

# Meg Rugg-Easey

31<sup>st</sup> August 1914 – 8<sup>th</sup> July 2013



Emstrey Crematorium  
Shrewsbury  
24<sup>th</sup> July 2013

**Entry Music:** *Meg Rugg-Easey playing the clarinet.*

### **Introduction and Welcome**

We are here today to share in the sadness of the death of Margaret Rugg-Easey (Meg), but also for you to remember her, to express your love and admiration for her and to try to bring some comfort to those of her family and friends who are here today.

I met Meg only once almost exactly a year ago and I talked to her a bit about her life. Meg was not a religious person and she wanted a non-religious funeral. I am here today as a member of the British Humanist Association to lead the service during which you will hear poems, readings and music chosen by Meg herself. The music that we heard as we came in was a recording of Meg playing the clarinet. I will also talk of Meg's life, as related to me by her family. Paul will also talk of his memories of Meg.

Humanists believe that it is possible to lead a good life and to be a good person without religion and today we will remember a person who indeed had a good life and was a wonderful person. For humanists life on earth is all we have and, for that reason, it is important to live life to the full and to help others to do the same. Meg certainly a very full life and her life has indeed greatly influenced the lives of many others. Human life is built on caring and not only was Meg a very caring person, but she was fortunate in having close family and friends who cared deeply for her - this is the heart of Humanism. Although Meg was not religious, she was by nature inclusive and respected those with faith. For those of you who are religious, there will be an opportunity for silent prayer, later on while we sit quietly and reflect on Meg's life.

### **Meg's Life by Simon Nightingale**

When someone dies in later life, we tend to think of them as they were when we last saw them, but let us now think back over Meg's long life, starting on 31<sup>st</sup> August 1914, the second of four children. Her father, Leslie Taylor, was a mining engineer and her mother, Lilian Noel Prior, was the daughter of a wealthy metal merchant. In Meg's early years, the family travelled a lot, at one point living in France for a year.

Young Meg was quite a tomboy, playing adventurous games with her two brothers. For some years the family lived near Branksome Chine in Poole, where Meg's little sister Pat was born. Then when Meg was 15 they settling in the Clifton area of Bristol. Meg went to Clifton High School for Girls, where she distinguished herself, becoming Head Girl and captain of the cricket team.

Meg took her studies seriously, often berating herself for not revising hard enough, in spite of achieving good marks. She also had a more spiritual side, planning at one time to be a missionary, but eventually she followed her eccentric Aunt Isa, one of the earliest female doctors, into the medical profession.

Social occasions were anathema to her – she hated going to dances or similar functions where she felt out of place. She was much more at home in the countryside, swimming in the sea or helping her cousin Noel, a budding farmer, with his chickens and pigs. Meg enjoyed long walking and cycling holidays, especially the family holidays in Paignton.

Meg left school with a scholarship and went to medical school in London. After qualifying she worked as a junior doctor in London during the worst of the Blitz. Several bombs damaged the hospital and injured staff, but Meg survived and went to work at a Children's Hospital in Carshalton. She loved working with children, but before long was called up to be a Captain in the Royal Army Medical Corps.

She was assigned to No. 6 British General Hospital, a mobile 1200-bed tented hospital. Twelve days after D-Day they crossed the Channel, landed in Normandy, and operated at various sites through France and Belgium and eventually in Germany. It was at Iserlohn, a former German Hospital, that she met a young Dental Officer, Major David Rugg-Easey.

Meg's diary suggests that she had dedicated her life to medicine and had never seriously considered being a wife. But, as she and Major Rugg-Easey (Dave) worked together and warmed to each other, she began to entertain the possibility of marriage and a family.

Not long after they were "de-mobbed" and returned to England, they married and purchased a small terraced house in Tooting. Dave decided to re-qualify as a doctor, so he went back to study at Guys Hospital while Meg did medicals at local schools. Imagine a young married couple setting up home together. Two years later Paul was born and Joan two years later and they bought their first car.

