

A celebration of life

Caroline Tunnaclyffe Bennett

12 March 1942 – 20 September 2020

3.00–3.45pm, 08 October 2020, Golders Green West Chapel

a personal goodbye

Humanist
Ceremonies

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Caroline Dimont was born on 12th March 1942 at the Rectory in the village of Willersey, near Broadway, where her grandfather Arthur was the vicar. Her parents Penelope and Charles had been married since 1937 and they already had a daughter, Madelon.

Penelope wrote of Carrie's arrival: 'as in all the most notable births, there was a storm that night. Gales howled, sleet lashed the windows. The doctor was uncontactable. My mother called the District Nurse. She arrived in a round hat, examined me, muttered to my mother in a corner. She couldn't find the baby's backbone. 'It's Doctor's job. I can't take the responsibility' she said primly, and bolted. Finally, through gale and blackout, the Doctor arrived and just in time pushed Carrie's mucky little foot back and wheedled the breech baby out inch by inch.'

Over the next six years Carrie became part of a large extended family and remained close to them all – her older sister Madelon, her younger siblings Julia and Deborah, Sally and Jeremy, and Charles's second wife Sonia and their three children – Charles, Sarah, and Chris. She was also very fond of her grandmother Caroline, who lived nearby.

In 1952, a few years after her mother married John Mortimer, the family moved to Harben Road in Swiss Cottage. Carrie and Julia walked each day to St. Mary's Town & Country School in Eton Avenue, a progressive school run by a married couple who were refugees from Germany. Carrie remained here until she went to study at RADA when she was 16. Shortly after, she moved out of the family home to live with the actor/writer Tom Kempinski, a fellow student, with whom she remained friends after their relationship ended.

In 1962, working as an understudy on a West End production of 'The Big Killing', she met the actor Leslie Phillips, with whom she was to spend the next 15 years. During this time her acting career flourished, spanning theatre, film, television and radio. She played leading roles in films such as 'Juggernaut' with Richard Harris, Anthony Hopkins and Omar Sharif, and 'The Hireling' with Sarah Miles and Robert Shaw. She appeared as a regular character in many popular TV dramas, notably 'Intrigue', 'The Cleopatras', 'General Hospital', and 'The Pallisers'. In one-off TV dramas, amongst others she played Eva Braun opposite Frank Finlay's Hitler in 'The Death of Adolf Hitler' and the lead in her mother's BBC Play for Today 'Three's Company'. Her many theatre roles included 'Otherwise Engaged', 'Night Must Fall', 'A Day in the Death of Joe Egg' and 'Look Back in Anger'.

In 1978 she met the actor John Bennett, introduced by a mutual friend Marian Diamond, who was to become one of Carrie's closest friends. In 1979 she and John married, and they moved to a large house in Willesden Green, number 73 Teignmouth Road. Shortly afterwards their son Jake was born, to be joined 18 months later by Sam – two brothers for Jamie, John's son by a previous marriage.

Many happy years followed, and Carrie's career slowed as she devoted herself to looking after her two boys and her dogs and supporting John in his career. No 73 became a meeting place for all Jake and Sam's many cousins, and in 1992 Julia and her family moved in next door at no 71, and in the mid-nineties Penelope moved from Gloucestershire to a flat in the next road.

In 2000 Sam spent a gap year in Africa before going up to Nottingham University. When he came home he complained of a pain in his shoulder which was diagnosed a few months later as a rare form of cancer – Ewings Sarcoma. There followed a nightmare 18 months of treatment which in the end proved unsuccessful, and he died on 27th January 2002. Carrie coped with immense bravery, but the loss of Sam changed her life, and John's, and Jake's, forever. In April 2005 John died, and ten years later Carrie's sister Madelon.

Through all this, Carrie continued to live at no 73, with Jake visiting every month from his home in Warminster. In 2015 she was diagnosed with ovarian cancer and had very invasive surgery and chemotherapy. She dealt with this with characteristic determination, but a further blow followed when her sister Deborah was diagnosed with the same cancer, of which she died in October 2018.

In late April of this year, just a few weeks after Lockdown began, Carrie was admitted to hospital with breathing difficulties and Covid symptoms. She had a protracted stay in hospital but managed to keep positive despite not being able to have visitors. She was finally released to go home and was thrilled to be back in familiar surroundings and in her beloved garden. But however strong her spirit, her body was failing. She was told she had untreatable leukaemia, and she died on 20th September.

Right to the very end, Carrie was asking about the chaps. She was always interested in what they were all up to and loved to hear the gossip. She was cheerful, bright, funny and beautiful – an icon of glamour – the sort of person you looked forward to spending time with because you knew you would have a lovely conversation. As a friend – and often confidante – she was curious, positive and non-judgemental,

though it didn't stop her having something to say about other actors she saw on the stage or TV! She was very perceptive about other people, and could be mischievous – she often came back with a sharp retort. But all that was underlined by a real empathy with others, one that prompted her to become a Childline Listener.

