, David Barrs

Joan made 90, touched many lives, cooked many meals and, as a physiotherapist and otherwise, cared for many people. She worked at the Queen Elizabeth II hospital in Welwyn for most of her career. Whilst she was there she wrote a chapter in a book - Physiotherapy in some Psychiatric Conditions in Neurology for Physiotherapists by Joan Cash. Our Joan had M.C.S.P (Member of the Chartered Society of Physiotherapists) and O.N.C (Ordinary National Certificate) after her name in that publication. Joan was also our official baby-sitter for many years, head chef, cleaner and project manager – she greeted and charmed all the workmen who came to do jobs at Cobblers and I'm sure we got better value for money as a result

She became an excellent “Welsh au pair”. In fact, without the sale of her house in Welwyn Garden City , there would have been no Cobblers . Thank you, Joan.

We must acknowledge the care and courage shown by the wonderful staff at Symonds House, Linton. Ali, Alex, Wazifa and Shani and so many others. Joan committed herself to their care just before the lockdown began. I choose the word ‘courage’ deliberately. We saw at first hand the courage the staff showed in the face of the threats from COVID 19. The way they went about their work each day knowing they were vulnerable and knowing those in their care were vulnerable. They did so without clear guidelines and without PPE. I mean the word ‘courage’. To care in these circumstances takes courage. We saw them genuinely show love to Joan, we saw them cry when she was in pain, we saw them bend the rules so we could see her. There are thousands of care workers across the country from so many different countries. They

work outside the NHS but are so much part of the NHS in our affection. The NHS and the care system stand together in the front line of a civilised society.

We found this note in Joan's bedside basket, "To all the internal and external staff at Symonds House, you're all marvellous and the care is wonderful – nothing is too much. You always work so hard and keep us happy and well. They deserve all the extras that they can claim. God bless them all. With love to all of you, Joan Dodgson". Thank you, care workers

In another of her scribbled notes we found this, "Two nurses looked after Grandma (she referred to herself in this way towards the end) day and night and we ought to (MUST) pay them as much as possible. They worked day and night which is very hard work and need a really big bonus!" If you are able to make a donation in Joan's name today the sole beneficiaries will be NHS Charities Together or the Symonds House Greenfinger Club.

Whilst there may be few of us here and none of the customary hugging , there are some benefits to Covid funerals. We haven't had to travel from New Zealand, the US, Scotland and the Isle of Man. Joan would never have wanted a fuss, and a virtual funeral certainly reduces the fuss. Maybe, at last, she would have appreciated technology. Indeed, she managed weekly Facetime calls when she was in Symonds House. Technology got to her in the end.

So whilst so many of you are not here in person you have overwhelmed us with your recollections of Joan which we will share with you in due course – if I have your email address!

Ann, Joan's daughter and a linguist, would have appreciated what Uncle Paul shared with us on the day Joan died - Ave atque vale -hail and farewell, Joan

Memories of Joan, Anna, Ben and Erica Schweining

Ben

To me, Josh and Anna, Joan has always been Grandma Joan, but this never felt quite right. Grandmas are associated with certain qualities - old fashioned, slow, maybe even out-of-touch but nothing could have been further from the truth for Grandma Joan.

She was always sharp as a tack and quick witted with a brilliant sense of humour and I know I speak for Josh, as he could not be here himself, when I remember fondly our visits, always welcomed by Joan beaming through the kitchen window.

Of course, even Grandma Joan couldn't escape all the grandmotherly cliches - she must have set some sort of record for the number of teas served per visit? And biscuits too! Thank you, Joan, for being our alternative Grandma.

Anna

We have always known just how lucky we are to have had 3 grandmas, and for me Grandma Joan was my "home" grandma. I hope Ellie and Joe don't mind me calling Joan our grandma too.

Everyone here will know how thoughtful and caring Grandma Joan was, and for me this always came through in the birthday presents she got us. Not only did she never miss a birthday, but she also somehow seemed to know the perfect present even when you didn't know yourself. It was only when I came to writing this that I realised quite how many of my most treasured possessions were given by Grandma Joan. This scarf for example.

Everyone here probably also knows she had a bit of a cheeky side. And whilst this was top secret at the time, Uncle David, I'm sure Grandma Joan won't mind me telling you now. Last year, every Friday after work, mum and I would buy her some chocolate buttons, which she would proceed to hide from you in the only safe place in the house, the seat of her walker.

Chocolate buttons will forever make me smile.

Erica

Some of you may remember that shortly after the Dodgson Barrs family moved into Cobblers with Joan, we had a flood in our house which rendered it uninhabitable and Calvin, Ben, Josh and I (Anna was not yet born) were invited to move in. It was meant to be a short stop gap but turned out to be six months. Joan was completely unphased by the presence of four under-fives and all their paraphernalia in her home. She revelled in the constant activity and very quickly we became one family.

