

A celebration of life Joan Daniel

25 September 1935 – 8th November 2021

2.45 pm, 26 November 2021, Surrey & Sussex Crematorium

a personal goodbye

Humanist
Ceremonies

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Joan was born in Warrington on the 25th September 1935, the youngest daughter of Anne and Jim Lowe. There were big age gaps between the children, with her eldest brother, James, being 12 years older than her. In between were Arthur and Betty. Like many of her generation, she experienced both the deprivations and the excitements of the war. Warrington, on the Manchester Ship Canal, was of course the target of many air raids, including one dreadful one when a lone bomber dropped bombs on a summer Gala, killing 16 people. Joan's memories were more positive, though – she recalled the troop ships pulling up at Latchford Locks, and the US soldiers throwing oranges down to the local children waiting below. And she had vivid memories of her Dad, who she was very close to, wringing the chickens' necks, and of her Mother teaching her to knit – a skill which has continued to pass down the generations.

She was a good scholar and went to the Grammar School, but as was common in those days, left school after doing her General Certificate, and she joined the GPO as a telephonist.

Joan met Eric in 1955 at a dance, and they began a four-year courtship, which included a trip to Paris on his motorbike. He had to ask her Dad's permission for her to go, and give him assurances that they had two rooms booked. When they married in 1959, she was no longer allowed to work at the GPO, and they gave her a "dowry" of £94, which she spent on a three-piece suite. The marriage was to last for 62 years. Joan was very proud of the telegram from the Queen on their Diamond Wedding anniversary.

Eric always considered himself a very lucky man to have Joan by his side. They shared a sense of humour and a love of gardening and sport. Despite her wonderful cooking, his favourite dish was always mushy peas or soup from a can! He misses her terribly now she's no longer with us: she was undoubtedly his world. He is immensely proud to have called her his wife and has so many fond memories of their 66 years together.

They created a magical, happy home around them. Claire was born in 1961 and Jaqueline in 1964. It was a household where many games were played – boardgames, cards and word games. Crosswords were Joan's passion. Claire and Jaqueline think that this love of words was what led to them both being accomplished linguists, and therefore shaping their careers. She loved to do the Telegraph cryptic crossword, and was particularly fond of the Radio Times Christmas Crossword.

William the dog arrived when the girls were small. Claire was frightened of the bouncy black lab who lived next door, so Joan decided that the best thing was to get a dog themselves. A corgi/basset cross, he was stubborn and loyal, keeping potential shoppers away from shops when the girls were inside. He once nipped a visiting friend's ocelot trousers when she crept up on the family unannounced!

And in turn, Joan was loyal to him, not putting him in kennels so they could go abroad but opting instead for family holidays in Britain in the caravan, giving the girls an encyclopaedic knowledge of British geography. They often went to Silverdale in the Lake District, meeting up there with other families and having a great time.

They huddled in the caravan playing cards and Scrabble when the weather was bad, but when it was good, Joan was outside worshipping the sun. Once Eric retired, they used to go to Tenerife for their wedding anniversary every March to soak up the sun while the UK was still shrouded in gloom.

And just occasionally they did leave William with a neighbour. She tells of how, when she took him out for a walk, he insisted on heading for Joan and Eric's house, going in, and searching every room till he was convinced they weren't there.

Once the girls were at school, Joan took a TOPS course in secretarial skills, and worked in various places, including a car showroom and Greenalls Brewery. But she was always on hand for the girls, as well as for her parents, when they needed care, and in time, for her grandchildren. More of that in a minute.

Eric's job with Lombard Finance brought them down south to Essex, which wasn't really their cup of tea, but when they moved to East Grinstead in 1984, they found a town, and a home, which suited them perfectly. Eric retired in his late 50s, and they loved every aspect of the retirement life. They played golf (Joan managing to hit a hole in one before Eric did), their involvement with Probus took them on some great European trips, and there was of course the garden, for which they won awards in East Grinstead Britain in Bloom.

They used to run a plant stall in Turners Hill each year to raise money for St Catherine's Hospice in East Grinstead. They both talked to the people who were buying the plants, generously sharing their knowledge and really enjoying themselves, and it is to St Catherine's that you should give any donations you want to make – details are in the order of ceremony.