Carrie is also remembered fondly as an animal lover – she supported the Mayhew animal shelter and Pets as Therapy, and her last canine companion, Alfie, is pictured in the order of service leaflet. Other things that made her happy were Hampstead Heath, crosswords, swimming in the sea and the 'Sound of Music'. But most of all, she drew joy and sustenance from being with the people she cared about: her children, husband and the wider family and her friends were everything to her.

Personal tributes

'With Love and Lizards': Jeremy

In the summer of 1956, the Mortimer family spent two months in Positano, our parents having been commissioned to write a book about their travels with six children and a nanny. The book opens with thumbnail sketches of said children. Here is Carrie going to bed in Harben Road.

Caroline, nearly fourteen and going to a co-educational day school, took her world up to her bedroom at the top of the house and became, brushing her short dark hair in front of her signed photograph of Gregory Peck, a star going to bed after a hard day at the studio – and, of course, even more exhausting, she had been duty-bound to call in at the theatre afterwards. For what star would not have a white wireless like hers, or an ailing pot of ivy, or mountains of film magazines, rows of young actors' faces in little frames, crew-cut or bushy-haired, grinning at her energetically from the mantelpiece? Inside her wardrobe she had pasted an admirable collage in which Mr Peck peered with identical grim bewilderment out of every role he had ever played. She studied her small face, her big green eyes, in the mirror, wondering whether there was time to experiment with a new make-up – a couple of black beauty spots perhaps, Garbo Cheekbones? She decided not and got into bed where she read for a long time a book about the chequered life of a young woman in the reign of George the Fourth, a thing that, strictly speaking, she was not supposed to do.

Poem for Carrie – On her 25th birthday, 1967: Sally

*Greetings to the lady in the big house
the big house in Maida Vale
fountains made of crystal
on which your new dreams sail
greetings to the actress, the wide-eyed actress
dressed in blue
I greet you in your corset
In colour BBC 2
greetings to my sister my dear sister Caroline
I once thought you were a princess
now I know you are from time to time
greetings to my sister
who I hope will smile today
although twenty five pink cherries
have paddled far away
greetings to your memories, your prince
your hopes your fears
may you be happy woman, actress, mother*

Sally - for a daisy chain of years

Four-Feet, by Rudyard Kipling: Marian

Carrie loved and had dogs for most of her life. The last of this line was her beloved Alfie – who as Jake says was an important part of her life for many years. After she lost Alfie at the beginning of last year she said she found walking without a dog a bit pointless. This poem by Rudyard Kipling is for Carrie and Alfie – with love.

*I have done mostly what most men do,
And pushed it out of my mind;
But I can't forget, if I wanted to,
Four-Feet trotting behind.*

*Day after day, the whole day through–
Wherever my road inclined–
Four-Feet said, ‘I am coming with you!’
And trotted along behind.*

*Now I must go by some other round, –
Which I shall never find–
Somewhere that does not carry the sound
Of Four-Feet trotting behind.*

Jake’s visual tribute

It was Jake’s idea and fond wish to have a visual memorial for his mother, and it is my pleasure to present it to you now. The music is chosen by him to reflect Carrie’s love of musicals, and as you listen to it please enjoy the slideshow, with images from her career interspersed with photos offered by her loved ones.

 **The Grand Waltz – ‘The Sound of Music’**

Jake Story: ‘Life with Mum and...’ Jamie on behalf of Jake

Mum loves Gardening when i was sweeping the leaves and cutting the grass at the garden

and having Lunch at outside

and throwing the ball for Alfie (dog) to play

and Mum taking me to have a haircut at the barbers and listening the music

...and taking Alfie for a walk.

I remember when Mum and I went to France to stay to visit auntie Madelon in her house

...with Alfie.

and we went back to France again for a holiday with Mum and Dad at Euro Disneyland

and I went on the rides and ice skating as I am not very good and I keep always fell over

...poor Jake!

and we went out for supper at the restaurant and hitting the table very loud because the sharks are coming

and Dad had soup

...and I can't remember what Mum had

Mum and I are listening the music - Mum was dancing and she loves Frank Sinatra music and Anything Goes as well and sometimes she likes dancing with Alfie as well and listening Elaine Paige on the radio in the car

...when Mum is taking Alfie for a walk.

She likes having Supper when she is watching the television and having a *stiff drink* in the evening and having a cup of Tea and breakfast in the morning and having a cup of Tea in the evening as well

and sometimes I like watching when Mum was in the film and television as well

...and then taking Alfie around the block.

She went to bed after that

and she likes having a bath in the morning and sometimes in the evening as well

...and then Mum said "Goodnight Alfie Poo".

Our final reading is a poem written by Carrie's beloved grandmother, Caroline Amy Fletcher, one which Carrie had framed in her bedroom.

'The One Spirit' by Caroline Amy Fletcher

The indestructible Life Spirit lives

In Everyone and Everything –

There is no Death, only Life in different forms –

Union with all –

Nature is All and One.

I shall live my own life no longer,

But the life of the Living Whole.