After Dave qualified as a doctor, they moved up to Tipton in the West Midlands, where Dave took his first job as a junior GP, and Meg worked in the practice part-time – and Sue was born. Then in 1957 they were able to build their own house with a GP surgery attached at number 1 Darby's Hill Road in Tividale near Dudley where Colin was born. Dave and Meg established a large and successful medical practice in partnership with a few other doctors.

You will have happy memories of family life at Tividale and holidays in the countryside or seaside, often camping or staying in caravans in Wales or later at the small house in Weston-Super-Mare.

Meg and Dave showed an unusual compassion outside their work often acting as confidants and even temporary foster parents for children of their patients or neighbours who needed help or support. They also looked after older relatives including Dave's mother and Meg's aged aunt and you will remember how at Christmas, they would invite one or two elderly friends or patients to join them for their family Christmas Dinner.

During the 70s as the children grew up, Meg had more time for herself and learned to play the clarinet. She also rediscovered her talent for writing poetry.

In 1976, everything changed when Dave was diagnosed with liver cancer and died soon afterwards at the age of 59. In her usual stoic fashion, Meg refused to give in to grief and began to develop a new phase in her life on her own.

Meg once said that her life was in three parts, each of roughly 30 years. The first being single life through to her wartime experiences; the second as a wife and mother bringing up a family; and the third her retirement. In her retirement, which lasted more than 30 years, she had the time to indulge her passions of reading, music and walking her dogs. She never complained of loneliness and seemed content with her own company, but was always happy to see her children, grandchildren and friends.

Before long, Meg sold the house in Weston and found a lovely cottage, a holiday retreat, on the rolling hills of mid-Wales, near Llanfyllin. Many of you will have happy memories walking there through fields and woodland or beside the river, usually with assorted children and dogs of family or friends; or on rainy days playing snooker, table tennis and darts in the games room. Some will recall Christmas there amid a magical scene of snow-covered fields and bright twinkling stars.

After Meg retired from medical practice, she worked as counsellor for The Samaritans and continued to support ex-patients and family with advice. She soon moved into a smaller house not far away in Wentworth Drive, but in time as driving became difficult, she sold the Welsh cottage, and later, moved into the flat in Oxford, just below Colin's.

Meg enjoyed both her independence and the companionship with Colin, sharing meals and visiting local parks, gardens and cultural events. Meg enjoyed discussions with Colin, who had a similar philosophy and literary tastes to her own. At one stage their relationship was suddenly reversed, when Colin was seriously injured in a terrible car accident. Meg, although over 90, helped look after Colin during his recovery in her usual calm and capable manner.

During the last few years, Meg became more frail and her memory and intellect faltered, so that she could no longer live independently. Meg came to live here with Sue, where she was lovingly cared for in the best possible environment, thanks to the courageous and selflessly compassionate hospitality of Sue, Pete and David. Loved and supported by her family, Meg died without pain or distress on the 8<sup>th</sup> July at the grand old age of 98.

I have given you a short chronological account of Meg's long life - a very full life - but what sort of person was she? Meg chose this passage from "The Island" by Aldous Huxley which reflects her practical and calm nature, her love for her family and her almost serene acceptance of death.

Lightly child, lightly. Learn to do everything lightly.  
Yes, feel lightly even though you're feeling deeply.  
Just lightly let things happen and lightly cope with them.

Lightly, lightly – it's the best advice ever given me.  
When it comes to dying even. Nothing ponderous or portentous, or emphatic.  
No rhetoric, no tremolos,  
And of course, no theology, no metaphysics.  
Just the fact of dying and the fact of the clear light.

So throw away your baggage and go forward.  
There are quick sands all about you, sucking at your feet,  
Trying to suck you down into fear and self-pity and despair.  
That's why you must walk so lightly.  
Lightly my darling, on tiptoes and no luggage,  
Not even a sponge bag, completely unencumbered.

