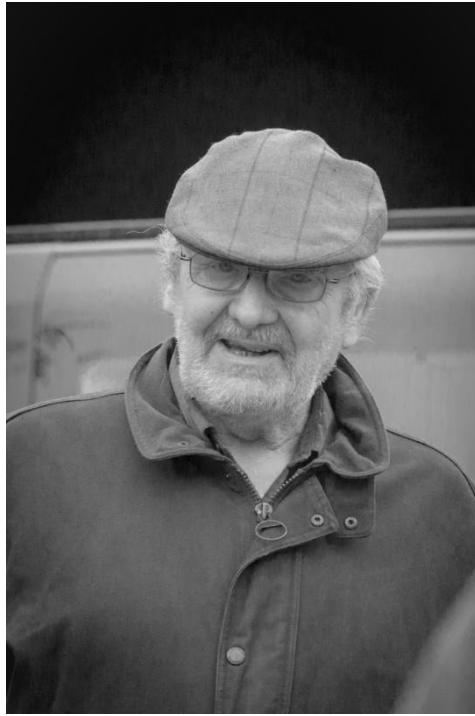


Jasper James Knight

5th May 1937 - 26th December 2020



5th February 2021

Barham Crematorium

W. J. Farrier and Son

Canterbury Road, Barham

161 London Road, Dover

Prepared and conducted by Peter Allison, Humanists UK Accredited Celebrant
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a personal goodbye

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A Tribute to Jasper

Jasper James Knight was born in London on 5th May 1937 to parents Betty and Jasper Frederick Knight. Within a couple of years, Jasper Junior was joined by his little brother Robert, or Rob, followed in 1946 by his sister Diana. Their father, who ultimately became the finance director of Unilever, worked in city finance, and also enjoyed success in his career as government Minister for Food. This involved importing American food into the UK, and Jasper Junior remembered the excitement and awe he felt when he first encountered chewing gum and bananas.

As a young boy Jasper, or James as he was known, attended Wellington House Prep School in Westgate, Thanet, as a boarder. He was unable to start at the same time as the other boys, as he spent a year in hospital with an infection of the tuberculin gland, after drinking unpasteurised milk on a trip to Lyme Regis. Being in hospital, he also missed the school's evacuation during the Second World War, although the whole family were then later evacuated to North Wales.

From Wellington House, Jasper moved up to Radley, a public school in Abingdon, Oxfordshire, where both he and Rob boarded. Jasper was a keen rower during his time at Radley. The school also kept its own pack of beagle hounds and he became fully immersed in the beagling activities there.

The family home had moved from Chelsea to the picturesque Hambledon Valley, near Henley on Thames; a popular filming location with its unspoilt scenery. Rob recalls an occasion when he and the thirteen year old Jasper were at home. The brothers decided, somewhat mischievously, to share the remains of the drinks left over from a cocktail party, hosted by their parents the previous night. Jasper must have sampled one too many of the cocktail dregs. He started to moan with discomfort, and Rob rushed downstairs to fetch their father. Father came to see Jasper, along with a family friend, a doctor who was visiting. The two of them roared with laughter when they realised what the boys had been sneakily drinking.

Before starting his French and Physics degree course at Exeter College, Oxford, Jasper was sent to Colchester Barracks to embark on his national service. This was an experience to which Jasper was not particularly suited. He was part of an artillery team with no weapons; all their guns had been sent to the Suez crisis. Jasper later claimed that all he learnt from national service was how to avoid doing any work. It also left him with a lifelong dislike of itchy woollen shirts. While posted at the barracks, he helped many of the other young men by reading their letters to them, and he taught some of them to read and write.

Jasper finally started his degree course but he did not complete it. He instead took a job selling hotdogs and burgers on Old Kent Road. Jasper Senior would sometimes be on the train, hearing other commuters discuss their sons' achievements. Little did he know the wonderful business successes and life adventures that Jasper Junior would soon come to enjoy. Moving on from selling hot dogs and burgers, Jasper spent his summers working on yachts around the Mediterranean, and his winters in the UK, improving properties. With his bold, intelligent, maverick outlook, Jasper was always what you might call a larger than life character, ever willing to take chances.

He first met Mo at Finches, a pub on Fulham Road in Chelsea; she was there with Roger Jones, a good friend of Jasper's from Oxford. At one point, Roger left the two of them alone for a moment, and Jasper asked Mo if she would like to accompany him to the cinema, on the condition that he could hold her hand; the first sign of what was to be a long, strong and loving relationship.

