

A celebration of life

Jeanette (Jan) Key

15 June 1933 – 23 October 1921

*10.45-11.15 am, Kent and Sussex Crematorium
17th November 2021*

a personal goodbye

Humanist
Ceremonies

Jan was born in Ladywood, Birmingham, on the 15th of June 1933, a younger sister to Phyllis and Olive. Their father, Burchall, was a tool maker, a reserved occupation, which meant he was not called up during the war but continued in his job in addition to being an ARP warden. Ladywood was the site of much damage, and Jan's time at primary school must have been dominated by the dangers – and for children, let's face it the excitement - of those years. Later in her life she would explain her lack of fear by referring to the dangers of those years. "I got through the bloody Blitz" she'd say, "I can do this".

Jeff will now talk to us about Jan:

Good morning everyone, thanks very much for being with us today.

I would like to remember the "Achiever" who shaped my life and our three great children - JAN

When I finished my Army service I joined the steel company in Birmingham, GKN. They still exist. Jan was a trainee secretary and I was a management trainee. We got on like a house on fire and had both bought new bikes, so we joined the YHA and toured the country, not much traffic so we tried Land's End and up to Lake District, starting with Stratford on Avon.

So we married when Jan became a Secretary at a Brewery (M and B).

Business took us North, Jan became a nurse and loved it and we had our super family at that time. Also she rang me up and said "The kids and I are going to buy a dog today" thanks for telling me. Sam was the first of our 4 including Rex, who's still around today.

Jan learned to drive my Ford Zephyr on Southport beach and she was soon whipping us down the Autobahn to Switzerland.

Then we moved South to Sevenoaks and she said "I liked that shop we saw in the Cotswolds" - so we bought the Village Gallery in Brasted and she concentrated on the latest craze, Stripped Pine. We got to know all the strippers in Kent, Sussex and Essex. I collected and delivered. Nine happy years. She even got the butcher opposite interested and he put in a tank.

During this time she enjoyed singing in a choir and finished up managing it

We brought a sample of her other hobby Oil Painting. Decorates our house.

So that ends my 3 minutes and I leave you with those thoughts.

Thanks for listening.

Thank you, Jeff

Barbara will now talk to us about her Mum:

What can I say about my Mum?

Amy (one of her three granddaughters) recently described her as ...' a wonderful vibrant lady who filled our lives with many happy memories' That's true. Mum had a zest and enthusiasm for life that never waned, until dementia took her from us.

She loved performing in a WI choir, whilst in Cheshire, which regularly competed in singing competitions including the Welsh Eisteddford. We chose the music you walked into because she would have loved those voices and would have killed for a Soprano voice like the soloist has in that version of Nimrod. She loved drama and played some very dramatic and challenging parts for the WI performances. She learned so much through the WI and developed an appreciation for music that lasted her whole life.

In an effort to widen our horizons, Mum and Dad took us to all sorts of performing arts, including a deadly boring Liverpool Symphony Orchestra performance. I remember Dad keeping us all entertained by drawing cheeky cartoons of the conductor on the programme. One of the highlights, other than her performances obviously, was going to see Ken Dodd in a pantomime. He knocked our socks off and other than being hilarious, used a cricket bat to hit balls into the upper circle. Mind blowing when you are primary age.

Mum always had an eye on fashion. She particularly loved to dress up for special occasions and after her and I had some wonderful shopping expeditions to Browns in Chester, she became the proud owner of the most wonderful wardrobe of evening dresses and accessories, including a musquash cape complete with dangling paws. She wore them to the annual Christmas Company do with Dad. Mum and Dad never underdressed. Dad wore some fine suits worn with cummerbund, bow tie and cuff links. He looked so proud and happy with our mum dressed up to the nines, on his arm. They jumped into their huge bronze Ford Zephyr and roared off into the night. A very fine stylish couple indeed.

They loved a bit of house fashion too. They moved house regularly and had fun doing each one up with the latest decorating ideas. It was matt black banisters and fake wooden panelling wallpaper in one house. A wall of bright orange kitchen cabinets - 'soo seventies darling', in another.

Tilda (her 2nd granddaughter) wrote, 'Wow! Did she go places, see things and enjoy so many of her years.' That's true too. The Company annual conference was held in the best hotels, in the best resorts. They flew to Italy, Brazil..... What a time they had. It was the 1960's after all. Was it Macmillan who said 'you've never had it so good.' I think they never had.

The three of us children had a significant age range. Adrian was the eldest child born in 1957, I was born in 1959 and Kate was born in 1963. Kate was kept closer to home but Adrian and I were allowed to roam freely. As long as we were home for tea that was fine. Mum was at home in our early years but she still managed to be an Avon make-up agent, a Polaroid rep, and even worked as a secretary in a Christian retreat called Foxhill.

