

Eulogy for MUM

My mum Jean was such a remarkable woman that it is very difficult even to attempt to condense all she achieved during her 90 years into a short speech. I must remember about 40 years ago when giving a best man speech at a school friend's wedding in Edinburgh after a few classes of champagne with the chief bridesmaid during the reception 'line up,' I became rather carried away telling all the stories involving George at Glenalmond College. A man next to my father apparently said 'who on earth is that?' to which my father replied 'I haven't a clue but I wish he would shut up!' Ladies and Gentlemen I will try and watch the clock today.

It is a huge privilege to have known my mum Jean now for only 15 months short of 70 years. She passed away, pain free, peacefully at home only last Friday, in her bedroom looking out over her beautifully kept front lawn surrounded by family members – what a way to go. She had 4 children and 11 grandchildren all of whom are present today including two who have travelled all the way from Botswana and now after the birth of little Hamish McKenzie in March, 10 great grandchildren. As you can see Jean's genes live on already for 3 more generations.

Jean was born in Hildenborough in Kent on the 12th February 1926 and was the middle of three children born to Gladys (daughter of Frederick Thomson, brother of Publisher DC Thomson) and Duncan Fraser, a medical practitioner.

In her teens she was a gifted musician obtaining grade 8 for piano and violin but was also an accomplished organist. She gained a place at the Royal College of Music in London to train as a concert pianist but Hitler intervened and she contributed to the war effort by driving a van full of cigarettes, drinks and snacks for the soldiers manning nearby anti-aircraft batteries. Sadly in 1942 her parent's marriage broke down and she did not in fact see her father again for another 29 years. I in fact remember accompanying her down to a farm on the edge of Dartmoor in 1971 to meet him, a very emotional time. But as a result of this she acquired a new brother and sister Simon and Francis who I am very pleased to say have made a huge effort to be here with us today. Simon and mum's elder sister Moira are also, like mum, MBEs.

In 1946 she married her second cousin Derek Thomson and moved to Broughty Ferry near Dundee. Maybe that explains why my 3 sisters and I are what we are! She proved to be a very caring and loving mum and throughout her life possessed a natural ability to communicate with children of all ages. In the late 1960s the family moved to Invereighty House near Forfar where she became involved with what was to become the Angus Riding for the Disabled Association or IRDA. This was originally founded by Irene Walker Munro and Kathleen Atkinson at Kinnettles. It became mum's lasting passion and in April 1997 the current facility at South Bottymyre was opened by the Princess Royal. This still stands as testimony to a remarkable and much loved woman who throughout her long life has always tried to put others first – to help and support people of all faiths, nationalities, ages and abilities from many different back grounds.

In 1999 she was awarded an MBE by Her Majesty the Queen at Holyrood Palace in Edinburgh and this public recognition of her services to disabled riding was followed soon afterwards by The Order of St John.

She was devastated when in January 2002 her husband Derek passed away after 56 years of marriage but she was consoled by her increasing family and her love of animals which included the

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horses at the IDA and Mountains Animal Sanctuary in Glen Ogil (founded by her brother Alan Fraser), her beloved canine friends including Susie, Shiva, Annie, Dawnie and Joy, but not forgetting the red squirrels which greeted her most mornings from the bird table adjacent to the kitchen window.

She loved sharing her beautiful gardens at Invereighy with as many people as possible and particularly liked showing off her 'cathedral' or avenue of beautiful lime trees lining the front drive.

She had a strong Christian faith and was a supporter and regular attender at St Johns Church in Forfar and always made a point of befriending not only every new incumbent priest but also new members of the congregation. Apparently some years ago she persuaded some of her young grandchildren to accompany her to church on Christmas day by saying it was Jesus's birthday. During rather solemn and quiet prayers one of them stood up and started singing 'happy birthday Jesus' in a loud voice! That reminds me of another grandchild anecdote when my daughter Rebecca returned from a late assignment in Dundee to find the house locked and everyone sound asleep, no one would answer the bell, she had to spend the night in a dog's bed in the pantry - definitely 'in the doghouse!' In her mid- fifties Mum developed an interest in the teachings of a Bangalore based Indian Hindu Guru called Sai Baba and went off on her own to India for several weeks to visit him.

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Her hero musician was Dutch violinist and conductor Andre Rieu. She possessed a large collection of DVDs of his concerts which she regularly played during her final few months when she was less mobile. Her attending his concert in Aberdeen last November was remarkable as only about six weeks before a consultant in Ninewells Hospital had said they had done all they could for her. Our friend Ian here was administering the 'last rights' when she opened an eye, said 'amen' and lived for another 10 months during which she also celebrated her 90th birthday, the birth of another grandchild, the wedding of grandson Tobi and the memorial service in Kent of her elder sister Moira. Apparently as young girls they had been very competitive and Moira felt that Jean always seemed to beat her but last December when she was nearing the end of her own life on earth she said 'well at least I will have beaten Jean at something when I reach the pearly gates before her!' Mum always loved Scotland where she regularly holidayed even as a young girl. Her favourite places were Coylumbridge and Dunkeld where she had timeshares for many years. She was also a keen and long term supporter of the Pitlochry Festival Theatre.

Until very recently she maintained her competitive instinct and family members and friends had to really have their wits about them to compete with her at Scrabble, Backgammon or Cribbage. In her last few months she faced with great fortitude increasing physical challenges, with walking, breathing, sleeping and restless legs. She was always very generous to charitable causes both at home and in Africa where as a 10 year old girl she had spent several months on holiday in Kenya with her father and siblings, they did in fact visit the old Treetops Hotel where she was very excited to see a rhino at 3 am one morning, apparently her father later bagged it as a trophy - an action which would have devastated her later in life.

The remarkable number of you all present here today is a testimony to such an extraordinary woman. Some might say that if we humans could award 'saint medals' then Jean Thomson would definitely be on the short list.