

Thoughts about Margaret

There is a time for everything,
a time to be born and a time to die,
a time to weep and a time to laugh.

Today we come to pay tribute to someone who got her timing right. To go to sleep peacefully when one was threatened with a major operation and a long period of rehabilitation was very clever. Jessie Margaret Deane was an activist and would not have enjoyed being confined. As one of my nephews said: “In cricket and in life, 89 is a very good innings.”

Her long and purposeful life was full of love and kindness although she had a sometimes disconcertingly forthright quality in expressing her opinion. Everyone who knew Margaret would say she would give just the right amount of support to friends and people who needed her help. She was the Sergeant Major of her kitchen with delicious soups, cakes and my favourite pikelets being beautifully cooked and graciously delivered. Michael Moore emailed from the Czech Republic reminding us that “she made mighty fine pieburgers and she was a lovely lady who always seemed happy and made others happy”.

Of course, as many here will recollect, some to their benefit, some to their cost, she was the Sergeant Major of a much wider arena than simply her kitchen.

Margaret Deane was born Jessie Margaret Waite in Dunedin on 11 August, 1919. She was named after her Mother’s best friend. Her Mother died when she was eighteen months old and the same friend, Jessie Cowper, looked after Margaret. She became a beloved member of the Cowper family for the rest of her life.

The families were all staunch members of the Methodist Church and Margaret's personality reflected the disciplines of making the most of one's talents and using one's time fully and wisely. Winifred her cousin said Margaret was always so beautiful and had a special sparkle. At one stage there was a flurry of excitement when it appeared the Waites were related to Sarah Banks, Joseph Bank's sister, and there may have been a legacy involved. However, this was one of those events which are talked about in family histories but the details are lost.

Like so many families in the depression Margaret's family was unable to allow her to accept a scholarship to attend high school. She would have loved to have been a teacher and later was able to realise part of her dreams by becoming a fine teacher of speech and drama. Instead of going to high school, Margaret went to work in Milne and Choice, at the time a leading department store in Auckland. She enjoyed a diverse and very busy social life. For her sixteenth birthday in August 1935 she made herself a new dress and went to a Bible Class social at St John's Methodist Church in Ponsonby, where she met a boy who was visiting with a friend. This boy was my Father Reg, who became the love of her life and the rock on which she sheltered for the rest of her life. As a friend observed yesterday, their relationship was to become a beautiful love story.

In January 1940 they were married at St John's Church and moved to their new home in Devonport. Cocker Spaniels and a baby son enlarged the family and then another world wide event, the Second World War, saw Reg and Margaret separated for some years. These were difficult times as with my Father overseas, their business and then their own house needed to be sold. Margaret and I lived with various members of the family until Reg returned home at the end of 1944. As the only male member of the family I learnt to appreciate the society of women.

Towards the close of the war, we moved to Christchurch under the auspices of the Air Force, and then lived in Mauku and Pukekohe where Margaret was able to broaden her talents by becoming a leading member of the local drama society. The great excitement of this time was waiting for another baby and when dear Jill arrived our family was complete. Margaret won a competition for looking most like Vivien Leigh, who at the time was starring in "Gone with the Wind". Inez and Norman Andrew have remained lifelong friends from this period of her life.

Pukekohe was close to both the Auckland and Tauranga families who were all an important part of their lives. Reg's brother Les had died early leaving his spirited widow Kath and four beautiful small children. Margaret and Reg were devoted to the children Reg, Bill, Ann and Colleen throughout their lives, and later also to Shirley and Emma, and Nynette, Robyn, Jock, Nicola and John who are here today. In turn they have all been so marvelously supportive, loving and understanding of their Aunt and Uncle. They have made the long trip to Masterton on many occasions for memorable celebrations and services of remembrance.

I remember Margaret weeping for days when she left her many friends in Pukekohe and as we moved to the famous metropolis of Opunake which I always seem to be explaining is located in Taranaki. But once she had settled in Opunake, she made a wide range of great friends with whom she remained in close contact until the end of their lives. Our home was always full of our friends. Mine loved the end of year parties my Mother provided.

Margaret was a prodigious correspondent who got huge pleasure from writing numerous letters and corresponding with many relatives and friends until her eyesight failed. Wherever we were in the world the spidery writing would follow us with the family news.

In 1960 Margaret and Reg moved to Masterton where she has enjoyed living ever since. She learnt to play bridge and loved both bridge and marjong. Sometimes they would play bridge for five nights a week. She was a voracious reader, devouring especially biographies and every available newspaper. She always did everything so quickly including driving her car at high speed, whether it be on roads or across footpaths. It was like an extension of herself. She would drive across the road to the dairy to collect a bottle of milk or just around the corner to the wine shop to supplement her happy hour.