I was lucky, I was on maternity leave, so in the mornings after everyone else had left, she and I would spend many hours talking and putting the world to rights.

Everyone one of us here will know what an incredibly easy person Joan was to talk to. She listened, and I mean **really** listened to everything you said. She asked questions, was perceptive and inciteful, compassionate and sympathetic, interested, and open, enthusiastic and loving. She had a knack of drawing you in. You could talk about anything and everything with Joan.

She was a total people person. She relished in every joy and success of her family and friends. She believed in, supported, and encouraged our dreams.

We will all recall, with a smile, the sincere welcome we received each time we visited. She had the skill of making each of us feel valued and only a special person can do that. Joan was that **very** special person.

Many of Joan's friends have shared their memories of Joan with David, Joe and Ellie.

They have talked about Joan's warmth, kindness and generosity, her grace and fortitude, her positive attitude. Despite facing tragedies in her long life, the early deaths of her husband and both her daughters, she never complained or asked 'why me'. Tachya once asked her how she had coped with such loss, Joan replied that she had to make a decision to live her life regardless of the pain she felt.

Her friends remember her intelligence and enthusiasm, her fundraising efforts for the physio unit at the QE II, her hatred of injustice and inequality, long discussions putting the world to rights, fuelled by cups of tea (and sherry).

They also recall, her mischievous sense of humour and bouts of quite uncontrollable laughter, the tea parties and film nights, roast dinners..... and the Rumtopf.

They say how immensely proud Joan was of her grandchildren, Joe and Ellie, who take something of their mum, grandma and auntie forward with them.

Joan was interested and interesting, she was caring and considerate, she was great company, she was much loved.

Poem read by Joe Barrs

Before I begin the poem, just a few words on behalf of Ellie and I...

Despite the overwhelming sadness, during times like this it is also human nature to take solace from positive reflections.

I've reflected a lot in recent days of how fortunate we have been to have a woman like Grandma in our lives for 29 years and 26 years respectively.

As I know is the case for so many of us, this is time that we seldom have with grandparents, this time is precious.

This time leaves us with a wealth of memories, experiences, pictures, mementos and good advice.

For me I will hold on to Grandma's stoicism, the value she placed on her life, but mostly the people in it and her absolute refusal to let sadness dictate her remaining years.

I'll hold onto her cheerfulness, the way she answered the phone, the way she greeted you at the door, her love for growing veg, her poached eggs, her coffee cake and her homemade apple juice!

She will live on in these memories and they will influence me for the rest of my life .

For Ellie, her relationship with Grandma wasn't just that of Grandma and Grandchild, they were best friends.

They would sit for hours at Cobblers watching Grandma's favourite TV, Downtown Abbey, Wimbledon – the soundtracks from both play a part in today's ceremony.

They shared everything together.

They would spend Saturdays, whilst Dad and I were at cricket, debating the rights and wrongs and going out for afternoon tea.

Whilst Ellie was at University, they would speak for hours on the phone.

When Ellie moved out from Cobblers, they would call almost every morning during her walk to work.

It is these daily calls that Ellie missed most when Grandma went to hospital and subsequently Symonds House, but she was happy to make up for it with her weekly visits.

A fond memory from her visits was the ongoing argument of who loved who more.

Once lockdown hit in the Spring and the weekly visits were no longer possible, we had to resort to technology to keep in touch with Grandma, which as you can imagine brought its challenges, but some funny moments too.

Ellie recalls Grandma trying to offer her biscuits through the mobile device she was video calling her on – she never did get use to technology!

Grandma will live on in these memories for Ellie.

The relevance of this to the poem is that they are living proof of a how a person, but more specifically their memory, lives on.

So Many Different Lengths of Time, Brian Patten

How long does a woman live after all?

A thousand days or only one?

One week or a few centuries?

How long does a woman spend living or dying and what do we mean when we say gone forever?

Adrift in such preoccupations, we seek clarification.

We can go to the philosophers
but they will weary of our questions.

We can go to the priests and rabbis
but they might be busy with administrations.

So, how long does a woman live after all?

And how much does she live while she lives?

We fret and ask so many questions - then when it comes to us
the answer is so simple after all.

A woman lives for as long as we carry her inside us, for as long as we carry
the harvest of her dreams, for as long as we ourselves live,
holding memories in common, a woman lives.

Her lover will carry her scent, her touch:
her children will carry the weight of her love.
One friend will carry her arguments, another will hum her favourite tunes,
another will still share her terrors.

And the days will pass with baffled faces,
then the weeks, then the months,
then there will be a day when no question is asked,
and the knots of grief will loosen in the stomach
and the puffed faces will calm.

And on that day she will not have ceased
but will have ceased to be separated by death.

How long does a woman live after all?
A woman lives so many different lengths of time.