

## Ceremony for Jane McCarthy

Entrance Music: *You've Got a Friend* sung by Carole King

### Welcome and Opening Words

Welcome to all of you here today to mourn the death and say goodbye to Jane McCarthy. But most importantly you are here to celebrate her life and all the joy she brought into your lives and the world around her.

Jane was only 65 years old, not old at all by today's measure and she certainly didn't think of herself as old - from her long pigtails, down to her boundless enthusiasm and childlike wonder; Jane still saw the world through childlike eyes.

When others saw the storm - Jane saw the beauty of the raindrops and had expectations of a rainbow, if there was a forecast for heavy snow, Jane was probably making plans to build a snowman, not worrying about freezing water pipes or blocked roads.

And Jane just didn't see beauty she created it in so many ways; her knitting, stained glass, painting, pottery, and her famous chocolate-wrapper silver foil creations, there is a long list, believe me. I managed to fill an A4 sheet of paper with all of her interests and activities and was exhausted just reading it!

She took such joy in the world around her - its plants and flowers, the natural landscape, the animals - anything from her beloved cats - Murphy and Maisie, to badgers, butterflies, birds and the occasional llama and a donkey called Hank.

And somewhere amongst all of her interests and activities was her ability to not only see the best in people but to bring out the best in them.

We began with the song '*You've Got a Friend*' chosen by Steve because to him it summed up Jane. He said, "*Jane has always been a giver, strongly independent and needed to be there for others - she was the friend you wanted in a storm.*"

And no matter how many friendships she made along the way throughout her life - there was always room in Jane's heart for more - as all of you here know only too well.

Of all the things everyone said to me about Jane the one thing that came up time and time again was her selflessness; everything was about other people. A genuine heartfelt concern and desire to make the world a better place for others for no other motive than it was what Jane did.

Even to the point that she said the hearse wasn't to drive too slowly because she didn't like the thought of holding people up and inconveniencing them, and concerned that you, her friends coming here today would somehow be an imposition. She didn't want to cause too much fuss.

As if you would want to be anywhere else but here to say goodbye to this remarkable woman and to support each other?

All of you who knew, loved and cared for Jane are in our thoughts today but especially Steve the husband she loved and adored, her sister and brother Ruth and Richard, the 'extended family'; Val and Nick, Lucie and Dave, Graham and Sue, Tony and Jude and Martin and Kate.

There may be some people who can't be here today but they will be thinking of you and they are very much a part of this ceremony. And for Frank and the family, today has the added sadness that you have been through this before with Carol - she too is in our thoughts today.

Each of you need to grieve - in your own way and your own time and it is the relationship that you have with each other - that extraordinary friendship you have that will help you through this time.

My name is Elaine Rawlinson and I am a celebrant with the British Humanist Association.

Humanism celebrates the belief that each of us is important – that we all have our place in this world and we all have the right to be respected, valued and listened to. That we can choose to lead a life, based on strong ethics and morals and care about others and the world we live in, without the need for a god or the promise of a reward in an after-life. Simply because that is a good way to live and that is what Jane did.

When she knew she was going to have chemotherapy and would likely lose her hair, she cut off her pigtails and donated her hair to a charity that makes wigs for children who lost theirs. Her hair and her trademark pigtails were a huge part of who she was and she gave that part of herself away with courage and generosity typical of Jane.

Jane was what Humanism is through to the core and it shone through in every aspect of her life - she showed us just what Humanity is all about.

Perhaps some of you have never been to a humanist funeral before - so what is it? Our ceremony offers an alternative way of marking Jane's death

with reverence and dignity, joy in remembering memories of happy times you spent with her and sadness that she will no longer be a physical presence in your world. The acknowledgement that we need to say goodbye and we need to grieve but that life goes on. It is a very personal ceremony based on Jane's life and your relationship with her.

Some of the things I am going to say are going to make you cry and I'm not making any apologies - Jane is worth shedding tears for; and some of the things I say are going to make you smile because even more so Jane is worth the warmth and love of your smiles.

I never met Jane - I have come to know her through all of you. And even from that I realise what a loss she is to the world - the loss and grief you are feeling must be overwhelming. And perhaps as well as the sadness there is a sense of injustice - that somehow this just isn't fair. Why Jane? Of all the people in the world why should this awful thing happen and take her from you?

In all honesty there is no answer to that question. The universe does not bestow good fortune on some and ill fortune on others; it is not cruel or kind; just or unjust - it simply is. It exists with or without us - oblivious to our wants, desires, our dreams and visions of what should be.

It is humanity, each of us, that shapes the character of the world we live in. We have the power to bring justice, fairness, kindness, compassion; to reach out and help each other and to let each person know that they are loved, valued and respected.

