

A Tribute

Hermaine Isabel Joyce Wheeler

Hermaine Isabel Joyce Wheeler, known as Joyce, was born in Raglan in 1916. She left us on Sunday 16 June 2002, 86 years later.

Her Great Grandfather, Henry, and his wife, Isabella, had left a law practice in London to travel on the "Cashmere" to Auckland in 1852. Her own Grandfather, Edward, was studying law at St John's College Oxford and followed the family later on. Her Father, Harry, was passionate about polo and politics. He lobbied to bring in laws to save the kauri forests and the toheroas but he was less mindful of his family. Her Mother, Gwen, was a warm and loving Mother and her siblings were a happy and tightknit group. Maiden aunts were integral to the huge old family home of 24 rooms at Murawai Beach, adding to the interest of a busy household of six children.

Because of her parents' separation, she was determined her own family would be one of joy and peace. Her years were filled with life and love. As many of you have said, and as we all know, she was perhaps the kindest person most of us had ever met. She cared deeply for her many friends and her abiding love of her family knew no bounds.

Joyce was determined, sometimes disconcertingly so, but she was wholeheartedly unselfish. She had a great strength and calmness, on which all of us could draw. She was warm and generous and wonderfully hospitable.

Joyce loved her home, her garden and Gisborne. But when given the opportunity, as Gillian once said, she took to international travel like a duck to water. Her time in America was one of the happiest events in her life, meeting new friends from all over the world and going to a new tourist destination each day.

You all know what a special person she was. Testament to that is the love of her family - her children Gillian, Jan, Barry and Ross, and her grandchildren Kristen, Guy, Danny, Kirk (who came all the way from Japan a few days ago to be with us), Scott, Damien, Michael, Peter, Rachel, Linda and David.

Her sisters, Vere in Whangarei, and Ceil in America, could not be here today, and three of her dear brothers have already left us: Ernie, Goldie and Hap. We are especially appreciative that Marie Palmer has come today from Whangarei to represent Joyce's sisters. Her sister-in-law, Auntie Rae Wheeler, is also here today, and dear Ibbie is here in spirit.

Joyce's other family over the past seven years became a wonderful group of caregivers who were devoted to maximising the potential of her life in the face of constraints which might earlier have overcome others. How can we ever thank sufficiently Mary Lou, Nelda, Ann, Janet, Lydia, Tracey, Charlotte, Pat, Steph, Tai and the others who cared so deeply for Joy. Gillian called them Joy's Angels.

And every day for weeks now we have heard from another Angle, Tasi Lemalu, who wanted to be here today but who could not make it.

There are some other special friends whom she loved greatly and whom I should acknowledge and thank - Lil Castles, Elaine Barron, Noeline Baty, Annie Fuchs, and Bell McPhail.

I first met Joyce in 1961, over 40 years ago, when she and indeed the whole family turned up to meet me at the Gisborne railway station. I fell in love with her instantly. And it was not just that amazing cooking. She spoilt me of course; but she spoilt everyone. When things were getting difficult for her some years ago, I said to her one day, I'll look after you forever. She simply said "I know that". That said it all.

Joyce was a person of modest material needs but she was nevertheless one of the world's great shoppers. The saying is "shop 'til you drop" but I never saw her drop, and she used to shop every day. When she lived with us in Washington DC in America for some months, she knew all the up market shops and all the discount ones. We did not want her to go home.

Chas and Joyce and Gillian and I and Kristen often holidayed together around New Zealand. There was never a cross word. There were lots of laughs.

Joyce's recipes and cooking were the things that legends are made of. We still use her recipes - apple short cake, sponges with cream, Louise cakes, immaculate pikelets, rhubarb meringue pie, Irish stew, steak and kidney pies, fish in batter like I've never had anywhere else. We bravely try to compete.

Her picnics were an art form: the car laden with pots of hot vegetables, savoury eggs, roast chicken - all laid on a table complete with tablecloth at the beach.

As many of you will have experienced, the Gibson home in McDonald Street provided six meals a day to all comers.

It was a miracle that her beloved Chas never put on any undue weight and lived to over 90. She would say it was because he was always looking forward to his next meal.

They were inseparable. As Auntie Moll said, it was love at first sight. And so it proved to be for over 60 years. They were woven together like a beautiful tapestry, such that it was at times impossible to disentangle who first thought what. It was the epitome of the romantic marriage.

Joyce spent her childhood on the wild West Coast, at Muriwai. She adored the sea. Every evening after dinner, she would say "let's go down to see the sea", just to experience it. This created problems. She had a Victorian obsession with fresh air, even in the depths of Winter.

Joyce came down to Gisborne to nurse at her Aunt's private hospital, Rostrevoir. She loved Gisborne from the first time she saw the beautiful beaches and slow winding rivers. Nursing was her calling and she loved the patients and making people well. Throughout her life you could tell her about a skin rash or a stomach upset and she would give you the right prescription in a moment. She loved going to the Red Cross meetings and delivering Meals on Wheels, and her own chicken soup and pikelets to her friends when they were ill.

Joyce and Chas could tell us about every dance floor in Poverty Bay, how well sprung they were, how accommodating of which dances and which steps. She was partly Victorian and partly Edwardian.

Their life at Ormond was very happy with wonderful neighbours and dear friends like Dot Grey who is here today, as well as the perpetual visits from their families which are well documented in a large range of family photographs. She could milk cows faster than Chas, and preferred being outside to doing housework which she always thought was a bore. She liked creative activities. Her cooking, sewing and knitting were activities she greatly enjoyed and at which she excelled.

Her value set was impeccable. Although Joyce was the least judgmental of women, she set high standards and simply expected the rest of us to comply. But shortcomings were accommodated. Her love of us all was unreserved, all encompassing, endless. She never said a cross word about anyone that I can recall; except that she would throw election pamphlets in the fire, saying emphatically that they were nothing but false promises. Let it be a warning to all of us!

Joyce was a great communicator. She had the most wonderful memory, she knew the names of all our friends' children even though she had not met the ones who lived overseas. She wrote numerous letters, was the originator of conference calls for Telecom - in the sense that everyone in the house had to

have a turn whenever we rang up - and as a young nurse got a glowing report which said she was a splendid nurse but spent too much time talking to the patients. Some of the families of those patients are here today.

Joyce was the right name for her. She was full of the joy of life and she shared that joyfulness with generosity and grace. As her neighbour at Ormond, Len Davidson, said "She was great fun but had a huge amount of commonsense". She was incredibly well organised, a natural manager, and shared her phenomenal memory with us in the most endearing and entertaining way.

We all knew the time had come for her to join her dear Chas and Jan and Kristen. But that does not really make the parting any easier.

Joyce was one of the world's special people. She was special to all of us and much loved by all of us.

It's time for her to go but we miss her forever.

Roderick Deane

June 2002