

KATHLEEN CUTHBERT, née FERGUSON

(05-10-1920 TO 01-10-2016)

Tuesday, 1st November 2016. At 10-45 pm we received a telephone call from the night nurse at John Wills House with the sad news that Kathleen had died at 10-25. She has been failing steadily ever since she moved into the St Monica's nursing care home some 4 months ago and the pace of decline had accelerated noticeably since the family celebration of her 96th birthday on the 5th October. Yesterday Christine met the Doctor there who was giving Kathleen a thorough check-up and afterwards she said that Kathleen was dying, and it could happen within the week or could take a month. I had been in to see Kathleen with Christine three days ago and I was shocked at how she had deteriorated both mentally and physically- a mere shadow of her former self. She was so emaciated that I could hardly believe that she could still be alive. On Tuesday morning Christine received a telephone call from the duty nurse who advised her to put the funeral arrangements in hand.

Christine and Caroline immediately went in to see Kathleen, who seemed to be almost in a coma, and they were unable to even get her to open her eyes. They left after an hour as they were told that there was nothing they could do except wait. That evening, after work, Jamie went in to see Kathleen. He said she was barely conscious and he held her hand, talked about the family and told her how well his daughter, Kathleen's great grand daughter, was doing at school. He left and some four hours later Kathleen suddenly died. One can only hope that the end was a happy release for her as, for the last few months her quality of life has been close to zero. At least she was warm, comfortable, in no pain and well looked after by the staff at John Wills House.

On the 18th November there was a burial and memorial service to celebrate her life at the nearby Canford Crematorium in Westbury-on-Trym, Bristol. The service was conducted by the Right Reverend George Cassidy, the recently retired Bishop of Southwell, and a long-time family friend. Christine and I wrote the following potted history of Kathleen's remarkable and eventful life which was read out by two nephews and her grandson, with additional contributions by a family friend and her grand daughter.

Appreciation: Major GRW Ferguson RRF (retired) Nephew.

Kathleen was the daughter of the improvident gentleman farmer James Ferguson and his wife Sara (nee Foster). Her childhood was spent with her two brothers and two sisters at the family home of Ballyvoy, near the village of Doagh, in Co Antrim, Northern Ireland. Her date of birth was a matter of dispute since by custom it was celebrated on the 4th October 1920 but when her birth certificate was later examined it had been registered as the 5th. Some question arose concerning the sobriety of her father at the time of registration so she consequently celebrated both dates.

At the age of five she was sent to live during the week with her maternal grandparents, who lived 60 miles away in the City of Derry. Going to school on her first day she met Georgie Simpson, who became a life-long friend. In due course both she and Georgie became pupils at Londonderry High School for Girls.

Kathleen was said to be one of the outstanding pupils of her generation in Northern Ireland. She not only won many school prizes and was editor of the School magazine but was also a prefect, house captain and finally Head Girl. She was also a keen hockey player, playing as goalie in the school 2nd eleven, winning 5 out of 7 matches in the 1937-8 Derry and Antrim Schoolgirls' League. In later life she often lamented that sports reporting on the TV only showed winning goals and not the amazing saves by goal-keepers!



Despite the depression of the 1930's leaving the family finances in a precarious position, on leaving school in 1938 she became an undergraduate at Queen's University, Belfast, having been awarded not one but two university scholarships along with several other national and international prizes. She was a 'blue stocking', living at Riddle Hall residence for female students and studying French and German Literature.

By then her parents had divorced and her family home was with her Mother in the sea-side town of Portstewart. There, through mutual friends, she met a young teacher, Norman Cuthbert, and their courtship took place on the windy local beaches and golf courses. Despite some family opposition to her marrying a mere teacher they were finally married on the first day of January 1943. To complete the circle Christine and Cliff were married on the last day of January 32 years later.



Kathleen spoke German fluently and on her graduation in 1942 she was head-hunted by the government to be a translator at Bletchley Park, the top secret UK wartime code-breaking establishment that finally cracked the allegedly 'unbreakable' German High Command Enigma Code, which is said to have changed the whole course of WW2. Under the direction of the brilliant mathematician Alan Turing, they developed the code-breaking machine Colossus, the forerunner of all computers. After the war, she and all her colleagues were told to forget all about Bletchley Park and never say anything to anyone, and only now are people admitting that they were there. Kathleen has never spoken of it, but she was there, at the very start of the Computer Age. In May 2016 Kathleen was awarded a medal and a certificate by the then Conservative Prime Minister, David Cameron, in recognition of her war time service at Bletchley Park.