Last year they finally employed a gardener, Sally, who has carried on working on the garden over the past few weeks. Sally said to Claire that it was only since Joan was not around at all that she realised how much she did in the garden, asking "did she Hoover up before we came?".

Here's a quote from Penelope Lively's book "Life in the Garden".

"My own life in the garden has been a particular, and special, aspect of life in general: the activity, the preoccupation, to which I have retreated both in practice and in the mind when everything else permitted. Get out there and dig, weed, prune, plant, when stuck with whatever was being written. Escape winter by swinging forward into spring, summer: maybe try those climbing French beans this year, what about a new rose, divide the irises, the leucojums are crowded – put some under the quince tree.

The gardening self becomes a separate persona, waiting to be indulged when possible, and never entirely subdued, always noticing, appreciating, recording. This will be the case for anyone with a consuming interest, but gardening has this embracing quality in that it colours the way you look at the world: everything that grows, and the way in which it grows, now catches your attention; the gardening eye assesses, queries, is sometimes judgemental – quite opinionated. The physical world has new eloquence.

In gardening, we step beyond the dictation of time. We create order. We design and direct. We get right in there with the plants, escape worldly worries, do in our knees and our backs, set spinning the circadian rhythms, jack up our immune systems, and possibly live a few years longer. When hard at it, none of this is relevant; it is simply a matter of intense engagement with cutting back, taking out, putting in, with this rose, that weed, these bulbs, tubers. As an occupation, it seems to me unparalleled; productive, beneficial, enjoyable. What more could one want?"

Joan was also a very good cook, creating wonderful sponge cakes and being renowned for her version of Lancashire Hot Pot, in the style known as “Tater Ash”, made with skirt steak. She kept the house in beautiful order and was meticulous about her own appearance. Even before her last trip back to hospital, she kept the ambulance drivers waiting while she combed her hair.

And she loved sport. Joan knew more about cricket than many other people. Her knowledge of players and the latest types of shots, such as sweep shot, reverse sweep and ramp shot, made post-match discussions very lively. Even in hospital she was asking how the T20 was going! Given that Warrington was in Lancashire when she was born, she was a big Lancashire supporter. She was also passionate about their Old Trafford neighbours, Manchester United, seeing many greats in the team over the years: Bobby Charlton, Bryan Robson and George Best to name but a few. She would no doubt have been much exercised by the events of the last few weeks.

Amazingly she still found time to read – mainly romantic or historical novels, plus of course cookery books and gardening books, and to watch television – again, loving the romantic and historic like Call the Midwife and Downton Abbey.

The pampered William lasted to a remarkable 18 years, and was in turn followed by Tessie, a rescued Jack Russell/Dachshund cross, who demonstrated the feistiness of both breeds and didn't like men very much (Eric excepted!). After her, they couldn't bear to get another, but there were always other family dogs on hand, like Poppy and Leo.

Along came the grandchildren, James, Alastair, Isabelle and Sophie. Again, Joan was always on hand to help, whether practically with school pick-ups and gardening, or emotionally when a little support was needed. When they got older, she helped again too – she was very involved in James and Alastair's weddings, and all the fun around them. Joan was so proud of what both her daughters and her grandchildren achieved. She and Eric used to fight over who got to read Claire and Jacqueline's letters first when they were doing their years abroad while at university.

And then came the great grandchildren, Zoë and Emma. Sadly Joan never met Emma, born in the USA – distance and Covid both prevented that, but Joan said to Claire that she felt she knew her through Facetime, videos and photos. Because, late in life, Joan also entered the digital world. She was dubious about the iPad which her daughters gave her for her 80th, but when she got access to Claire's Kindle account, she was in seventh heaven, constantly reading novels. Having overcome her reluctance, she got an iPhone too and was active on the family WhatsApp group and loved to check “her” personal weather app.

Joan's illness developed very rapidly, and it was only three weeks between her admitting that she felt ill, and her death. Eric and both her daughters were able to be with her over the last few days, and James, his wife Ellie and Zoë were able to say their goodbyes. Claire had the privilege of being with her at the very end. Once she'd gone, the nurses came in and suggested that they open the window “to let her spirit go” which was a lovely touch.