In 1963 Mo was working in Paris for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, or OECD, and Jasper, following his heart, went to find Mo, and propose marriage. They had been separated for a short time and Jasper's mission was to go and win her back. Mo realised that Jasper must have been in Paris, looking for her, when, on her way to work, she noticed his jumper in the back of a car. With this discovery, she phoned in sick, took the day off, and waited for Jasper to find her. That evening, she accepted Jasper's proposition. He returned to London to make an immediate start on the wedding arrangements. Within one week, in December 1963, Mo returned from Paris for their wedding in Kensington Registry Office. They had recruited some witnesses at the Architectural Association Ball the night before, some of whom they knew, and some they didn't. Jasper had paid £7.50 for the wedding certification, which he later described as the best £7.50 he had ever spent. Mo was required to work in Paris for another month before returning home to Jasper, but return she did. It was the start of a long and loving marriage and a close and caring family, with the arrival of their first daughter Charlotte in 1966, followed by Sarah in 1971.

Throughout the sixties, Jasper's business flourished and grew. He had a knack of always being one step ahead in his property development and interior design work, and he and Mo moved around London, transforming various buildings in Islington and Hackney, and on Ledbury Road in Notting Hill Gate, whilst also managing the decorating and interior design shop on Danbury Street near the Angel, Islington.

Jasper was a renowned interior designer, and his circle of friends and clients (and clients who became friends) grew to include many famous characters, including George Melly, Peter Cook, Bill Oddie, and Annabel Jones (Viscountess Astor), co-founder and CEO of home furnishings retailer OKA . It was during their London property days, that Mo and Jasper met Keith Harrison, also known as Boots, and his wife Thora; Boots and Thora became very close friends of the Knights.

In the seventies, the family settled in what they had previously used as a weekend house; the Old Rectory, in Elmstone. Perhaps it was Jasper's connection with Westgate that drew him back to Kent. They settled into the good life at the Old Rectory; or the Old Wreck as it became known. The evenings were often witness to the most fantastic parties, with the best tandoori chicken, all mixed up in dustbins, newly bought for the occasion, and with a communal punch mixed up in the big glass fish tank, while the fish themselves holidayed in pint glasses for the evening.

On one occasion, Jasper decided that they could do with a swimming pool, so he and Boots set straight to work, starting with the excavation of a huge hole. Boots, a paver by trade, was invaluable in the completion of the project. The pool was enjoyed by many, and before long it seemed that Mo and Jasper had taught the whole village how to swim. They created a wonderful family home at the Old Wreck, where they accumulated hens, geese, pigs, ferrets and dogs, including Penny, and Scrap, all the while growing an extensive kitchen garden.

A major part of their country lifestyle was Jasper's involvement with the Blean Beagles and the West Street Hunt, where many lifelong friendships were forged, including Bill Henderson, John Morris, and many, many more. Jasper took charge of catering for hundreds of people at the infamous West Street midnight steeplechase, with just a few hours' preparation. He thoroughly enjoyed hunting, especially beagling. Each season the Old Wreck would host one of the Beagle Teas. These were weekly social gatherings throughout the beagling season. Starting as a 4pm tea with boiled eggs, sandwiches, cakes, scones, Stone's ginger wine and lots and lots of cups of tea, these events would often continue through the evening, thanks, in part, to Jasper's home-made wine; he could make wine from anything he could find, even used teabags.

Jasper was a marvellous host. He loved to entertain. He was once the inventor of a brand new dish, made with local vegetables, although it was later revealed that the dish already existed; it was called ratatouille. He would be equally happy in the countryside in his much-loved pick-up truck, walking the dogs, especially Penny and Scrap, or listening to jazz and blues, completing a cryptic crossword, or chatting with friends and family in the pub, or on a long telephone call.

Initially friends of Rob and his wife Carol, The Brocklebanks became part of the extended Knight family; Dan and Barbara, with their children Ralph, Serena and Annabel, with Rob and Carol, and their children Patrick, Emma and Richard, along with Mo, Jasper, Charlotte and Sarah made one great big crowd. They took joy in each others' company and shared countless adventures. On one particular occasion many of them took a trip to Boulogne in the north of France. A booze cruise was always a good excuse for a fun day out. The whole group were in the harbour area, standing on a station platform. A freight train started to crawl slowly past them. Jasper and Rob decided to board the train, and walk straight through it, onto the platform on the other side. The confused children watched the long train pass slowly, thinking their fathers were now on their way to Paris, as they tried to resist feelings of panic and fear. The train's final carriage eventually rolled past them, revealing Rob and Jasper grinning on the opposite platform.

Mo qualified as a beauty therapist in the early eighties, and Jasper continued his work with properties in East Kent. He took on a young apprentice, Julian Cope, and a strong and lasting bond grew between the two of them. Charlotte and Sarah remember Jasper and Julian working together on properties, and they would often lend a hand themselves. They recall their dad and his young apprentice as "being like an old married couple". Radio two would fill the air, and whenever Jasper asked Julian to pass him a hammer, he would always ask instead for a ham sandwich; one of many family sayings that will surely continue into future generations.

