

# A celebration of the life of Beryl Margaret West

June 1932 – April 2019



*a personal goodbye*

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## **Beryl West**

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The life we are here to remember began in Nottingham on June 24th 1932, when Kitty and George Grafton became parents to the first of their five children, who they named Beryl Margaret. Over the following 11 years, as the family grew to include Doreen, who is now deceased, David, who lives in Australia, and Marilyn and Ken, who are here today, Beryl had to help care for her younger siblings. On one occasion, she took Marilyn and Ken with her on a shopping errand. When she returned, it was only when her father commented about how quiet it was at home that she realised she had left them there. Another time, she was given the unusual task of taking a live chicken to her Aunty's house, and when she stopped to let her younger siblings play in a park, the chicken ran off. With the help of passers-by, the bird was eventually caught and safely delivered, but it had all been very stressful for Beryl. She felt that being the oldest child was a big responsibility on her young shoulders, and declared that - if any more babies arrived - she would leave home!

Beryl had a natural creativity which was always evident. She loved to draw and paint and dreamed of going to art college, but - like most youngsters of her generation - through necessity, she left school at 14 to start work. Beryl may have had to give up on her artistic ambitions but she had firm views on what she would, or wouldn't, do next. When her mum took her to the Bairnswear factory, she refused to work there, opting instead to become an office junior for a firm of solicitors on Long Row. It was a good decision because the firm paid for her to learn shorthand and typing, providing the foundation for her future career. Beryl then became a switchboard operator; a role for which she was required to develop an appropriate telephone voice. She worked all over the area and made many valued and lasting friendships during her time there.

From a young age, Beryl was a keen cyclist. She had fond childhood memories of Sunday morning rides with her dad to Dale Abbey and, when she was in her teens, she was thrilled with the made-to-measure bike he bought her, and couldn't wait to show her granddad, whose trade had been building bikes. Beryl rode everywhere, but it was only when her dad threatened to dismantle her bike if she didn't join a club that she became a member of the Nottingham Wheelers. One of the first people who spoke to her was a handsome young man whose name she discovered was Alan West, and who she recognised because he had sometimes overtaken her when she was struggling up Alfretton Road. He said, "Hello chick, I like your bike." It was cycling that brought Beryl and Alan together, and within a very short time of meeting, it was a horrifying cycling accident which would have such a profound impact on their future lives.

Beryl and Alan were both just 18 when Alan sustained life-changing - and potentially life-threatening - injuries on May 13th 1951, which left him paralysed from the neck down. Some people might have been so overwhelmed by what possibly lay ahead that they would have walked away, but Beryl loved Alan deeply and it wasn't in her nature to give up. They married on August 3rd 1956 and from then until Alan's death in November 2007, they were an integral part of each other's lives, each supporting and encouraging the other to reach their full potential. And six years after their wedding they were both delighted when their family was completed with the arrival of their adored daughter, Diane.

It's hard to imagine it today, but in the 1950s, women often had to resign from their jobs when they married, and so it was for Beryl; the only upside being that she received a dowry from her employers. But she soon found other work, and for the first six years of her marriage, as well as looking after the bungalow that she and Alan moved to in Wollaton Park, she was employed in the offices of Sherwood Bleachers and Dyers.

After Diane was born, she initially worked part-time running the coffee bar in the university's Psychology department, before taking on the role of secretary to two child psychology professors; Elizabeth and John Newson. Beryl loved being able to cycle to work and she also enjoyed the opportunity to make lasting friendships with post grad students from all over the world. She was very proud of the work she did and the huge party held to mark her retirement on June 1st 1990 showed how well thought of she was by colleagues and students alike.

Away from work, Beryl had a number of hobbies and interests, some of which demonstrated her creative flair, and never was that more evident than in her beautiful garden. She loved being outside and combined with an extensive knowledge of trees and plants, this made gardening a perfect way for her to spend her time. She also loved playing the piano, reading, painting, drawing, knitting, sewing and making bobbin lace, and she was a very talented baker who enjoyed making cakes for others, and who liked to cook for the guests that she and Alan regularly welcomed into their home. They often socialised with neighbours in Wollaton Park, in particular, Gill and the late Keith, John and the late Julia, and June and the late Peter, and with good friends, Mike and Sue, from Mansfield, who they had known for many years. And of course Beryl's family was always very important to her.

As well as being a devoted wife and mother, she remained close to her siblings, was a loving aunty to her nieces and nephews, a welcoming mother-in-law to Andy and a doting Granny to her two cherished granddaughters, Lizzie and Evie; both of whom have inherited many of her characteristics. One thing she has passed on to them, and to Diane, is a love of travel and adventure. From the early days of her marriage, holidays featured prominently. Whether it was caravanning in Chapel St. Leonards, camping in a borrowed leaky tent, or later trips around the UK and Europe in their own various tents - all of which must have presented numerous logistical challenges - Beryl was undaunted. Whatever problems she encountered, her determination and resourcefulness got her through. In the year when she was expecting Diane, the only compromise to the planned trip to Austria was that Ken joined them to do the heavy lifting. He remembers flying from Lydd to Le Touquet, in seats like deckchairs, with the van having been driven into the plane.

Of course, as you all know, Beryl and Alan's travels also came to include many trips abroad when Alan competed on an international level in athletics and swimming, and then coached the swimming team. His achievements were incredible, and would not have been possible without Beryl's unwavering involvement and support. Over the years, either as part of the GB team or as tourists, the places Beryl and Alan visited included France, Switzerland, Austria, Germany, Canada, Israel, America, New Zealand, Australia to visit Beryl's brother, David, his wife, Diana and their children, and Doha, to see her sister, Marilyn, her husband, Derek and their family, and wherever she went, Beryl always found people to talk to. But much as they enjoyed foreign travel, she and Alan also loved exploring our own beautiful countryside, with Derbyshire a particular favourite. "Stretch your eyeballs", she would say when trying to take in the full splendour of the views before her.

Whenever they could, Beryl and Alan would drive to Derbyshire to visit one stunning location or another. They came to know the area extremely well and claimed to have visited every chip shop in the county!

Alan was a founder member of the Spinal Injuries Association and - keen to help others - Beryl used her own experiences to offer support to those who were newly injured, and to their families. She was a people person who could relate to anyone in any situation and who showed a genuine interest in other people's lives. As keen travellers themselves, in later years, Beryl and Alan attended meetings of the World Travellers' Club where they learned about the trips that others had been on.

Losing her beloved husband in 2007 had a profound impact on Beryl. She missed him terribly but was determined to continue living as full a life as was possible. She kept busy listening to classical music and Radio 4, gardening, cycling wherever she could, holidaying with family and paying frequent visits to Diane, Andy, Lizzie and Evie. In time, the arthritis which had begun in her 50s worsened, as did her eyesight, and her family noticed a gradual onset of dementia but - even after breaking her hip in January of last year - Beryl remained the cheerful, polite and charming person she always had been. Both in QMC and Landermeads she engaged with the staff as they did with her; her wonderful character shining through right until the end of her life.