On one occasion she delivered baking to her friend Connie and received speeding tickets on the way down Colombo Street and then again on the return journey. Furious about this, she stood over Reg while he rang the Traffic Office to explain that my Mother could not possibly have driven down and back in the time set out on the tickets. The Officer interrupted my Father: “Mr. Deane, given that your wife was travelling at the speeds indicated on the two tickets, she could indeed have got there and back in that time”.

Sadly, when she developed macular degeneration, these joys were no longer possible and the lack of independence from not being able to drive was a frustrating event.

Margaret valued family and friends above all else. Spot of Telecom’s \$2 phone calls saw her keeping up with them all over the country. She loved the advent of mobile phones which meant she could follow Jill around all day checking on her with numerous calls! When I once paid my Mother’s account, I discovered she could easily phone Jill an unbelievable 12 to 15 times a day.

A story about the 1987 election shows her intense loyalty to her family above her long standing voting support of National. Several of the National party politicians had criticized her son and she protested by voting Labour for the first and only time in her life. She said to me, never tell your father. The Wairarapa seat was won by Labour by just one vote. It shows the power of the individual in the democratic system and how politicians have to be aware of the power of revenge. Women are said to have long memories.

After her eightieth birthday, Margaret told me that it was “the best day of her life.” I asked her why? What was so special about the party? “The computer of course” was the sharp response. The family had given her a computer as a gift and we then saw all over again the bright and intelligent student who loved the intellectual challenges provided by this new activity. She adored the games she could play on the computer, and it was a great outlet for her competitive spirit.

After Reg had a stroke, Margaret devoted herself to taking care of him. Jill looked after them both, anticipating their every need even before they thought of it themselves. Nicky came to keep Reg company and to give Margaret a break. But Reg said “Margaret needs Nicky not me!” so dear Nicky became a surrogate daughter to them both by making life so special for them with her warmth and endless tact and delicious homemade food which they thought was as good as Margaret’s! Compliments were a rarity, only delivered when perfection was achieved.

When Reg died she struggled to be brave and to remember how fortunate she was that he had come home from the war as the only survivor in his contingent of eight young men. Tasi and Foalima came to Reg’s funeral and Tasi and Margaret rang each other every week from that time. Margaret would have been especially touched that Foalima came to sing for her today.

We have many of our other friends here today. Many of you were also great friends to Margaret. Friendship is one of the finest gifts of life and we cannot tell you how much we appreciate your warm and loving support.

Over more recent years, Jill, Nicky and Marina were indefatigable in ensuring Margaret was visited several times a day and that all her needs were met. Marina became one of Margaret's closest friends and confidants as they philosophized on the nature of life and the ups and downs it creates to keep us challenged. Jo and Alison at MetLifeCare were so understanding and provided friendship and comfort.

Tim and Callum and Kristen were all very special to Margaret, as were PD and Melissa and Jason. Flynn was her first great grandchild and then there was Lachie, Tia and little Luke. She loved Garry and Murray and they enjoyed lots of happy meals and laughs together.

I must return to our Tauranga cousins, Reg and Shirley, Bill and Emma, Ann and Colleen, and to their families, represented here today by Nynette, Robyn, Jock, Nicola and John. We thank them from the bottom of our hearts for their love and devotion and endless caring and generosity to Margaret and Reg. You were all just like sons and daughters to them, as indeed was their God-daughter Diane.

Dear Jill was such a wonderful daughter and no one will know exactly ALL the love, care and constant understanding she has given to her Mother. They have been the best of friends through this demanding time. I must pay the warmest tribute to Jill who has been the most amazing and loving daughter to our Mother and Father. I know Margaret would want me to thank Jill in a special way for her great devotion and support.

One could never forget our Mother, Grandmother, Aunt and friend. She was in turn vibrant and steely; stylish and attractive; disciplined and disciplining; warm and strong willed; caring and demanding; generous and rigorous; a perfectionist with a great enjoyment of the ironies in life and the possessor of a wicked sense of humour; a splendidly well organized woman with a gift for both friendship and frankness; and an actress to the end of her life.

Jill and Gillian and I do not know what we will do without her.

Now is the time to remember the dynamic and beautiful woman who has meant so much to all of us, and to those who are waiting for her....

And as the final words of the well known phrases I began this tribute with say so well

Now Margaret

This is a time to love and a time of peace

Roderick Deane

28 October 2008