

## REMEMBERING JDA MEMBER JOAN WEINBERG

**Our wonderful friend, Joan Weinberg, passed away on 31 May 2024. Her twin sister Pat Rae wrote this beautiful eulogy for her.**

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.

We were very close until Joan went to board at the Residential School for Jewish Deaf Children (RSJDC) in Nightingale Lane at a very early age 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.

Once she could read, one of my earliest memories is 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.



▲ *Joan (centre) with Rosalind and Pat*

Joan had a very lively, bubbly personality and did well at school. After leaving the RSJDC, 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. It was there that she learnt to become a successful dress designer. I still have some of her drawings.

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



▲ *Joan and Benny on their wedding day*

Eventually the family firm was undercut by cheap Chinese imports and the company was closed.

At roughly the same time, our mother died, so my elder sister Rosalind 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.

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.



▲ *David and Joan*

By good fortune, she wasn't on her own long. On a JDA coach outing, she sat next to an old friend, David Stellman, who was also widowed, and they talked for nine hours.

He moved into her flat and they had eleven happy years together.



▲ *Joan at Purim together with Lisa Mansur her Support Worker and at JDA celebrating her birthday with Sue*

Both her children had problems whilst growing up. Thankfully, Laurence is well looked after in Manchester and Joan was able to see Nicola settled in her present flat and managing her 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 known.

Rest in peace, my dear sister.