In the summer of 1945 Kathleen was awarded the degree of Master of Arts at Queen's University, Belfast. Her thesis was on the Maritime Vocabulary in a *very* obscure Middle High German poem - and it is highly probable that she wrote some of it during her time at Bletchley Park! Recently a

family member researching Bletchley Park discovered that she had also taken a course in Japanese while there, so amongst the hectic and demanding war-time translating work Kathleen still found time to study and learn new things.

In 1946 Christine had been born and shortly afterwards Kathleen went to Bernaville in northern France on an exchange visit for practical experience in the language, as required by her first degree. She stayed with the Blaire family as an English tutor to their children and they became life-long friends. Kathleen was fortunate to have a supportive husband, loving grandmother, mother and aunt who managed to look after Christine in her absence!

By this time Norman had been awarded an MA in Economics and was appointed Junior Lecturer in the Economics Department at Queen's University which was much smaller than today so friends and acquaintances came from wide ranging fields of study. They moved into a flat on the nearby Lisburn Road, which became a social hub for their friends and university colleagues and was the venue of many memorable parties which tended to be riotous and were on occasion actually hosted on behalf of others. In his retirement speech Norman referred to an unnamed Professor who had to be carried down the steps to his car! Fortunately the young Christine was a very heavy sleeper and the neighbours were deaf!

Graeme finished by recounting contributions from two of his step-children, Elinor and Henry, whose hearts Kathleen captured:

Elinor's words: Thank you for telling me about Kathleen. The world is a little less fabulous without her in it, but her example lives on, and I'm happy she was able to go peacefully. I always think about a fun loving, code breaking, wine drinking, clothes making, elegant and very kind lady when I wear her dresses.

Henry's words: *Kathleen helped me prepare for my GCSE French Oral, particularly pronunciation, which I needed as part of my path to University and a little latter the examiner asked my Mother (Karen Ferguson) wherever did I learn my impeccably proper French diction and phraseology from the 1940s and 50s?*

Appreciation: Dr Patrick Taggart. Nephew.

Family activities at that time included a short membership of a Beagle hunt, sailing on Strangford Lough; camping holidays in north Donegal with the Taggart family. Those of you familiar with Donegal will know that any holiday spent there, especially under canvas, requires optimism and enthusiasm. Kathleen possessed these. She was always ready for a picnic in the pouring rain. Well into her 80s she was first up the gangplank for a trip to Tory island. This involved an hour in a trawler across 12 miles of the north Atlantic. On the cusp of her tenth decade she crossed the bay at Rosbeg in my small open boat to see the wonderful cliffs and seabirds.

In due course Kathleen became a Tutor in the French Department. She was an active member in the so called 'University Wives' Club' and the Derry High School Old Girls' and she gave a lot of time to the Citizens' Advice Bureau. Kathleen and Norman continued to travel to many countries and each time she always took the opportunity of learning at least a smattering of the local language.

Her many accomplishments included being a talented seamstress and a byword for elegance. For each outfit she made there was a matching hat created by the Belfast milliner, the late John Green, frequently made of specially dyed fine straw or felt.

She was also an accomplished and adventurous cook who could whip up a meal for 20 in half an hour and for some time during the 1960s and under a male pseudonym she wrote a recipe column and reviewed cookery books for the Belfast Telegraph.

In the 1950s and 60s both she and Norman were deeply involved in pastoral work for their students, including those from Nigeria and Malaya, and entertaining the Honours students to afternoon tea on a Sunday. One of Norman's star honours students at these Sunday teas was George Cassidy, who became a family friend, and who officiated at Norman's funeral in 1990 and is doing the job for Kathleen today.



Many of Norman's ex-students did well in later life. On one occasion they visited Cyprus where an ex-student was by then the Minister of Tourism. Norman was mortified that when they left the Minister had not only upgraded them to the first class cabin but also loaded Kathleen and Christine with massive bunches of flowers and a large crate of Cyprus oranges was very visibly loaded on to the plane for them to take home. On another occasion, when he and Kathleen visited Kuala Lumpur, an ex-student was the Finance Minister in the then Malayan Government and Kathleen was enchanted to hear him refer to Norman as his guru. This man had done much better than Norman had expected so he was happy to accept the offer of a private plane for the next stage of their journey!

In 1968 Kathleen and Norman went to Malta for two years where Norman was Professor of Economics at the Royal University of Malta, helping to set up the new Economics department. The University was a small place and once more they soon acquired a wide range of friends and a hectic social life. Kathleen delighted in learning the Maltese language and exploring the islands and, as a dedicated shopper, searching out all the tiny workshops or factories that had something unusual or different on offer.