Meg's family have had many letters and cards that talk of her great kindness. **June, Sarah, Charlie, young Meg and Jess** wrote:

Vic (Meg's late brother-in-law) was very fond of Meg, and I remember well our enjoyable stays with her and David when we were all a lot younger, and Paul, Joan, Sue and Colin were four boisterous youngsters who were part of a welcoming, loving

family. Meg was always the best of friends, tolerant, humorous, kind and, above all, understanding. She was a huge support to me during Vic's long illness and our frequent telephone conversations were such a help at that time. She was, of course, together with David, Sarah's guardian, and Sarah loved and appreciated being included in her family – it meant a great deal to her to spend happy times with Meg and her family. We shall miss her.

**Sylvia Rugg-Easey** wrote:

Meg was my mother-in-law and my friend. I loved and admired her. Even in her nineties, she was bold enough to move to the exotic Cowley Road in Oxford and play her music loud! I am privileged to have known such a wise and extraordinary woman. I know she is resting in peace because in the words of Leonardo Da Vinci: “a well-spent day brings happy sleep”.

**Jacque Mutter** wrote:

There are lots of lovely memories that I have of your mum even though I only knew her for these past 6 years. She shared my love of the natural world and this made it even more of a pleasure when we helped to turn her balcony into a place she could sit and enjoy plants and flowers that she had chosen for herself. She loved bizzie lizzies, she loved reds, oranges and yellows, and she loved watching the bulbs emerge into daffodils and tulips in spring.

One of my favourite memories is of her sitting on the Oxford flat's balcony in her chair wrapped up in her coat on a cold autumn day telling me which bulbs she wanted planting where. She really enjoyed watching as I planted and we teased her about being “Lady of the Manor” with me as her gardener. If there is one aspect of your mum's character that will always stay with me, it is her sense of humour which frequently manifested itself in quick, sharp wit combined with a mischievous twinkle in her eyes. It never left her -  
remember how she exclaimed her rations had been cut when she couldn't have her sherry because of her medication and that was only last April!

My experience of your mum was of a gentle, kind and dignified woman with great intelligence and great humility. I admired her for her independence, for her achievements and most of all for the way she loved you. She was a lovely woman and I am so glad I had the chance to know her. The Oxford Botanical Gardens will never be the same place again without her to share it with.

I will miss her.

Jacque

## Paul's tribute to Mum.

Mum once declared that she hated funerals. She didn't explain exactly why, but I suspect it was because she hated fuss, insincerity, or formality, and did not enjoy any public display of emotion.

This time, she has no choice but to be here! Sorry Mum! I really hope she approves of this one, and I think she would, because Humanism seems to echo her life philosophy, and I would like to thank Simon for helping us put together a meaningful tribute in tune with her life. I will try to be sincere, and keep my emotions under control.

\*\*\*\*

I was lucky to be the first born, so had Mum all to myself for two years. My first memories are of a woman who, I felt, treasured me, listened to me and respected me as a person, even as a very young child, and patiently tried to teach me about the world.

There is no doubt that she loved us children, indeed she had a soft spot for all children. She didn't speak of love, as far as I remember. That wasn't her style. She acted it – the way she greeted us – the way she played with us as children. We were always addressed as “darling”, but she was never one for lots of hugs and kisses. Her love was demonstrated by the way she tucked us in and read us stories at night, sitting at the end of our beds. I particularly remember her characterisations when reading from “Winnie the Pooh” which brought it to life and ensured that we always loved that book.

\*\*\*\*

Mum was never one to speak much about herself, but in recent years we started to piece together some of her early life history. Then recently, we found her diary which had been kept very private, and obtained her permission to start reading it. It proved to be a treasure trove of her private thoughts, beautifully and honestly expressed, from her teenage years up to her nineties. We are still reading it and discovering remarkable new perspectives on the woman we thought we knew so well, and if any of you are interested in transcripts of the diary, please let me know.

I'd like to refer to a couple of entries from her diary, both from 80 years ago in 1933 when she was aged 19.

