

A Eulogy to Jean Elizabeth Sceal (nee Brockbank)

2nd May 1943 to 14th January 2022

(Read by John Brockbank, her brother, at the Thanksgiving service on 2nd April 2022)

Mary, Jean and I were all born in Walsall, West midlands. Mary was born in January 1942, and Jean in May 1943 and I followed in May 1948. In 1950 the whole family moved to Newcastle under Lyme which was home for the next 13 years. Mary and Jean went to the nearest primary school, 10 minutes' walk away. At 11 Mary went to the Orme Girls High school and Jean followed the year after which was only 5 minutes walk away.

Every Sunday, it was Quaker meeting in the morning, a quick lunch and then drive over to Granny and Grampa Brockbank's house for afternoon tea with the rest of the Brockbank family. This was when Jean formed her long lasting friendship with her first cousin Joy.

During her school years Jean got herself involved in anything (she was allowed to) to get out of the house. Brownies, then Guides, she loved guide camps and ended up as a queens guide and went to an international camp. She was a keen swimmer and would go to swimming club several nights a week with her friend Wendy Cooper. Mum would insist on going to meet Jean after swimming club and to walk her home, so Jean couldn't hang around talking to the boys!! Her other great friend was Vivian. It was great excitement for Jean, when Mum allowed her to go with Vivian and her brother on a cycling holiday around Cornwall staying at youth hostels. I remember Jean coming back and saying they had got as far as Tintagel – although I hadn't a clue where that was.

When Jean turned seventeen, she immediately got her provisional driving licence, and would drive us to the family gathering every Sunday. She also practiced in an Austin Seven (crash box and all); as a 12-year-old I was very impressed. She was a competent, and confident driver and passed her test first time, within a few months. The last big family holiday together was two weeks in Austria in the summer of 1960. We drove in the family car and Jean did most of the driving through northern France, Luxembourg, and Germany.

Jean did not find school work easy; Mum used to say that she talked too much!! However, Jean realised, as a growing teenager, that if she wanted to get out from under the control of Mother going to college was the way forward. She spent hours revising for her O levels and A levels which enabled her to go to Gloucester Training College of Domestic Science where she obtained her teaching diploma.

Her first teaching job was at a mixed comprehensive school in Manchester and I think she struggled with the sixteen year old boys who thought it was wonderful to have a young, attractive teacher not much older than they were. In 1965 she got a teaching job in a Girls Grammar school in London near Bow Bells and shared a flat with her cousin Joy and friend Sally.

It was during this time that Jean met John at the Queensway ice skating rink. It was not though, just coincidence. Jean had just started the new teaching post in London and a work colleague of John's who was a nephew of a close friend of Mum's, had been instructed to keep an eye on her in the big city - and he organised get-togethers!

After a while Jean and John went out together – and gave up ice skating. Jean seemed a bit more adventurous than some of the other girls John had met, which is probably just as well considering what he inflicted on her later in life.

In 1967 John was in his final year of a geology degree. After the exam results that summer he was offered, somewhat out of the blue, a research post based initially in Nairobi, surveying a remote part of northern Kenya – departing in three weeks!

No way was John going to turn this adventure of a lifetime down although he would be away for eighteen months. It was whether Jean thought he was worth waiting for.

Prior to John being offered this post Jean and Sally had been planning a Spanish camping holiday. There were nine of us cousins and friends. John might have been invited had he not already flown to Kenya. Jean and I drove to Spain in her Morris traveller. Sally was in charge of arrangements and Jean was head chef!! I have a particular memory of three German lads who were camping on the same site inviting Jean, Sally and cousin Rosemary out for a date. Ro nick-named them 'Hans, Feet and Bumpsidaisy' and she has assured me that it was all above board and no hanky panky !!

John didn't hear about this until a long time after. The other memories of that holiday included having Paella, for us all, in a dish at least six foot in diameter, going to a bull fight and having a picnic on a roundabout in the centre of Barcelona and being marched off by the police

This was 1967 and John was already under canvas in northern Kenya. Communication was not quite as it is now. The nearest post office was about three hours' drive over rough tracks; they exchanged letters every fortnight.