That's what Jane did. Every small act of kindness, every smile or hug that she gave to someone that perhaps made all the difference to an awful day was as important as the 'so-called' big decisions made by big organisations and world powers. She made a huge difference to this world and to each life she touched.

Jane hated to be closed in, to be restrained in any way - she didn't even like wearing headphones - or her glasses; she needed to move and experience life with the wind on her face and in her hair, running and jumping and leaping through life. She needed to be free, sometimes the greatest love is about letting go.

David Nobbs, humanist and the creator of Reggie Perrin, wrote

*We are all born once. We all die once. That is the end of the equality meted out by this world. Let us not fear this thing. We cannot avoid the fear of painful illness, but we must not fear death itself. ... Relish the miracle of life every day. Make the most of it, both for yourself and for others. ... Don't fear other people's death. Hard though it is, don't grieve for your loss, but think of their peace and give thanks for their life which lives on in you. ... Life is a relay race. Pass the baton.*

## Tribute

Jane was born on the 17th February 1950 in Holloway, North London. I would imagine that the first thing she did wasn't to cry, but to apologise, in particular to her Mum Peggy and then to her Dad Charles for causing them any inconvenience - the word 'sorry' came all too easily to Jane.

Jane had two sisters- Ruth and Carol and a brother Richard. Sadly Carol died 5 years ago in similar circumstances. The Worts family lived and grew up in North London, Steve wrote that Jane liked the outdoor life and was perhaps a bit of a 'tomboy'? She liked to play in Cherry Tree Woods pretending to be part of Enid Blyton's Famous Five. Well actually what Steve wrote was '*Enid Blyton's Famous Vice*' - hmm.

Jane went to Hornsey High School for Girls where she was a bit of a rebel and even then was in creative company: outside school hours rubbing shoulders with Ray Davies who would go on to be a member of the Kinks and an accomplished musician and Simon Nicol, a member of Fairport Convention. And it was her friends from her schooldays -Sue, Linda, Liz and Margaret, who became the first of Jane's life-long friends.

Jane was already interested in the creative arts and wanted to study Art at teacher training college but the course was oversubscribed and she opted to study Drama, although she wasn't that keen on being centre stage.

It was there she met Steve and these are his words:

*"..after leading him on a real song and dance they got married on 10th April 1971. It was Easter and we were on our Easter vacation from college. We were married at Haringey Registry Office because we were staying with Jane's sister Carol. It was one of those 60s type [weddings] when we got out of the same bed and went to the registry office (nothing traditional)"*

And of course at college Jane met more fellow students who became firm friends - Susie and Jon and Tim and Widdy.

Jane started teaching in Chadwell St. Mary near Grays, Essex and though she had a class of 42 seven year olds, she managed to have them all reading by the end of the year. The woman knew no fear!

Steve and Jane moved to Northamptonshire and this is what Steve said about her work life; *" Jane became disillusioned with teaching and moved into the Civil Service working in the Benefits section. She once more proved her adaptability and capacity for change by developing a new career in housing at Northampton Borough Council. Looking for more responsibility and wanting to maintain her connection with people she moved to South Northants Council where she was responsible for Housing, homelessness and Warden controlled units.*

*After turning fifty her work was taking her more and more into management and away from the public who she wanted to help, so she decided to change again and became a dispenser/receptionist at Blisworth surgery. Like everything in her life she threw herself completely into the work and before long she was the drug pusher of choice."*

Jane loved to be active and adored being outside where she could feel in contact with the world around her; cycling, walking, gardening and landscaping, watching wildlife and travelling to different places experiencing different cultures and landscapes. Steve and Jane went on trips all over; including staying with friends and relatives in Australia and snorkelling off the Great Barrier Reef. Jane must have revelled in that.

There were several trips to the USA, staying with Steve's brother in San Francisco and driving his Porsche up Highway 1 with the roof down - with Jane's pigtails flying in the breeze? There was the trip to Albuquerque for the largest balloon festival in the world - over a 1,000 balloons in the air, and then driving back to San Francisco along Route 66. And journeys to Florence and Venice, a chance for Jane to indulge her passion and appreciation for art.

Jane loved travelling around the UK - the spontaneity of just throwing things in the car and going to a cottage somewhere remote, hiring bikes and enjoying the countryside and each others' company.

Jane and Steve have many friends but there are a group that are thought of as 'family'. They met Dave and Lucie, Graham and Sue and Nick and Val, Tony and Jude and Martin and Kate, 25 years ago through volunteering to be part of a Hot Air Ballooning Team Recovery crew. Racing around the countryside, chasing a hot air balloon and helping when it lands. After first negotiating with the landowner of course - a job I hear often given to Jane with her talent to charm and disarm someone who wasn't exactly thrilled at having a balloon land in their fields. Perhaps also in case there were any animals to deal with - Jane had a remarkable knack at making friends with animals too.