Norman's retired from Queen's in 1975 and he took up an appointment at the University of the West Indies, in Barbados where they lived for a year, finding the opportunity to visit most, if not all, of the islands of the West Indies. This was followed by a semester in Decorah, Ohio which was instigated by American friends from Malta days. As ever, friends were made – for life. I hope you will agree with me that Kathleen had an incomparable zest for life and that if she had a motto it was Carpe Diem, (seize the day) and I think she would have been sorry to miss today.

Appreciation: James George Caundle King. Grandson



Back in Belfast, the travel continued with visits to the Far East and Australia, Russia, East Germany, North and South Africa and Europe. Kathleen took up painting and prolifically recorded many of the sights and events seen on their travels, producing 150 delightful pictures - a visual archive of memories. She considered herself to be only a 'primitive' or perhaps 'naïve' painter, but she had a particular skill in capturing the essence of ordinary people in ordinary



circumstances in a few strokes on her canvas - ranging from a wedding in Donegal, race goers in Malta, a group of school children in St Petersburg, to passers-by in South Africa and fishermen in Barbados.

After being widowed in 1991 Kathleen became an Advanced Motorist and in her 70s she took part as navigator in the 'Monte Carlo Dash', a women-only rally driving event in which the object was to get there by the shortest route from their given starting point.



Kathleen also learned how to use a computer, becoming a whiz on the internet and enabling her to keep in touch with her many world-wide friends by email and even taught herself to draw with a mouse. To the last, she watched YouTube videos of her favourite singers.

She continued to travel, always wanting to go somewhere new, with little interest in returning to a country she had already visited. We calculated that in her time she has visited over 40 countries in the company of friends or family. However, her true love was the cottage in Rosbeg in Donegal, built by her and Norman in 1966 with the proceeds of her tutoring work at Queen's and which she visited annually, albeit latterly with pain and difficulty.

In 2010 Kathleen moved to Bristol in order to be nearer to her immediate family and since then had the pleasure of acquiring 3 great granddaughters and a great grandson. Although she never got over the loss of Norman she none the less carried on to make a new life, making new friends. She continued to read like fury, ordering books from the internet and from catalogues. She joined the Africa Society, having an interest thanks to her 2 brothers who had lived and worked there, and re-joined the Corona Society of which she had been a member when in Malta and Barbados, and attended as many meetings as possible.

Indomitable as ever this summer, ignoring rapidly failing health, she was still asking when she could next be taken to the cottage at Rosbeg. On her 96th birthday, only six weeks ago, she was still able to blow out the candles on her cake and knock back a glass of sparkling wine!

Extraordinary, clever, talented and game to the last.

Appreciation: Thomas Haire OBE. Student of Norman Cuthbert.

I would like to say a few words in memory and honour of Kathleen on behalf of the Haire family. About the Kathleen that my wife Clare and I knew and loved.

As the only non-family member honoured to be speaking today, it is a great privilege and says a lot about the close friendships the Cuthberts, Kings and Haires have had over many years. Thank you for asking me, Christine and Cliff.

Kathleen was always incredibly generous and welcoming to the Haires be it during our visits to her home in Osborne Park, Belfast or the cottage in Rosbeg, Donegal, or indeed in letting us use the cottage over the years. Kathleen always had a bit if a shine for me – as I did for her – and any time we visited she would always make sure the two of us sat together.

I worked for a number of years on security matters in Northern Ireland and Kathleen always wanted to hear some inside stories or titbits. Who was in jail, who was getting out or who was getting brought back again.

You will all have your own memories of Kathleen – and we have heard a lot about her wonderful life already. I'm going to speak very briefly of the Kathleen Clare and I knew by way of one short story.

One that I think encapsulates an element of a shared upbringing I had with her despite the difference in years. That shows the surprises that Kathleen could spring on us. That shows her sense of fun. And at the same time shows her enlightened view of the world.

It was one lovely evening a couple of years ago up in Rosbeg. We had enjoyed one of those “bring and buy” Donegal holiday dinners: we'll bring the spuds, you bring the sausages, we'll go to Lidle, and you go to Morgan's and so on. The whiskey and wine was flowing – and Kathleen knew how to pour you a real half 'un – and there was the possibility of a bit of sing-song in the air. We were talking Norn Iron, politics, loyalties and I probably confessed to having carried the string as a boy on a few Orange parades. It was what you did where I grew up. The next thing, Kathleen asks “*So do you know the Oul Orange Flute then?*” I said yes, and the next thing, she starts us off.

“In the County Tyrone near the town of Dungannon, where manys the ruction meself had a hannin, Bob Williamson lived, a weaver by trade, sure and all of us thought him a stout Orange blade.”

It's an Orange ballad about the said Bob Williamson, a flute player in the local parading band who marries, in the words of the song, “*a papist named Bridget McGinn*”.

