

## **Eulogy for Marie Janet Hart - 25 March 2023**

Welcome friends and family. Damien and I are grateful you could be here with us today, both live streaming and in person to celebrate the life of our mother Marie Hart.

To all who know Marie, they will know that she was a great record keeper and communicator of the written word. So much so that in the pack up of her home, we discovered some writings of her memoir in a box aptly named "Funeral details". So my gratitude also to mum today for making this task of her eulogy somewhat easier by saving me some research and digging, and helping me get HER facts right. She was a stickler for accuracy!

Marie was born Thursday January 2 1930. Marie made note in these reflections that "Thursday's Child has far to go". And indeed she did. 93 years, and 74 days.

Marie notes that it was a hot day when she was born, and the temperature had reached 35° in Sydney. Marie's parents were Elvie Bird and James Benning. Marie had one older brother, James, or Jim who was seven years older than her. Jim and Marie had lovely travels together in the final decades of their lives. Jim passed away only in recent years.

Marie grew up in eastern Sydney, particularly Waverley, which is now referred to as Bronte. She notes that she had memorable Sunday school picnics at Bronte beach, where they were served sandwiches, cakes and lemon or raspberry syrup in the mugs they wore on a tape around their necks. They had running races and games, and had splendid time. These special events often called for the purchase of a new dress or hat from Anthony Hordens, and the magic of this wonderful store made such an impact on Marie.

Marie reflects that although their possessions were few, the freedom of playing in the neighbourhood and the warmth of their family home meant that feelings of deprivation were never known to her, despite living in the period of The Great Depression.

Marie attended Clovelly Public School and writes fondly of her memories of the teachers there, and classes of needlework and such. When World War II began, she took part in the air raid drills in the playground, and at that time was a Girl Guide and the leader of a patrol in the first Clovelly company.

As a teenager Marie attended Randwick Girls Home Science School and fell in love there with what she calls "the beauty of the English language". In 1944 she came second to the Dux in final exams, and received her intermediate certificate for English, general maths, business principles, history, physiology and hygiene, art and needlework. She had a part-time job at Coles in Bondi Junction.

Although Marie suggests that school education for girls at the time could be described as minimal, she felt it was a thorough and sound foundation for her, which has served her well through her life. Her first jobs were with insurance and Real Estate companies in administrative roles.

As a young woman Marie was engaged to a young man named Peter. I recall her often commenting about this relationship when I got myself into tricky relationship situations. She was with this fellow for a number of years and engaged to him, but due to not being the same culture as his family was ostracised and humiliated by them.

Marie broke that engagement, and changed her workplace to Sydney Hospital in a medical administrator role. In 1957 Marie decided "on a whim" to go to England with her friend Joan Kelly, and at the age of 27 left home for the first time to sail to Europe on the Orsova

Marie's time in Europe was well documented, I now have in my possession in her diary and every letter that was sent home to her parents. I also have her extensive scrapbook and many hundreds of slides and photographs of what she describes as the "most wonderful 16 months of her life".

In briefly reading through some of her diary entries, since packing up her home, I'm introduced to the young Marie. One that was filled with spontaneity and passion, whimsy, and wonder. One such diary entry talks about the embarrassment of having to visit the laundromat with her pyjamas poking out from under her coat in the dreary London weather, as none of her clothes were clean. She writes of late night train station conversations with other travellers. And nights out dancing and socialising, as well as attending magical ballet performances and other cultural delights. Perhaps there is still a book to be written by her in this diary and collection of stories.

On Marie's return to Australia she resumed work at Sydney Hospital with her previous employer and her involvement in The Outdoor Club. Marie was an avid bushwalker and The Outdoor Club provided many social activities that were great fun. It was at one of these events where she met her first husband, Norman Dalton. Marie writes that she accepted his invitation to attend a ball when the girl that Norm had originally invited, had boils, and therefore could not join him. She writes that she knew that night, as he drove to the venue that, without a doubt, he was the man who would fulfil her every hope in a husband.

Marie and Norm were married the following year and lived in Balgowlah in Sydney. Norm had a lifelong lung condition which required frequent admissions to hospital and many operations. At times he was unable to work, and Marie nursed him for several years. Marie and Norm desperately wanted children, but were unable to conceive. They had been approved for adoption had prepared clothing and equipment and were offered a baby boy, but at the time they were offered the adoption Norm deteriorated seriously, and the offer was withdrawn. Marie writes as of this as her deepest grief. Norm died before they have been married eight years. I do believe that her love for Norm and the grief of his death impacted her for the rest of her life.

