

Chapter 40

A Lady of Courage - Our Final Year

This was to be our last year together although we weren't to know it and it was an extremely difficult one for Doreen. At times she was in some pain and discomfort, however, through it all her spirit shone and there was always a smile of welcome for anyone who visited. It was a joy for her to see the children and she loved seeing the dogs. The last photograph we have, taken by



**October 2000
Doreen with Me, Eddie & Lupo**

Andrew, shows her and me fronted by Andrew's two dogs, Eddie and Lupo. There was some compensation for me in that I felt that I was able to help someone I loved dearly; I therefore felt useful. Dr. Parkinson called in regularly to see her and check on her progress.

On 10th November she had difficulty swallowing her breakfast food. The District Nurse came to see her and decided that she had suffered a minor stroke so arranged for an ambulance. She was taken to the BRI and, after a consultation, was transferred to Ward F6 at St. Luke's. Her swallowing problem had gone but she had a chest infection. She was discharged on 18th November but told that she would be referred to the BRI for a camera probe of her lungs. She had been on a course of antibiotics which Dr. Parkinson had prescribed on 20th November when he called to see her. He called in to see her again on 28th November but said that she was no better and was in urgent need of further hospital treatment and immediately arranged for an ambulance. She went to Ward E3 where they arranged for the probe to be done on an urgent basis. Before she went, the doctor warned us that she was in a serious condition and that the cause of her weight loss, which was considerable, could be cancer. She had the probe and came back in high spirits because they told her that there was no cancer. She was so happy that she told all the other patients in her ward; we looked forward to a slow recovery. Then the blow fell. Two or three days later the nurses came rushing in and said that she would have to be isolated

in a single room as she had caught the hospital bug MRSA (Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus) which is resistant to the usual antibiotics. She was heart broken and clung to me and whispered: "Does this mean I shan't be going home anymore?" I told the doctors and nurses about her reactions and they tried hard to pacify her. It was difficult as we had always agreed to be open and truthful about things, but, in this case I didn't know and told her so. The doctor saw me and told me that a special antibiotic was being prepared and would be started at midnight. He also told me that if, within two or three days, she showed some sign of improvement and that lasted for a further two

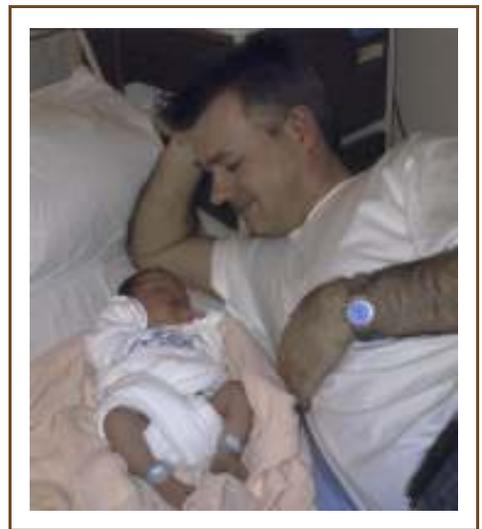


Brenda Thacker

days, there was hope. Well, the improvement came but only for a day, then relapse and so it went on. Days of hope and days of sadness. I spent about seven hours each day in the room with her and did what I could to make her comfortable and happy. I also fed her as best I could. She really didn't feel like eating but we struggled on. Paul collected me in the evenings and brought ready-made food for me. Over the

Christmas period Sarah also helped with the transport as did Brenda, my cleaning lady. Brenda was a real godsend as she took me to the hospital and brought me home on the days when there were no buses.

During the last week, Nick, Karen and Curtis visited bringing presents etc. She was pleased to see them and the old smile of welcome was still there. The same week, Andrew and Mary visited and still the same old spirit shone through the sadness. On 30th December, little Joe was born to Mary and Andrew; Doreen was so pleased and excited that she told all the nurses. Finally, Maria and John arrived. She did her best but she was obviously weaker. Nonetheless the smile was still there. Her eyes, oh those eyes, that welcoming brightness. What more can one say.



**31 Dec 2000
Andrew with Joe**

New Year's Eve became a nightmare. The doctor's told me that, while they were continuing with the treatment, they were also giving her morphine. Before this took effect, she had finally given way to her real thoughts. While she could still be heard, she said: "Please take me". I can only think that she was talking to God; she also said: "Let me go" which I believe was to me; lastly, and clearly, with her eyes open, directly to the doctor and nurses: "Let me die". It was heart rending. She was injected with more morphine and I thought that would put her to sleep but, not so. She was fighting for breath and this went on for hour after hour. A nurse came in and told me she would make me a cup of coffee. I went into the nurse's rest room. Outside, fireworks were going off. Everyone celebrating the New Year, and my love lay dying. Hour after hour went by with me occasionally wetting her lips but not being able to think of anything else to do. I felt so alone and helpless. Towards 3.30 am, another cup of coffee; with her still fighting for breath I heard a change, rushed in, realised she was going and got hold of the nurse who said: "Take her hand". I did and she was gone as I kissed her and said my "Goodbye". I remembered the nurse with whom we had got very friendly, told me that these things usually end in tears and so it was. I went home in a taxi and went to bed; I didn't know what else to do.