Bob has to leave the country; flees to Connaught; and committing the cardinal sin of having “turned” he tries to get the flute to play at Mass. But it won't do so and plays only such broad-minded tunes like “the Boyne Water” and “the Protestant Boys”. The flute is more loyal than Bob.

We sang it quite heartily – though I think with more gusto from me than Kathleen - much to the surprise of some of those there who didn't think Kathleen had it in her. The second half of the story though is that, later that same evening, the chat moved on and we found ourselves talking about things Irish and the Irish language.

I was joking that many such Irish speakers in the North spoke a quaint variation of Gaelic called “Jailic” because they learnt it all in the University of the Maze – the Maze prison that is. The next thing, Kathleen again surprises a number of us, only this time by speaking to us in Irish. Turns out she had at one time taken Irish classes to the extent that she had been awarded a silver Fainne. That's one off the gold standard for speaking Irish and pretty good in my book.

To me, this short story; these two examples, of Orange on one side and Green on the other, say everything about the enlightened and balanced person Kathleen was. Generous to a fault and open to all views. A model for us all to follow.

I tried to think of a way to round off this short tribute. Should I sing the Oul Orange Flute? Probably not – but I could do a bit back at the house later if others sing the chorus.

Should I write her a personal version? “*In the County of Derry in the town of that name, Kathleen Cuthbert, nee Ferguson came*”. In the end I thought I should close with a few words of Irish that Kathleen would have known and would have often said to us as we left the cottage.

Slan abhaile. Go dte tu slan. Airim uiaim thu.

What that means is:

Safe home. Go safely Kathleen. We'll all miss you.

I think Kathleen would have been amused to know that the Oul Orange Flute and the Irish language played a part in her tributes to-day. I hope you have enjoyed these memories Clare and I have of Kathleen and that it brings a smile to you as you remember the Kathleen we all knew and loved.

Appreciation: .Caroline Sara Cuthbert King Granddaughter

During my formative years, there were three women who were hugely influential on my life and who can take credit for any positive attributes I may have. My mum, my nanny Ruth and my dear, dear grandmother Kathleen (or Nonna, as I took to calling her, once I had learned Italian).

What can I say about Kathleen? There are so many incredible things about her life I could relate, but now I'm going to focus on an aspect of her that made a huge impact on me. Language and communication.

Kathleen was clever. I picked up from her the joy of learning, knowing stuff and discussing and debating. I have great memories of sitting with her and ma, at the kitchen table at Osborne Park, talking about big and small things and probably drinking a little too much wine.

It wasn't just our mini-symposia that stick in my mind. From a young age, I learned from her how to talk with adults. I remember attending many of her grown up parties, where I put into practice the sage advice she dispensed. Lots of listening and asking questions, and to remember that there is always something interesting to find out about a person - you just have to find out what it is. That knowledge has helped me learn a lot of really interesting things about people and the world, and also held me in good stead when doing boring business networking things.

Kathleen was a complete natural with languages. She excelled at her studies and teaching of languages but, from my experience, her skills were incredible. She came to visit me when I was studying in Milan, and having not picked up a book or studied Italian, just took a moment or two's thought (ah, it is a romance language. The structure will go like this. And it will probably sound something like this) and she was off! Chattering like a local with all and sundry. Pretty galling for me, who had put in a couple of years of study to get to semi-fluent!

I saw this talent for communication again when she visited me in South Bristol. There was a corner shop run by some Russians that sold milk, bread, that sort of thing. After a couple of minutes of pottering around, we find her chatting away in Russian to the wee Russian granny, both of them having a whale of a time.

Her love for communication manifested itself in other ways, including reading to friends who were blind. One such friend was a doctor, Joyce Neill, who had tried using audio books, but didn't find them demanding

enough. So the pair of them would get to grips with something more challenging and would then have animated discussions of the book in question.

The service concluded with a poem read by Caroline. It was written for Kathleen by her long time friend, the late Dr Joyce Neill, a published poet, whose medical activities in the late 1940s included smuggling contraceptives from Northern Ireland into the Republic of Ireland, where they were banned!

For KATHLEEN CUTHBERT, after a most enjoyable luncheon party, May 10th, 2002.

A major pleasure, at this stage
Of our increasingly great age,
Is sitting down to take our ease
With lively, bright contemporaries;
And, to augment our happy mood,
Provision of delicious food.

Then from this common vantage point,
This strange new world's less out of joint,
And the old shared one's warm and clear,
Amid the snows of yesteryear.
So, Kathleen, here to you I send
My grateful thanks for a dear friend.





KATHLEEN CUTHBERT
5th October 1920- 1st November 2016.