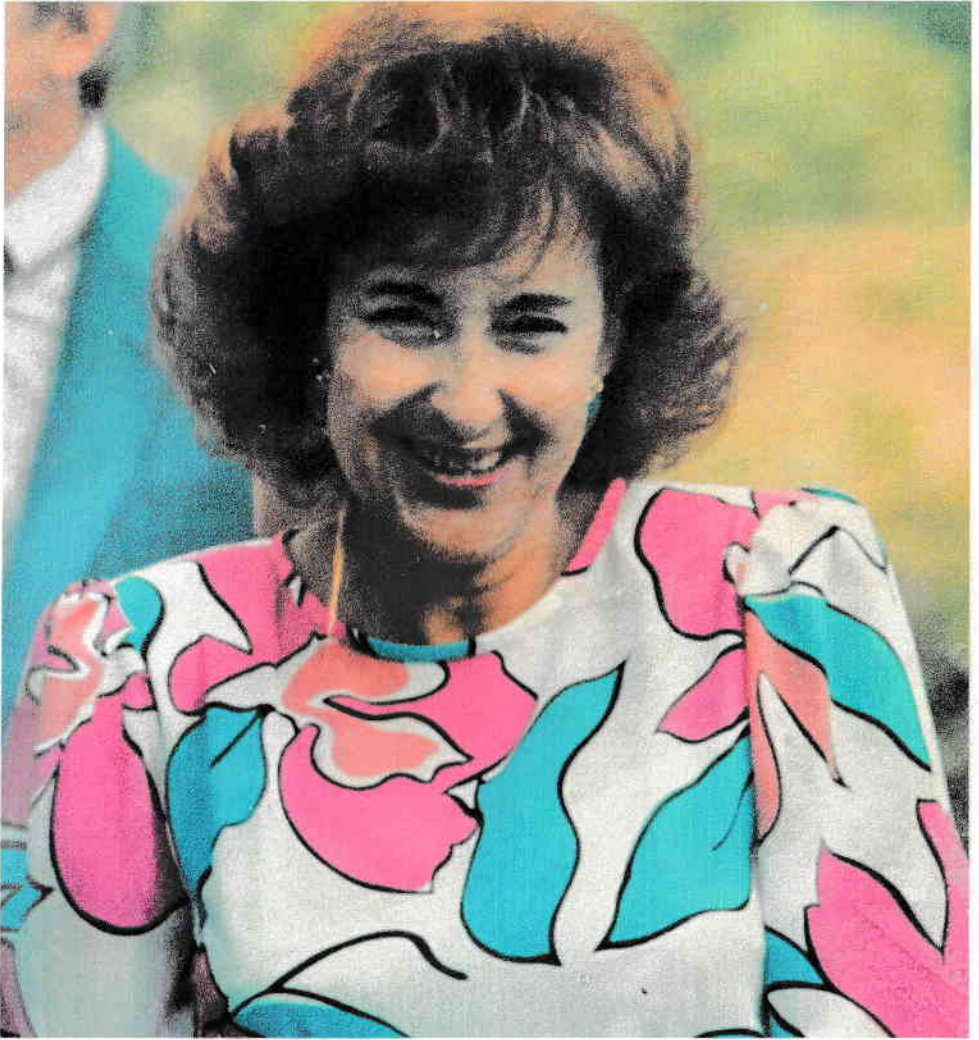


Joan Weinberg

23 August 1929 – 31 May 2024



Bushey Old Cemetery
1 June 2024

For Nicola

A letter from *Pat Rae*



Joan on her 90th birthday with Nicola at Pat's party

Below and opposite: Joan's sketches at art school.



This is a letter to Nicola, to let her know about her wonderful mother, my dear twin sister, Joan. Our mother discovered Joan was deaf when we were babies and she was singing lullabies to make us sleep. I would drop off but Joan didn't. One of my earliest memories was of us lying in bed telling each other stories. When our light was turned out, I continued by spelling the words out on the palm of her hand. We were very close until Joan went to board at the Jewish Deaf School in Nightingale Lane to be taught how to speak and to lipread. In those days, signing was frowned upon. Thankfully, we are now more enlightened and realise that sign language can enrich one's life, so Joan did learn it much later on.

Joan had a very lively, bubbly personality and did well at school. After leaving the Jewish Deaf School, she attended Dene Hollow, later to become the Mary Hare Grammar School. She was a good pupil though one of her reports noted that she talked too much during prep and bedtime. Her artistic abilities won her a place at St Martin's School of Art but it was during wartime and the period when London was being bombarded with doodlebugs so my parents felt she would be safer attending Willesden School of Art where she learnt to become a successful dress designer. I still have some of her drawings.

Her first job was at Marshall and Snellgrove's in the West End in the alteration room. That job lasted one month as she discovered that she was meant to tidy



Joan (middle) with Rosalind and Pat



married your lovely father Bernard and moved up to Manchester.

It is only now that I realise what a brave decision that was, to move away from her family and friends. The family



up after the other workers. Joan always knew she was worth more than that and she wasn't going to let her disability define her. She found her next job herself, with the London studio of a French fashion house called Jacqueline Vienne. She showed her fashion sketches to them, got the job but was rather peeved when she started work and found they were already making up one of her designs without giving her the credit. After a couple of years, she found another job as the head designer for a sportswear company.

Her professional career came to a halt when she



Joan (middle) with Pat, your Grandpa Louis, Uncle Monty and Grandma Clara

owned a raincoat manufacturing company but in those days, middle class wives were not expected to work. It wasn't till much later that they realised what an asset she could be in designing the new products.

Eventually the family firm was undercut by cheap Chinese imports and the company was closed. At roughly the same time, our mother, your grandmother died, so my elder sister and I suggested that both she and Benny move to our parents' flat in Wembley to start a new life. They both got jobs and had a lively social life with Joan joining a deaf group of amateur actors and Benny watching football with his closest friend Lionel Rose. Joan was also a mentor on Breakthrough, an organisation that advised hearing parents of deaf children on how to understand a deaf person's point of view.



Top: your parents, Benny and Joan, you; below: your brother Laurence, Joan and David

Sadly, those activities ended when Benny developed motor neurone disease that started in his legs and affected his mobility. Joan was a devoted wife, hoisting his wheelchair into the car so that they could continue to go out together until he finally succumbed to the disease. By good fortune, she wasn't on her own long. On a coach outing, she sat next to an old friend, David Stellman, who was also widowed, and, as he once said, they talked for nine hours. He moved into her flat and they had eleven happy years together.

Nicola, you know that both you and Laurence have had problems whilst growing up. Thankfully, Laurence is well looked after in Manchester and she was able to see you settled in your present flat and managing your life before dementia took away

her memory. My personal memories of Joan are of a loving, occasionally naughty sister. The only row I can remember is when I was helping her to change into her going away outfit after her wedding and I hadn't packed a certain matching undergarment. She turned to me and exclaimed "I will never have you as a bridesmaid again", at which we both fell about laughing.

When I reflect on her life and all the adversity she had to deal with, I realise that she was the bravest woman I have ever met.

Rest in peace, my dear sister.