The next day, John and Maria returned. John listed everything that there was to be done which included going to the hospital and collecting the death certificate. Having done this, I noticed that there was no mention of MRSA and I still believe that there should have been. Besides doing the routine jobs, John and Maria undertook the most onerous task of sorting out all of Doreen's clothes etc., clearing all drawers and cupboards. This was a courageous thing to do and I am most grateful to them. They took a good number of items to the 'Help the Aged' shop in Bradford.

We called in to see George Lever to arrange the funeral. This was carried out on 5th January 2001. Father Paul Brook officiated. Two hymns were sung and I was glad to hear that someone in the congregation lead the singing. Who she was I do not know, but she did have a lovely voice. Doreen had asked that the service be a simple one and so it was, highlighted by John's address given well and with great courage. I was proud of him. The following is the text of that address:

Doreen came into the life of the Turner family in 1963 when she and my Pop were introduced by a mutual friend. Much of her life prior to that is unknown to me although I know that she was born and bred in Bradford and that her Secondary Education was at St. Joseph's College. She was also a very active member in St. Mary's Parish.

She had already been widowed and was working at English Electric when she came into contact with Jack. After a brief courtship, a proposal at Filey and engagement at Christmas 1963, they married in March 1964 and she took on the role of Wife and Mother to the Turner family.

Sadly, she was never to have children of her own but, when grandchildren started to arrive in 1967, she accepted the role of Grandma with great enthusiasm and delight.

Doreen was a committed Catholic all her life and she lived in a Christian way at all times; never a bad word to say about anyone; asking very little and always willing to help anyone with troubles.

In my memory, Doreen was the most constantly cheerful person I have ever met and I am sure that many, if not all, of this congregation would feel the same - a huge smile and a friendly welcome always.

During the more recent years, she met with many misfortunes in the form of various illnesses. These were all met full on with never a hint that she felt sorry for herself. Still, everyone was met with that smile. Whenever she greeted anyone she knew and loved, her eyes lit up as the sun lights the sky. Her love for her husband and the family, as it grew to include Great Grandchildren, was boundless and her joy never ending. Anyone who had contact with her over these last trying years must have marvelled at the patient way in which she dealt with each set back. Even when she could no longer walk, she didn't change; she sat in her chair with a quiet dignity, a telephone to hand which she used to keep in contact with the outside world where she continued to spread happiness.

Doreen so wished to die at the home which she loved. Sadly, it was not to be. She fought to the end in her hospital bed but as we know, the battle was lost. Doreen did not have a second name but surely "BRAVEHEART" would be most appropriate. A brave, gentle and lovely lady has gone to meet her maker - May she Rest in Peace.

Finally, Doreen will be missed and remembered by all those who loved her and those are many. Thankyou all for coming today and please take away your own memories of Doreen in happier times. My own memory is of 37 years of unstinting love for my Pop and our family.

Thankyou.

The service was followed by cremation at Scholemoor. A collection plate was available in the church and crematorium for contributions to Manorlands Hospice. £230 was collected.

One last reminder of our life together is represented by a little card given to me by Doreen some years before. It read:

*You're my Inspiration
In everything I do
And happiness to me, Dear
Is sharing life with you.*

Overleaf it says:

I love You

and is signed

Doreen.

What more could I ask? I loved and I was loved.

A few days later the casket holding her ashes was placed in our family grave.

In June 2001 a new headstone was put in place.



In March 2001, Father Dwyer, one of our priests from years ago, and now retired, wrote to me the following:

Thanks ever so much for your letter and copy of panegyric by John. He did it beautifully.

You will miss her very much but try to think that she has not left the land of the living. She has left the land of the dying and entered into the land of the living. Try to think of the gain to her as well as the loss to yourself. Easier said than done but that is how love reaches out beyond death. It is important to see life in its totality as well as the brief time we spend on this earth. Death is like a birth really. We are enfolded in the womb of Mother Earth and then time comes when we have to let go of all the attractions of this earth to find them in their fullness in the life beyond this life. Please God that is how it is with Doreen in her new life. So I hope you will try, in the middle of your grief, to see it in that light; of the gain to her as well as the loss to yourself.

God Bless and keep you Jack.

Sincerely

Father Mathew

PS. I shall be offering Mass for my dear friend Doreen tomorrow (Sun). God rest her noble soul.

And now? I find it very difficult to keep in mind the words expressed by Father Dwyer although, oddly enough, Dr. Parkinson, who paid two visits to me after the funeral, expressed very similar thoughts.

Sometimes, sitting in my chair by the window, I look across to her empty chair and close my eyes and, in a sort of prayer, hope that, when I open them again, it will all be a dream and I will see her sitting there.

But no, the chair is empty and she is not there.

The stairlift is silent.

It is the End.

And the last Song?

“Beyond the Sunset”

“If you go first

And I remain

To walk the road alone”



*March 2001
Jack & Joe Turner*