

**A Ceremony to
celebrate the life
of
Janet Linda
Higginson**

Wednesday 30th September 2015

Manchester Crematorium at 1.20pm

Humanist Celebrant: Guy Otten

Entrance Music: Three Times a Lady by the Commodores

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen and welcome to this ceremony to remember and honour the life of Janet Linda Higginson. Grant thanks you all for attending today.

Janet leaves her husband Grant, and her brother Charlie (whom she always called Kevin) and his family.

My name is Guy Otten. I am a humanist celebrant with the British Humanist Association. This will be a humanist ceremony because Janet and Grant were members of the Greater Manchester Humanist community. It is a privilege for me to be able to conduct a funeral for a friend I came to know at the Humanist meetings over the past few years.

Humanists find purpose and meaning for ourselves in this, the one life we have, and we believe that humans do not need a religious belief in order to live good lives. Janet's own life demonstrates this truth well.

Janet was a courageous woman who faced and dealt with the challenges of disability and discrimination with good spirit and kindness. She suffered from cerebral palsy and has not had the luck of great health in her life. She bravely overcame those disadvantages.

About three years ago a cancer was found in her bladder. That was treated and she hoped to have overcome it, but last year the doctors found that the problem had returned and had spread. She understood that this time her days were finite.

Janet decided then that she preferred to be with her beloved Grant at home as she declined, rather than be in a hospice, and so a 24 hour care regime was put in place. Grant was there by her side; he made sure she always had flowers she loved around her.

MacMillan Nurses and the carers from *Care and Share Associates* helped look after Janet at home; their skilled care gave Janet some good months, even a last trip to London.

But over the last few weeks Janet became distressed by the intensified pain; the palliative medication was increased leaving Janet with relief but reduced consciousness. Isobel the devoted carer looking after Janet overnight on 17th to 18th September was concerned early

in the morning that Janet was failing and had summoned the nurses, but before they came Janet passed away with Grant by her bedside, holding her hand.

Naturally we are sad because Janet has died. Humanists believe that death is a part of the circle of life. Even though we understand that death is inevitable, when we experience the death of someone close to us, it is still a sad and painful experience. Grief is a natural part of the way that we deal with losing someone important to us.

Today however it is the quality of a life lived bravely and lived well, that we remember and celebrate. Although she has gone, her character and personality, and her values, live on through all those whose life she touched and all those she was close to.

Janet was always thinking of others in her life. This poem perhaps reflects what she would now say to us if she were here. It's called

Afterglow

I'd like the memory of me to be a happy one,

I'd like to leave an afterglow of smiles when life is done.

I'd like to leave an echo whispering softly down the ways

Of happy times and laughing times and bright sunny days.

I'd like the tears of those who grieve to dry before the sun

Of happy memories that I leave when life is done.

Janet was born on 17th November 1953 in Crumpsall. She had a hard childhood; her Mum Betty was a single parent and because Janet was born with cerebral palsy she went to special schools, the *Margaret Barclay* and *Lancasterian*. When she was 19 she was placed at the residential *Derwen Training College* near Oswestry, where she lived for 10 years. There she learnt a number of skills designed to help her lead an independent life including learning to drive, and she had a 'noddy car' in which she drove to visit her family in Manchester. One time the car broke down. The police arrived and pushed Janet, still in the car, off the road

and into a field, where she was promptly surrounded by curious cows; they would have towered over her in that little car.

She made some good friendships at *Derwen* including one with a teacher Mrs Vera Williams with whom she has kept in touch. Vera has written how she admired Janet for getting on with life in spite of her disability.

There came a time when Janet was ready to live independently and was allocated a flat in *Alf Morris Court*, but Janet's mother invited her to live with *her* and her husband Frank in Northern Moor. She was given a placement at the *Frank Taylor* day centre. Memorably she met the Drifters there when they came to open a fete!

There also is where she met Grant! They were introduced by Paul, a mutual friend, who in effect fixed them up for a blind date at his flat. His judgement was spot on as Grant and Janet hit it off. They courted for 6 months and then Janet moved in with Grant in his fourth floor flat in Hulme.

That was fine when the lifts were working, but one time they weren't, Grant carried Janet down four flights of stairs settling her on the bottom step, while he climbed back up to fetch her wheelchair down! Such was life in a wheelchair for Janet! She had a manual wheelchair in those days which was not easy to handle through snow on pavements.

Fortunately for the couple their respective families were happy with the relationship. Grant's family took to Janet straight away. But Janet's mother Betty was more of a challenge as a somewhat traditional mother-in-law, but when she discovered that Grant could cook and care for Janet, she gave her blessing.

Once Janet and Grant got engaged, they intended to marry in the autumn but were persuaded that there was no reason to wait, and so they married at the *Jackson's Row Registry Office* on 5th May 1984. This speedy marriage gave rise to a rumour that it was a shotgun affair.

Grant's workmates were very generous and collected £300, a tidy sum in 1984, for the happy couple. On his last day at work Grant was ribbed by the girls at work and then turned

up back at the flat to greet Janet and Betty, decked out in plastic breasts. His mother-in-law-to-be was not impressed.