During that time Jean kept herself busy and amongst other things signed up for a Cordon Bleu cookery course in London. One weekend she bought home (we had moved when I was 14 to Farcroft, near Stourbridge) a roast chicken she had done on the course which was beautifully decorated on the outside. Dad said it seemed a shame to have to carve into it and Mum said something like “what a waste of time to put on all that decoration only to cut into it and eat it”.

In the summer of '68 Jean found that she could get a cheap flight to Nairobi through a teachers' organisation; she went to Kenya for a month and had a close-up experience of the work of a field geologist in a wild, remote area of northern Kenya; and climbed to the top of John's volcano!

John returned to England in time for Christmas 1968 and they got married at Stourbridge Quaker meeting house in August of 1969. Our dad had died earlier in the year, so I was asked/instructed to give Jean away at the wedding. Jean had made her own wedding dress and also Sally's bridesmaid dress.

For the first three years of married life they lived in a flat in Mile End, London, near where Jean was teaching until John had written up his thesis and got a proper job. They moved to Leeds in 1972 and Nicola was born in St. James Infirmary on July 15th, also memorable as it was St. Swithin's day and rained continuously while John was to-ing and fro-ing from the hospital.

John's job in Leeds was only a temporary contract and a more secure post, as Cumbria County Council Minerals Office, turned up in Kendal. They moved to Kendal in 1974 – and this area has been 'home' ever since. It was, and is, a very friendly place and they made lots of friends, then and now. Liz was born in Helme Chase and they were fairly settled in their rather nice, Victorian terrace house on Greenside.

Something was missing though. Kendal was very comfortable but Local Government didn't provide much adventure of the sort that John and Jean shared when they first met.

Trawling through the job adverts they came across “Geologist wanted for the State of Bahrain.” I had visited the Gulf States on a sales trip and I was able to reassure Jean that Bahrain was a pleasant country and fairly relaxed towards expatriates. They flew out to Bahrain with their young family in the summer of 1978 with little idea of what to expect.

These were Nikki and Liz's formative years. Growing up in an Arab country no doubt had a lasting and I'm sure a positive influence; and they both have had lives

with adventures much as Jean and John have had. Jean got a job in the Island's English school and had the privilege of teaching several children from the Bahrain royal family; England and the English had a special place in the country's elite. Memories of the Bahrain adventure is one that they, as a family, regularly revisit.

Whilst in Kenya John had, not only fallen in love with Jean, but also with Land Rovers. Shortly after arriving in Bahrain he bought the first family car - a long wheel base Land Rover (left hand drive). This Land Rover has been with the family ever since.

in 1984, after 6 years in the Gulf, the family (and the Land Rover) returned to Kendal back to their house on Greenside. In 1989 John found the job he was looking for in a consultancy in Newcastle under Lyme, back to where we grew up, and the family moved to Stoke on Trent. Jean taught at a local junior school and their two girls spent most of their teen years growing up, as did Jean, in Staffordshire.

It was during this time that Nikki met Tim, after a few years after Nikki had finished her degree at Lancaster and Tim had joined the REME, they got married 15th July 1995 in Bracknell. Liz and my two girls Katy and Debbie were bridesmaids.

Jean and John were in Stoke on Trent for over ten years. There had been little time for adventures with pressure of work and seeing the girls through their teenage years. However, Jean and John took advantage of their daughters' own adventures and visited Germany, when Tim was stationed there, and Japan where Liz was teaching English as a foreign language. The Japanese trip was particularly memorable. Soon after they arrived Jean and John were invited to a school assembly. Jean had decided that she should learn at least a little Japanese and she made a short speech, in Japanese, that was loudly applauded.

As retirement loomed and the family had fledged they both felt that another challenge, or another adventure of a sort, was required.

The Lakes had always been 'home'. They started looking for a property with "potential" within a ten-mile radius of Kendal and after a year or so of going to auctions (and being outbid!) South Low came on the market. It is a bit of a longer story but they moved to Crosthwaite in the millennium.

