

A celebration of the life of

# Christine McCaffrey

18 February 1933 – 23 December 2022

12 noon, 9 February 2023, Guildford Crematorium



*a personal goodbye*

Humanist  
*Ceremonies*

Christine was born in Kingston on the 18<sup>th</sup> February 1933, the only child of Dennis and Beatrice Hanrohan. Dennis worked for Pearl Insurance. Beatrice Anna, always known as Nan, was one of three sisters, the Tiptons. Vi, Nan and Curlie were quite some girls in their youth, if the pictures are anything to go by, and the family was close. Christine seems to have spent a fair bit of time with Curlie, and was perhaps influenced by her independent streak. Vi later married Ernest Cotterill, and we family members who are here today are all descended from Vi and Ernest.

Christine grew up in Raeburn Avenue, Surbiton, and the family later moved to the Isle of Wight, and then Worthing. She was an active girl and young woman, a member of the Sea Rangers and the Surbiton Rowing and Sailing Club, and she enjoyed cycling. She and her friend Pam would also pop up to London often, very definitely intending to enjoy themselves.

When she left school, she did a Pitman secretarial course, and began her long career in the motor racing industry. She worked mainly for Jack Brabham in the early days. When former driver John Coombs set up his own team, which Brabham drove for, she went to work for the team. She stayed on as the business morphed into being a car dealership, first for Jaguar and then BMW. Christine's tales of the motor racing industry were legion, and probably like most of you here today I wish I'd written them down – what was that one about Stirling Moss's nightclub up West? Who was it who rose from cleaning cars to running a motor racing team? Actually, I think that was Ron Dennis. And she certainly had tales to tell about Bernie Ecclestone.

When they stopped working together, Jack wrote to Christine, saying: *To Dear Christine, they were great days and you helped to make it all possible. Best wishes Jack Brabham*

Her interests did not stop at motor racing. She didn't work for Coombs on Wednesdays, she went up to London to work for Walter Norton as his PA. Walter had significant horse racing interests, and was a wealthy man. He was supposed to have left Christine and others a gold bar, which led to Christine taking one of the only three plane journeys she undertook in her long life. But it was a wild goose chase. The second flight was a business trip from London to Edinburgh. The third was to Canada, and we'll hear more about later.

She was also a PA for Diana Barnato Walker, daughter of the racing driver Wolff Barnato. Diana was a pioneering British aviator. In World War II, she became one of the first women pilots of the Air Transport Auxiliary, flying 80 types of aircraft and delivering 260 Spitfires. In 1963, she became the first British woman to break the sound barrier. Another of those strong women with whom Christine associated.

In 1961, Christine married Tony McCaffrey, a photographer she had met when he was photographing motor racing. The marriage did not last, though in later years she looked after him in his final illness. She bought her little house in Guildford in 1988, and retired from Coombs in 1993.

While at Coombs she met two people who had an enormous impact on the rest of her life – first Claire, who has been a tremendous friend over the years, and supported Christine tirelessly over the last two difficult years, despite having a house full of boys and dogs to cope with as well. And Clive, who remained very close to Christine right to the end of her life, and who introduced her to Cornwall, which she loved. Clive's daughter, Jane, later encouraged Christine to buy properties there, and she became very fond of Jane's husband Richard and daughter Lara – she proudly showed us Lara's graduation photo last time we visited her.

Lara said of Christine:

*"I will always remember your bargain hunting skills for a good deal on the biscuits in Lidl, and how you used to talk to your car as "Mr Toad" on your monthly journeys down here. How you'd blame Mr Toad for the car doing 80mph down the motorway, nothing to do with your foot on the accelerator at all! I will always remember your obsession with gaff rigging on the yachts and how much you enjoyed being by the sea in Cornwall..... You were an absolute amazement to us all driving from Guildford to Cornwall once a month in your 80s, until the pandemic struck. Not to mention your day trips driving to Wales, just because you could. I'll always remember your love for a good game, you were excellent at Rummikubs and you used to love a crossword. I remember us baking shortbread together when I was younger, and your answer to everything was "It'll be all right". I am heartbroken you're no longer here and annoyed at you because you promised you'd live till you were 125. Christine's biggest message in life was "have fun", and that's what I'll continue to do."*

Other friends from Coombs included Joan in wages, and her daughter Gloria who used to pop in on her way from school. Joan and Christine frequently discussed the stock market, and the connection went down the generations, with Gloria's daughter Toni sharing Christine's love of Formula One.