In the year following Norm's death Marie travel to Norfolk Island on the suggestion of her travel agent. A day or two before her return to Sydney she met our father Tony Hart. They corresponded for some time before Dad made his way to Sydney and they were soon married. They were quickly approved for adoption, but before long Marie became pregnant with my brother Damien. When our dad passed away 26 years ago, I remember Mum saying that Dad

was the supreme optimist. When she said to him that her deepest wish was to have children Dad said to her “if you want children, we will have children”. 17 months after Damien’s birth, I was born, we were settled in our home in Belrose in Sydney. At that time Marie’s mother was still living with our family and I can remember the care that mum afforded to her own mother in her final years. After she passed away, mum and dad made the decision in 1977 to move to Ballina. Marie was always heavily involved in committees and groups of service in Ballina. She was never afraid to put her hand up and was led by the “duty” to “do the right thing”.

Mum and Dad stayed in our family home in Bonview St East Ballina until the mid 90’s when I had left home and Damien was married. They then moved to Swift Street, where Marie remained until mid last year when she relocated to Florence Price Gardens.

In 1983 Mum began the Richmond Tweed Family History Society. What started as 5 like-minded women, around our dining room table, including her dear friend Patricia who is here today, has flourished into a thriving society. Marie was a historian - for decades, she researched our family history, held reunions, and helped others fill the gaps in their family stories. For years the best Christmas present we could ever give her was either British pound notes or English stamps for her to send off to England for birth certificates or records of some newly discovered relation. All of this research was “old school” - letters, microfiche and journals. In fact, the first Journal of the Richmond Tweed Family History Society “The Cedar log” was typed in September 1984, on her faithful typewriter at home. Decades before ancestry.com was a twinkle in a computers eye. In 2011 the Society’s Research Centre was named the Marie Hart Library in honour and appreciation of Marie’s contribution to the establishment of their Society and resources. Marie was deeply honoured by this gesture and we know she was incredibly proud of the society.

Marie continued to invest her research and historical knowledge into others, and we have received a beautiful email from the president of the Richmond Tweed Family History Society Richard Goss, with a collection of reflections. Including the comment that *“we all looked forward to reading Marie’s regular column ‘All in the Family’ in The Cedar Log. This was one of the many ways Marie kept us all together as family – her family of Family Historians”*. Richard is here today with some other members of the society, and we extend our love and gratitude to you Richard for your honouring of Marie’s life and work.

Many of you that are here today know the recent Marie. You are familiar with the last few decades of her life. You may recall that she had a few return visits to England, which she called her “Swan Song”, she stayed at youth hostels and had her decades of research come alive visiting places of her ancestors origin. She even reconnected with her old flatmate, Pat Arnold, who understand is joining us from England, on live stream today.

In her later years, Marie continue to write for the The Cedar Log, she remained active in the Friends of the Library, the Bangalow Writers group, and attended exercise classes and walked regularly - so much walking. Marie always delighted in her op shop fossicking, garage sales, and of course her gardening. For as long as I can remember Marie would have seasonal pots of “colour” and make a little collection of flowers in a posie to take when she visited others. Giving up her garden, was one of the toughest things she had to endure in recent years.

Marie was a has six grandchildren and was a kind and loving Nana or Grandma to them all, and mother-in-law to Maree and Scott. I believe our children will have memories of Nana with her “mad bags” that she would call them, filled with little treasures, or unusual, magazines or books that she had picked up in her adventures through the garage sales.

One theme that has run consistently through Marie’s life is her friendships with strong women. Marie surrounded herself always, with good conversation, and engaging and lively friendships. Through putting together the slideshow that will follow shortly, it’s evident the affection that she had for the women in her life. Many of who are here today, to celebrate her.

In the emails that I have received since mums passing, you have shared with us your reflections of Marie’s contribution to your lives. Marie was a involved in many significant moments for her close family and friends, as she was always so supportive of people’s pursuits. We’ve read that Marie taught people all things from making marmalade to finding their birth parents. Marie would always recommend a book she thought you should read, write a note she thought may be of interest on the back of an envelope, cut out a clipping, or drop a quick email. Although her computer literacy was limited, Marie did her very best to embrace technology especially as it afforded her of her deepest passion, to communicate with others.

Many of you have reflected on how capable, independent and remarkable she was. Marie was indeed a living example of doing the right thing, and following through on her commitments.

Damien and I, and our families are sincerely grateful that you could join us today to celebrate and remember such a wonderful lady as our Mum, Marie Hart.

Please enjoy the next few minutes of a snapshot of Marie’s long and valuable life.