The couple honeymooned in Blackpool, memorable because Janet's wheelchair developed a puncture. It rained throughout the honeymoon and so they went to the cinema. One Chinese restaurant they went to could only admit Janet round the back door through the kitchens. This was the reality in those days; the wheelchair often had to be yanked up and down steps. And on some trains, Janet in her wheelchair would be placed in the guards van!

The council gave Janet and Grant a ground floor flat in West Gorton. By this time Janet was attending the Leaf Day centre and it was from there that she was offered a volunteer's role at Manchester Town Hall. She did so well as a volunteer that she won 'Volunteer of the Year' award in 2005, and this led onto paid part-time employment.

Janet and Grant moved to Baguley in 1989 and Janet was able to benefit from the new buses designed to take wheelchairs; she gained further independence with a powered wheelchair.

This poem called *Remember* is adapted from one by *Christina Rossetti*

*REMEMBER me when I am gone away,
Gone far away into the silent land;
When you can no more hold me by the hand,
Nor I half turn to go, yet turning stay.*

*Remember me when no more day by day
You tell me of our future that you plann'd:
Only remember me; you understand
It will be late to counsel then a way.*

*Yet if you should forget me for a while
And afterwards remember, do not grieve:
For if the darkness and corruption leave
A vestige of the thoughts that once I had,*

*Better by far you should forget and smile,
Than that you should remember and be sad.*

Janet's personality has always been one of getting on with life and positively overcoming the restrictions she met.

In spite of this she was one to think of others rather herself, and even during her last illness she would apologise to her carers for being such a nuisance. She always wanted Grant to lead his life and they had some activities they would do independently. She enjoyed reading novels and she loved the theatre and shows: she would be found at the Lowry, The Bridgewater, the Palace and the Opera House.

They had great holidays together, not just to London for the theatres and the Royal Family whom Janet loved, but also to places like Majorca and on cruises including one in the Far East. One holiday to North Wales found Janet going right to the top of Mt Snowden, the last few steps carried in the strong and faithful arms of Grant. There was nothing which daunted this lady!

They were regulars on Saturday Nights at the *Brooklands Trades and Labour Club*. And we humanists loved having them join us in our monthly meetings in Manchester. Interestingly they found humanism after Janet's mother's humanist funeral in 2010.

And they were great gardeners. They had two allotments and their garden at home is an explosion of lovely flowers and scents. Indeed this year they won the *Wythenshawe Best Front Garden of the Year Award!* Another impressive achievement. Sadly however Janet will not be there in November when the Lord Mayor presents the award.

They also shared their love of their cats. Their last cat Millie has hardly left the bedroom where Janet died since she passed away, a feline testament perhaps to her devotion to Janet!

So many friends and family have written touching condolence cards, speaking of her courage, and positive spirit, her physical frailty but mental strength and her quiet sense of

humour. She was admired as a remarkable woman who showed kindness even in the face of the difficulties she encountered.

Remembering her qualities prompts this poem adapted from one written by *Anne Bronte*. It's called

Farewell to Thee

Farewell to thee, but not farewell

To all my fondest thoughts of thee.

Within my heart they still shall dwell

And they shall cheer and comfort me.

Life seems more sweet that you did live

And love more true that you were once.

Nothing is lost that you did give;

Nothing destroyed that you have done.

Janet led a full and remarkable life, even a pioneering life, which was fulfilled beyond her expectations. You who loved her will miss her, but she will live on through the memories that you, her family and her friends hold of her.

Now we will have an opportunity for you to recall your own fond memories of Janet. There are always more such precious memories than can possibly be recounted in a funeral.

And for those here who have a religious faith, this is a time you can use in your own private way.

To help us with this we will listen to the beautiful theme from the *Deerhunter*

Only if you can comfortably, will you please stand?

Now is the time to say good bye to Janet.

Janet was a very special woman for her family and friends. You will miss her but her memory will live on through you. It will live on in your hearts, your dreams and your memories.

If you can comfortably, please now stand

We say our final farewell to the body of Janet Linda Higginson.

Her memory is already committed - safe and warm into our hearts: the things that mattered to her are committed to our minds,

and now, in sorrow for her death,

but in gratitude for her life,

we commit her body to the elements,

and so back to nature, to rejoin the stardust from which all life has come.

Please be seated.

Grief can be a confusing emotion. But each tear you shed is part of your journey through a healing process. Whatever journey grief sends you on, take comfort from knowing, that if you are open to grief, in time, it will be the warm memories of Janet that will remain in your heart for so much longer than the sadness of her death.

*Softly the leaves of memory fall
Gently I gather and treasure them all,
Unseen, unheard you are always near,

So missed, so loved, so very dear.
No longer in our lives to share,
But in our hearts you're always there.*

Thank you for attending today. Your presence has been deeply appreciated by Janet's family and has been a comfort to them.

Janet has been taken from us, but we must live on. She leaves behind good memories. These are yours to keep.

Now some Announcements

If anyone would like to make a donation in memory of Janet, you are free to donate to your chosen charity or else the family suggest these be given to the *Macmillan Nurses*. The Funeral Director will have a box for donations at the exit from the chapel.

And you are all invited to a Reception now at the Winston Conservative Club, Hall Lane, Baguley. This will be another opportunity to share more precious memories of Janet.

We will end this ceremony with another song which Janet loved. It's '*My Girl*' sung by *the Temptations*.

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