The first illustrates how she abhorred any suffering being inflicted on living things. She relates unusual friction with her father over a recent episode which upset her.. Her father and younger sister Pat had been trying to tame a robin, and had put out some live worms for it. Meg was so upset at the thought of the worms being eaten alive, that she made a sarcastic remark, provoking an angry response from her father. She writes..

*He exploded a bit, saying I was making a fuss about nothing, and hinting I did not really mind a bit. I flared up, and, as everyone seemed against me, and I was really in earnest, I dissolved into tears. I have never cried like that before. It really hurt me. I thought I had grown out of crying, but I don't think I ever will.*

In almost 65 years, I never recall actually seeing Mum cry, although she did go a bit quiet and misty-eyed once or twice!

\*\*\*\*

The second diary entry relates her first visit to a dentist for an injection and filling. She had been sitting in the dentist's chair waiting for the injection, but when he put the needle into her mouth, she started to feel unwell and thought she might faint. It was a tendency she had noticed before, and was worried about this sign of weakness. She writes...

*I am going to ask him to talk to me while he is doing the injection, because that might stop me working my silly self up into a panic. It is so idiotic to nearly faint when it didn't hurt at all; I didn't even feel the needle! He must think I'm a little fool. I must ask him not to say anything about it to Dad when he goes next time, because it would only worry Dad and Mum to know about it, and Mr . Brooks might mention it, not knowing that I had kept the matter quiet.*

*I rather worries me to think I am going to faint so easily when I am a doctor. I do hope I will get over it. It is the third time it has happened. I must really try to stop it happening again on Thursday, I ought to be able to.*

To me this illustrates Mum's strong will developing, to conquer her weaknesses and be strong for others. She obviously achieved this because it was a quality we often saw in her. Another surprise on reading the wartime diary entries (because she never spoke much of the war, and we assumed that was because it had been a hellish experience) was that most of her complaints were about the dancing and drinking which went on in the mess, or the boredom when there was nothing to do, and she described Iserlohn, Germany (just before she met my father) as idyllic. As usual, her account says little about the work she did in the hospital, which must have been tiring and emotionally draining, but on the beautiful scenery around the Iserlohn area, the joy of taking long walks in the countryside, and swimming in the open air pool before breakfast. Perhaps that is an example of her lifelong talent for finding the positive, enjoyable side of everything and coping with the unpleasantness and difficulties of life without ever burdening others with them.

And that is an overriding impression I have of our Mum – always capable, always ready to do what was required in a calm and sensible way. And always concentrating on the positive side, not dwelling on her own doubts or fears, very often using humour to lift everyone's spirits.

This positive attitude never deserted her, even in the last year when, due to dementia, she was no longer the capable, independent woman we knew. She still greeted me with a smile when answering a video call on Skype, still answered when asked how she was “Oh, I'm fine!”. Usually there was a wicked twinkle in her eye too, and she could still pick up on little jokes with a smile or a chuckle.

She had a very strong sense of ethics and morality based on human values; she always seemed to know the right thing to do, and she did it. Her advice was always valued. Mercifully, she did not demand such high standards from others as she did from herself, although she was a very astute judge of character, and her judgements usually turned out to be right.

Not many of us can hope to live such a full life as Mum did, but I really feel that we can all learn from her the important lessons of her life – to enjoy everything that comes our way, value each person we meet and value each second we are alive. I am so grateful to have been her son!

**David** has asked me to read these memories of his Nan

Although I would never have wished dementia on my Nan, I was grateful that it meant that she came to live with us. In the last year of her life, while I helped to look after her, we became closer than we had been for most of my adult life.

The dementia robbed her of many of her memories but her warmth, wit and playful sense of humour were not dampened at all. When she couldn't remember my name, she would look at me with a playful smile and a glint in her eye and choose the most

unlikely name she could think of: Jehoshaphat or Beelzebub. When I explained I was happy for her to call me Beelzebub, but that it would make her the devil's grandmother, the smile broadened to a grin.