The Old Wreck was made available to American journalists for the duration of the Sandwich Golf Opens, including the entourage of Jack Nicklaus, and Loran, and Myrna Smith, who was known to mention Mo and Jasper in his Atlanta Post musings. While the house was filled with journalists, Mo and Jasper would stay in a caravan, and the girls would either stay with them or with their friends.

At the age of 45, Jasper took up skiing, and true to his eccentric nature, he could be seen skiing in the French Alps, dressed in Barbour jacket and tweed cap. Before long, he would find himself drawn back there, and skiing in France would soon become central to the Knight family's world.

The family spent eight or so years at the Old Wreck, before moving to Ramsgate, where they enjoyed a stunning view overlooking the harbour. In 1990, with visions of future fun-filled holidays, they bought a property in Montagny. It had started life as a barn with animal pens in the cellar. Jasper, always ahead of the curve, conserved all the old timbers and reused them in the creation of a sympathetic house, full of character and unique features. On seeing the conversion, the local mayor commented that he was unable to differentiate between the new parts and the originals. Alex Favre was drafted in to help with the building's electrics, and this was the start of another close life-long friendship. Jasper was amazed to learn that his cousin Rob Sewell had renovated a barn in an uncannily similar style, just across the valley.

Jasper wholeheartedly immersed himself in the Montagny way of life, including much volunteer work for the village's three day summer fete, the St Germain, which included helping to bake the communal bread, stirring the huge vat of soup, and sweeping up, along with fellow Montagnards, after the festivities.

The time, energy and love that Jasper, Mo, Alex and others, put into the old barn at Montagny resulted in an impressive ski chalet with fifteen beds; some of them accessible only by ladder or trap door; available for use by family and friends, with Mr and Mrs Knight as both chalet staff and generous hosts, offering monster breakfasts and three course dinners. In the après-ski evenings, guests would share their tales of skiing accidents and accomplishments, with cheeses and free-flowing wine, and often the local liqueur Genepi. Many good friendships started in Montagny, including Nigel and Steph, Mal and Jenny, and Pip and Roy, all with similar renovations in the area.

Meanwhile, away from the ski slopes and back in the UK, the Knights moved from Ramsgate and settled, a little further south, at Angle Cottage in Sandwich. Ever the decorator, Jasper once painted the exterior of Angle Cottage bright blue; he was then ordered, by the council, to return it to its original shade of grey, despite its location, sandwiched between the Red Cow pub and a bright lemon-yellow coloured house.

Around the turn of the millennium, Jasper and Mo were blessed with four grandchildren; two grandsons, namely Charlotte's sons Jasper and Will, followed by two granddaughters, namely Sarah's daughters Katie and Jess.

My Grandad - Jasper James Knight

My grandad was a man of men,
A grafter through and through,
But he planted seeds and tended them
With care until they grew.
His intellect spanned the far reaches of space,
But I'm sure his voice went further
He always said things with his chest.
I never heard him murmur.
Strong and smart, loud but loving.
A true man of might.
This is always how I will remember my grandad
Jasper James Knight
(Jasper Jefferies)

Jasper adored his grandchildren, and he would take them to Montagny, two at a time for fortnight-long adventures at the chalet. The Knight family, along with their wide circle of relatives and friends, would often return to their French home from home.

Jasper broke his femur in 2002 and, despite being full of screws and pins, he still continued to ski. Rob tells me that Jasper, or James as Rob still calls him, was always injuring himself as a youngster. Rob always managed to come out unscathed, whereas James was always breaking bones. He broke his arm rolling down a grass bank, damaged his shoulder while shooting a squirrel from the bedroom window and then broke his collarbone trying to get on some stilts. The young Jasper certainly revealed the charisma of the bold, eccentric character that you all know and love.

From Sandwich, Mo and Jasper moved to Eastbridge House in Bridge, which they bought in 2005, with Sarah and her husband Dom. Mo and Jasper claimed one third of the house, leaving Sarah and Dom the rest.

From an earlier passion for sailing, Jasper loved to travel, including visits to relatives in Australia, and to Florida, many wonderful cruises with Mo, and of course, the plentiful trips to Montagny and back. While trying to be retired, Jasper still managed to find more projects to take on at the ski chalet.

In 2018 Jasper moved into Littlebourne House, a care home in the East Kent village of Littlebourne, where he was exceptionally well cared for, and enjoyed regular family visits.

Jasper died, aged 83, on Boxing Day 2020.