Dad was on the road for long hours and she held the fort without family back-up or close friends. She never seemed to look back to her family and friends in Birmingham with any regrets, until much later in life. I guess having three children kept her a bit busy. She was a one-woman band and her drive and fearlessness never failed her. Once she had an idea, she was like a cruise ship, she wouldn't change her path and carried on until she arrived at her destination. I think she passed those genes down to all of her children and grandchildren and maybe even her four great grandsons in the future in one way or another.

Her nieces Jill and Jane have very fond memories of their Auntie Janet. Jill phoned from Australia several times and sent flowers to our Dad which he was very touched to receive. Jane wrote 'that she always brought excitement and colour into our lives when our families met. Aunt Janet had a great sense of humour and youthful outlook on life. She leaves a gap in our family constellation' How true.

I feel proud of what she achieved in her life, despite a challenging and limiting start as a child and young woman. I know that her grandchildren and great children will always enjoy the stories we tell about our fun times and with the sentiment behind the saying 'on the shoulders of giants' we have the chance to improve on previous generations achievements and make the very best of our life chances – just like she did.

Thank you, Barbara.

And now Kate:

My Mum was always there for me.

From when I was a little girl, picking me up from primary school with our Golden Retriever called Sam, to when I was 22 and the doctors refused to operate on me while I lay very ill in hospital. Feisty Mum took control. As the consultant turned to leave my bedside, Mum went up to him and took him by his collar drawing him close to her face and said in rage 'don't be such a coward, operate now'! He obeyed and it turned out that Mum saved my life.

My Mum was the first feminist I ever met. She had courage, a tremendous work ethic and sheer determination that has passed to myself and Barbara. We both forged great careers, Barb in Teaching and myself in TV. I am so proud to say all our daughters have pushed the boundaries even further.

She was a spirited businesswoman in her and Dad's days running The Village Gallery. She ventured far and wide around the Kentish country lanes to find furniture to upgrade and sell in the shop. Mum always drove a hard bargain and we squeezed all her purchases in our small van. They were fun days.

Mum was so funny, making us laugh when she kicked the Hoover or thumped the TV if they didn't work. Mum's philosophy was a swift kick or bash often fixed things. At the very least it would make you feel better.

Mum always said that when she passed she wanted to be buried with cream cakes. So I have done just that. There is a box with her of her favourite cream horns.

She had some great sayings, one I will never forget.

While parking Dad's spanking new bright canary yellow coloured Range Rover in an underground car park, she reversed out of the space crunching my passenger door on a rogue concrete pillar. Mum didn't blink an eye and we returned home. Dad looked as his brand new car and asked 'what the heck happened'? Mum simply said her perfect retort a saying she often used 'Well obviously the car was designed by a man.' Nothing more was said.

One of my favourite sayings was her last words spoken to our daughter Georgia as she was leaving to go out with friends.

'Be good, but not too good' that was my Mum.

Thank you, Kate.

Sadly, by the time the great grandchildren – Archie, Sonny, Theo and Alfie - arrived she was already ill, and the additional restraints of Covid meant that she only met one of them. At least she was spared the overwhelming sadness of Adrian's recent death, which would have been devastating for her had she known.

Adrian was an amazingly positive and pragmatic man, often in the face of great adversity. The family have chosen a short poem that reflects his positivity at this sad time. It seems a fitting legacy to them both. It's based on the David Harkins poem "She is Gone", adapted slightly to do justice to them both.

You can shed tears that they are gone

Or you can smile because they have lived

You can close your eyes and wish they would come back

Or you can open your eyes and see all that they have left

Your heart can be empty because you can't see them

Or you can be full of the love that you shared

You can turn your back on tomorrow and live yesterday

Or you can be happy for tomorrow because of yesterday

You can remember them and only that they are gone

Or you can cherish their memory and let it live on

You can cry and close your mind, be empty and turn your back

Or you can do what they would want: smile, open your eyes, love and go on.

Jeff did a great job of caring for Jan, but just under two years ago, they were advised that she really needed more care than she could be offered at home, and she moved into Caroline House in Hailsham, where she was cared for with great respect and sensitivity. The staff there knew when her life was coming to an end, and alerted the family so that Jeff, Barbara and Kate could all spend time with her before she died, which felt like a real privilege after all the time during Covid when they had not been able to touch her.

We often think of death as a cruel enemy, taking away those we love, but for those who are suffering or who have reached the end of their endurance, it can come as a quiet friend, closing the curtains, turning out the light, and settling us into a last sleep, free from pain and weariness.

I hope it was so for Jan.