The friends became so close that they decided that when they retired they would try to find somewhere they could live independently but be close to each other. Dave found a piece of land where they could each build/have built a property that was right for them. Although a few them did 'escape' a little further afield and Sue and Graham stayed on at base camp.

There was one problem - this piece of land was in Lincolnshire. But to Jane it was just another adventure and a chance to try out her creative and practical skills once again. In the house at Rothersthorpe Jane had made stained glass, decorated, laid carpet, did bricklaying - building a folly in the garden, turning her hand to stonemasonry.

In the new house Jane chose the tiles and carpets and landscaped and planted out the garden.



She produced wonderful creative work but she never really felt it was anything special or very good. So very Jane!

She became part of the local community - often seen standing at the gate waving to passers-by, becoming a volunteer at Lincoln Castle and at Caistor Arts and Heritage centre, joining a local choir where she pursued her love of singing and music and continuing her various forms of art work.

I have only touched briefly on some of Jane's interests and skills not to mention her ability to fall asleep whenever and wherever - perhaps it was her affinity with cats! There are so many stories to tell and we will be telling them later on at The Walnut Tree. But for now this sums up Jane from the person who knew her best - her friend, companion, love of her life and husband;

*"Living a life that involved travelling at three times the speed of everyone else had its problems because she effectively lived three times as long as us mere mortals. We were standing still while she made the most of every moment."*

Steve has asked for this poem to be read out by WH Auden.

*Twelve Songs part IX by WH Auden.*

*Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,  
Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone,  
Silence the pianos and with muffled drum  
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.*

*Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead  
Scribbling on the sky the message: She Is Dead,  
Put crepe bows round the white necks of the public doves,  
Let the traffic policemen wear black cotton gloves.*

*She was my North, my South, my East and West,  
My working week and my Sunday rest,  
My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song;  
I thought that love would last forever: I was wrong.*

*The stars are not wanted now: put out everyone;  
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun;  
Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood,  
For nothing now can ever come to any good.*

### Reflection

This is a time when those of you with a religious faith may wish to say a silent prayer and for all of you to remember your own special memories and times you have spent with Jane.

Reflection Music: Days performed by Ray Davies and the Crouch End  
Festival Choir.

## Committal

We have now come to the time when you are going to say your final farewell to Jane

It is hard for us to let go of the things that are most precious to us.

It is time for Jane to continue the cycle of all living things;

We are born, we live and we die.

As you say goodbye and you let her go, remember that this coffin does not contain that which made Jane the person she was.

We commit her physical remains back to the universe but she lives on in your memories;

Because she lived, she touched the lives of others who will live ,

Because she loved, others loved, and will love.

Because she laughed, others laughed, and will laugh again

## Closing Words

Steve would like to thank you all for coming here today and for all your care and support not just over the last few weeks but the months during Jane's illness. Also his thanks to the people who looked after Jane and the staff at St Barnabas Hospice.

If you would like to make a donation in honour of Jane's memory it should be made to either Cancer Research UK or St Barnabas Hospice.

There is just so much to say about Jane and all the activities and interests she was passionate about - you are all invited to come along to the Walnut Tree, which is in Blisworth where we will continue this celebration of Jane's life and you can share your stories and memories of her.

The Auden poem earlier captures the sense of helplessness we feel when faced with the death of someone who is such an important part of our life that it feels as if a part of us has died and we can't go on. But we do - we must - the hurt never goes away but it becomes a part of our life rather than overwhelming it.

The ancient Greeks told a story about Pandora. Despite warnings she opened a jar and let loose into the world all the ills mortal suffer including despair; but there was still one small thing left in the jar that was more powerful than all the combined ills - it was hope. Jane understood about hope - about belief in looking and finding the good there is in the world - in looking to the future not living in the past.

This poem is perhaps what Jane would say to you:

'Farewell, My Friends' Rabindranath Tagore

*"It was beautiful while it lasted, the journey of my life.  
I have no regrets whatsoever, save the pain I'll leave behind.  
Those dear hearts who love and care.  
The strings pulling at heart and soul.  
The strong arms that held me up  
When my own strength let me down.  
At every turning of my life I came across good friends.  
Friends who stood by me even when time raced me by...  
Farewell, farewell my friends.  
I smile and bid you good bye.  
No, shed no tears, for I need them not.  
All I need is your smile.  
If you feel sad, do think of me.  
For that's what I'll like.  
When you live in the hearts of those you love,  
Remember then. You never die..."*

As Jane would say: *Love and hugs.*

Exit Music: Days performed by Ray Davies and the Crouch End Festival  
Choir.