South Low was a bit dilapidated. - perhaps an understatement. However, they had a vision. Jean said what she wanted; John fixed it (or tried to) and Jean cleared up the mess and added the decor.

When they arrived in Crosthwaite Jean very soon decided to get involved in the local community and she joined the WI. She never looked back and she was an enthusiastic member for most of time she lived in Crosthwaite. It played an important role in her life (as well as John's!) and it's worth sharing a few stories.

[the following notes on Jean's involvement with the WI has been provided by Jean Sherratt who is playing the organ for us today]

For a number of years, she was Programme Secretary, and, as well as organising a variety of speakers and topics, she organised trips and outings, and her planning was always meticulous down to the last detail. She will be remembered for the outing to Leeds to celebrate the Crosthwaite WI's 80th Anniversary in particular researching the outing that meant going by train to Leeds, trying out restaurants and finding out where the theatre was.

She was also ahead of her time in the fight against plastic pollution and, with another member, did huge amount of research and submitted a resolution concerning "Single Use Plastic" that was debated at the National AGM. She was passionate about bringing this to public attention.

In November 2012 Jean took over the role of President, and for her 3 year term of office really threw herself into the job with great enthusiasm and energy, inspiring entries into the Westmorland County Show, twinning Crosthwaite with Bingley WI, which involved reciprocal visits, and organising outreach sessions at Crosthwaite Exchange, the village Strawberry Tea and "Damson Day".

Coinciding with Jean's final year in office was the National Federation's Centenary. Two events organised by Jean were memorable. A speaker on "Women in Westmorland in the WW1 Era" was planned and committee members dressed up in World War One costumes and organised a sing-song of war time songs. Also there was a splendid Afternoon Tea at Storr's Hall Hotel, right on the shores of Windermere. The guest of honour was the Federation's Chairman, Ruth Rigg, who arrived in a car which had been provided by Honda to celebrate the Centenary. It was a lovely occasion for the members who all dressed up and enjoyed a lovely tea and live music from a string quartet. There was, needless to say, a photo in the Westmorland Gazette!

Jean's fame didn't stop with WI, though. She was an enthusiastic baker who won first prize in the village show's cake competition a couple of times. The winner always has to provide a recipe for the following year and Jean had the WI ladies making yeast pastries and a luscious chocolate cakes. And in Jean Sherratt's words *"What a great asset to our village. We miss her very dearly."*

[moving on...]

Lizzie and Sebastian got married in 2009, in this very church, and Jean thoroughly enjoyed spending time helping Liz with preparation and organisation.

Also, around this time, after ten years or so of work on South Low, it was getting near to how they wanted it – and both were beginning to slow down!

They had already taken a few overseas holidays either as packages or guided birdwatching tours, that they both enjoyed, but they were a bit tame and felt a bit regimented. When they were first married they had an old van that was kitted out as a camper; not that common in those days. John wanted to relive his youth and Jean was persuaded.

John bought the ex-military Land Rover ambulance that most of you will have seen. They converted it to a camper and for ten years or so they had numerous adventures, spending several weeks each year in Spain or France. They learnt Spanish; Jean was much better and more diligent than John; so, John did the driving and Jean did the talking! - they were well matched. The highlight of their adventures has to be the 5-week tour around Morocco and into the Sahara Desert in 2014 – still talked about.

Their last 'adventure' in the van was a few months before COVID struck when they camped in Scotland on their fiftieth year of marriage. Although they did not realise it at the time Jean was already succumbing to the polymyositis. Getting in and out of the van was a struggle and they decamped to a hotel; there was talk of selling the van but John couldn't part with it. It's still at South Low and I'm told it will be back on its feet this year.

The conclusion of this tribute to Jean's life, the family life and partnership of adventures shared with John, is perhaps best expressed in John's own words: -

"The last two years brought us even closer together and made me realise, as if I didn't already know, that it has been a real privilege to have shared my life with such a lovely person."