

Family Eulogy for Anne

Today we are celebrating and remembering Anne, Sr Anne. I am honoured to be asked to speak today to share some memories of Anne, so I hope I can do justice to the trust that has been placed in me.

Today, fittingly, is the birthday of the founder of the Sisters of the Cross and Passion, The Venerable Elizabeth Prout, Mother Mary Joseph, also known as the Mother Teresa of Manchester.

On 31st October 1952 Anne was born to her mother Lillian and father Albert. Anne was the youngest of three children; her older sister, Barbara and her brother Albert.

When it became apparent to Anne that her time was limited, she spent some time writing about her early life and her earliest memories, some of which I would like to share with you now.

Anne spent her early life in Bradford, Manchester, apparently their mail was often delayed as it was frequently sent to Bradford, Yorkshire by mistake and had to be redirected. Ironic really considering that Anne spent a large part of her life in West Yorkshire.

Anne fondly recounted growing up in a very close-knit community; her mother, who she called Mam kept an eye on the older people in their neighbourhood, going to their houses first thing in the morning to check in with them and to pick up any groceries for them. Perhaps this was where the initial seeds of Anne's later vocation for helping and caring for others in the community were planted, from the acts of kindness and generosity of her mother.

Anne's earliest memory was one of these grocery errands. She recalled sitting upright in her pram when her Mam put a neighbour's fresh loaf of bread, on the apron of the pram, out of reach of the very little Anne – or so she thought! Taking her opportunity, whilst her Mam went into another shop, she managed to get hold of the loaf and tuck into one of the corners. By the time her Mam, (our Gran), came out of the shop, Anne was already setting about another corner! This apparently became quite a regular occurrence as her brother, Albert regularly complained that Anne had nibbled at the corners of the bread again leaving it wet and soggy.

Thankfully for all, Anne became far more refined as time went by!

Anne was a very happy little girl and enjoyed her early pre-school years, after all she was the youngest of her siblings by 15 and 10 years respectively, so enjoyed the benefits of the attention lavished upon her from her older sister, brother and parents. At the age of 5 she was a very shy but pretty and proud little bridesmaid for her sister Barbara.

That all changed though when she had to start school. Anne clearly didn't enjoy her early days at school and took an instant dislike to her first teacher, painting a somewhat unflattering picture of her, describing her as, and I quote: "a white haired, wrinkly old woman who smelt of fags!" She had never been left with anyone other than family before and viewed school as being left with strangers.

Her first day, by all accounts was not an enjoyable experience and she decided that school wasn't for her. The next day setting out for school, Anne was sick at the top of the road, thinking that might put paid to another day in school, but unfortunately there was no turning back, she was cleaned up, reassured and sent into school. She obviously had to do a better job of avoiding school and so began her escapades of making regular escape bids, some days getting farther than others, but always being caught and brought back, managing to give the staff a run for their money!

Anne later became a pupil at St Clare's High School, leaving to begin a career in the Midland Bank in Manchester. As a young woman, Anne had a successful career in the bank and appeared to anyone on the outside looking in to have everything, she didn't want for material possessions, cars, clothes and jewellery. However, it was clear that she was not fulfilled and was searching for something more, which she found in her vocation with the Sisters of the Cross and Passion. Anne willingly shed all her possessions and was in her 39th year of religious life when she died on 26th July. She found her true vocation, fulfilment, peace and happiness in religious life.

Whilst growing up, Anne was an integral presence in the lives of her nieces and nephews and took her duties as an Aunt and Godmother very seriously. She spent endless hours of her time taking her nieces and nephews out. School holidays and weekends were spent visiting various parks and museums near and farther afield, especially after she passed her driving test and got her first car. There were frequent swimming trips to the local pool

during the school holidays, all of which are fondly remembered and still talked and laughed about to this day, even though I am going back some 50 plus years!

Anne's youngest nieces, Angela and Pam were like 2 little bookends who came as a package and had many adventures together growing up. Anne was devoted to both to Pam and Angela and they to her. The three shared a very special bond.

Growing up, two particular occasions stand out, when Pam was about 8 or 9, she complained that her fringe was in her eyes, so Anne, ever helpful, took it upon herself address the problem! She cut a perfect, but rather short curved fringe for her. At this time, those of us of a certain age will remember a 70s rock band, Slade, whose lead guitarist sported a fringe just like it - I will leave it to you to imagine the teasing that followed until it grew out!

On another occasion, Anne took me to the dentist. Unfortunately, for me, I had to have a tooth removed and the dentist asked whether I preferred gas or cocaine (as it was then), I was just about to say cocaine and she jumped in and said "she'll have gas"! Years later when I reminded her of this and accused her of being a bossy boots, she laughed, that wickedly infectious giggle she had, and said I was too young to know what was good for me and having gas meant I wouldn't remember. I still maintain I would rather remember than have the dreaded gas mask!

I tell you both these little anecdotes, not just because they have made us laugh for years, but to underscore the weight of responsibility and commitment that she placed on her role as our aunty.

Anne was always a part of family occasions, in happy times - birthdays, baptisms, First Holy Communions, weddings and of course in less happy times, through illness and loss. She was always quick to offer support, words of comfort and wisdom, a reassuring presence and a big hug was always on offer.

Anne was always very busy, achieving a great deal in her life. For many years she was the Retreat Director of The Briery here in Ilkley, she has travelled the world to poverty stricken communities, continuing the work of Mother Mary Joseph, bringing comfort and support to those in need.

As Assistant Chaplain at Leeds Trinity for a time, Anne touched the lives of many students, promoting their welfare, giving spiritual and moral guidance and counsel without judgement, irrespective of their individual beliefs.

Anne was a founding member and a trustee of St Gemma's Hospice, who cared for her so beautifully in her final days ensuring she was as comfortable as possible.

Even though Anne worked very hard, she found time to take up crochet, a hobby I am pleased to have introduced her to – we shared many tips and YouTube links and looking at some of Anne's beautiful pieces, it would be fair to say that the tables soon turned and she could have taught me a thing or two!

Anne was also a TV star! On March 13th 2021 she appeared on the BBC's Songs of Praise, where she eloquently talked about the work of The Venerable Sister Elizabeth Prout.

It sounds like a cliché to say that Anne, Sr Anne, was many things to many people, but this is a fact, she touched the lives of numerous people in all walks of life and her presence will be sorely missed by people near and far.

Our family is especially indebted to Sister Susan, Anne's great friend and companion who selflessly cared for and looked after Anne throughout her illness and it is a great sadness that they won't get to enjoy their well-earned retirement at the cottage with Pushca, their little cat.

Throughout her illness and especially in what she knew were her last days Anne was sustained and comforted by her unwavering faith and the inner peace that this gave her. This in turn brought those around her comfort – typical Anne, she tried to make her leaving easier for the rest of us to bear.

We will all remember Anne in our own unique way. I for one am very grateful to have had Anne as part of my life and will cherish the childhood memories, her infectious giggle and sense of humour and especially her wise counsel and comfort when it was needed most.

Andrea Skelly 2nd September 2024.