You all know about Christine's passion for owls, and Claire will now read from the greatest of owl poems:

***The Owl and the Pussycat, Edward Lear***

*The Owl and the Pussycat went to sea  
In a beautiful pea-green boat,  
They took some honey, and plenty of money,  
Wrapped up in a five pound note.  
The Owl looked up to the stars above,  
And sang to a small guitar,  
"O lovely Pussy! O Pussy, my love,  
What a beautiful Pussy you are, you are, you are,  
What a beautiful Pussy you are."  
Pussy said to the Owl "You elegant fowl,  
How charmingly sweet you sing.  
O let us be married, too long we have tarried;  
But what shall we do for a ring?"  
They sailed away, for a year and a day,  
To the land where the Bong-tree grows,  
And there in a wood a Piggy-wig stood  
With a ring at the end of his nose, his nose, his nose,  
With a ring at the end of his nose.  
"Dear Pig, are you willing to sell for one shilling your ring?"  
Said the Piggy, "I will"  
So they took it away, and were married next day  
By the Turkey who lives on the hill.  
They dined on mince, and slices of quince,  
Which they ate with a runcible spoon.  
And hand in hand, on the edge of the sand.  
They danced by the light of the moon, the moon, the moon,  
They danced by the light of the moon.*

Christine's energy was astonishing. Her mother died in 1988, leaving Dennis on his own in Worthing. Christine would leave Coombs on a Friday night and drive down there to look after him over the weekend, then drive back up on Monday to be back at her desk by 9am. She and Dennis took many holidays together, with Christine driving to France and Ireland, and they took day trips from Portsmouth to Normandy. On at least one of the Ireland trips, they met up with her cousin Wendy, my mother, and her husband Bob, who was an Ulsterman.

After Dennis's death in 2003, the need to get rid of his possessions prompted Christine to take up doing car boot sales, which she continued to do for the next 15 years. She was unsentimental about this, and had very little room in Powell Close, so everything went, even her father's medals. The monthly car boot by the A3 near Ripley was one of her favourites, and the Country Market at Borden.

After her retirement from Coombs, she carried on working for Walter, and she made good friends in Guildford, particularly Janet (always referred to as "Doggy Janet" to differentiate her from neighbour Janet) and Els. And Christine's birthday was always celebrated by a big group of them, several from the Coombs days, including Claire of course, Jackie and her daughter Lisa, Mandy, Rose and Gwyn, and the two Janets and Els. These continued until early 2020, when Covid called a halt to them. Not that Christine was intimidated by Covid – she and Janet would drive down to Tesco once a week to get the shopping, while all the rest of us were hiding away.

Janet has asked me to read this lovely tribute from her to Christine:

*No one could have prepared me for the loss of Christine, who's been my dear friend for over thirty years.*

*Christine changed my life, we were comfortable in each other's company and spent a lot of time together.*

*Christine shared stories of her working life and what it meant to her.*

*How she loved packing up her car, to the roof, as she went off to her car boot sales.*

*We would do simple things together, our weekly food shopping trips to Tesco, where she was very familiar with the yellow label sections.*

*We'd often venture further afield and shop additionally at Morrisons, Aldershot, where we'd enjoy their big breakfasts.*

*Christine loved my dogs and would sit in her favourite chair in my conservatory with a cuppa by her side and a lap full of dogs.*

*In the latter months, due to her lack of mobility, our days out finished so my visits were to her home and on unpacking her shopping, the inclusion of a Marks and Spencer's prawn sandwich, broadened her smile.*

*I would ask that you raise a glass to Christine on 18th February as she was so looking forward to celebrating her 90th birthday.*

*I'm a better person for having Christine in my life.*

*Thank you my dear friend.*

I had two big adventures with Christine. One was heading off with her in our campervan, driven by my husband Chris, to Portstewart in the North of Ireland for the scattering of the ashes of Wendy's husband Bob. More adventurous still, though, was the third flight of her life, with me to visit our family in Calgary. Everyone had a great time, and she developed a particular bond with Bob and Brenda's miniature Schnauzer, Charlie.

Bob (Junior) says of Christine:

*"I was always amazed at Christine's resiliency. She was well into her 80's and we climbed up a tower at Lewes castle. I remember well her trip to Canada which was a tremendous feat of courage because she did not enjoy flying. She always was so cheerful and she was Mum's favourite cousin. They were good friends and I think corresponded by mail. They loved letters, a dying tradition now. Not many people write letters anymore. We'll miss her smile. She was always game for anything."*

The Canada trip wasn't the first time she'd been to North America, as she did go to New York once on the Queen Elizabeth, but she never managed to go on a cruise. This had been her ambition for her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, but it wasn't to be.

She did however continue her love of water locally, by serving teas on canal barge trips for the Wey and Arun Canal Trust – another activity which Covid sadly brought to an end.

She kept up with all her family members, particularly enjoying the annual get togethers in Waterlooville hosted by Michael, who says:

*"My overarching thoughts about Christine are that she was extremely personable and had this encyclopaedic mind - she seemed to know everything about everybody in the family! Conversations with Christine were never dull, and she took a genuine interest in what you were getting up to. She will be missed."*

She really did take a genuine interest in everything, and was full of questions. Sadly she never got into technology, which was a shame, because I'm sure she would have enormously enjoyed it.

The last couple of years have not been kind to Christine, but she has shown her usual resilience, though blackouts and broken bones and Covid and all the rest. And in the last few weeks of her life, many of us got to see her – not only Claire and her local friends, but her goddaughter Bridget, Jane, and Chris and me. When we visited, we went round the corner to get her favourite scampi and chips, washed down with coffee laced with Baileys.

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 Christine.