She lost a lot, but she certainly wasn't stupid. We used to have wonderful, interesting conversations about all the big, juicy issues; love, politics, religion, the monarchy... I was always struck by how similar our views were, despite the huge age gap between us, and how, even in cases where we might not completely agree, she was open minded and accepted my viewpoint as a valid alternative to her own.

Helping her through the final stages of her life felt like a huge privilege. She was an amazing woman and a joy to be with until the end.

As we sit quietly and listen to music, you may be thinking of a loving and much loved, mother and grandmother; someone who lived for her family and gave an unconditional love that will be greatly missed. Many of you may be thinking of a great friend who was fun and bright, kind, generous and loyal.

While we listen to a beautiful Chopin Nocturne that Meg loved, remember the times you have spent with her, and reflect on the person you knew, for it is in your hearts, your thoughts and your memories that Meg lives on. Those of you with religious faith may wish to use these few minutes of quiet reflection for your silent prayers.

**Music for quiet reflection:** *Chopin Nocturnes, Op. 9:No. 1 in B-Flat Minor*

### Committal

The time has come for us to take our final farewell of Meg. In sadness for her death, but with loving appreciation for a life well lived, we commit the body of Meg Rugg-Easey to its natural end, beyond harm or fear or pain.

When I lie where shades of darkness  
Shall no more assail mine eyes,  
Nor the rain make lamentation  
    When the wind sighs;  
How will fare the world whose wonder  
Was the very proof of me?  
Memory fades, must the remembered  
    Perishing be?

Oh, when this my dust surrenders  
Hand, foot, lip, to dust again,  
May these loved and loving faces  
    Please other men!  
May the rusting harvest hedgerow  
Still the Traveller's Joy entwine,  
And as happy children gather  
    Posies once mine.

Look thy last on all things lovely,  
Every hour. Let no night



Seal thy sense in deathly slumber  
Till to delight  
Thou have paid thy utmost blessing;  
Since that all things thou wouldst praise  
Beauty took from those who loved them  
In other days.

*"Fare Well" by Walter de la Mare*

### **Closing words**

We have been remembering a life that has ended, but Meg will continue to live on in her children, her grandchildren and their children and in the hearts and minds of all those who have shared her life. You have experienced a great loss, but you have each other. By sharing your thoughts and your feelings, you support each other. By your living and your loving, you create value and meaning in the world. We know that the value and meaning of life consists in living it – and living it well. People who have been a strength and a comfort to others and have worked for future generations – these are the people who create value and meaning in life. Meg was such a person.

Meg's family would be pleased if you can join them after the service at the Lord Hill Hotel a short drive from here. Although this is a very sad time, remember with thanks and love the Meg you were fortunate to have known. So, talk about her, repeat the words and sayings she used and enjoy your memories of her.

Soon we will be leaving and as we do we shall listen to another Chopin Nocturne that Meg loved. Before that Paul will read a poem.

### **Paul Rugg-Easey**

I mentioned before the irrepressible sense of humour which Mum always had, and the twinkle in her eye, ready to respond to any little joke or droll situation. The sense of humour was always there, right up to the end, and nothing illustrates that slightly wicked side of her better, I feel, than the short poem she apparently wrote herself in 1972 called "A Secret". So let's leave remembering, not her death, but her life, and the way she lived it, with more smiles than frowns.

It really is a blessing -  
Though of course it is a sin -  
To be able to say one thing  
But to think a different thing.

To say "I'm pleased to meet you"  
(I dislike you all the same,)  
Or "Must you really leave so soon?"  
(And please don't come again.)

When bored at social functions  
It's most comforting I find

Whilst being outwardly polite  
To be rude in my mind.

So everyone, thank goodness, can  
If they don't let it show -  
Think all the horrid thoughts they want  
And no one else will know.

*“A Secret” by Meg Rugg-Easey*

**Music for leaving:** *Chopin Nocturnes, Op. 9:No. 2 in E-Flat*

Meg's family would like you to join them at the Lord Hill Hotel after the service.

Donations to the Alzheimer's Society.  
Devon House  
58 St Katherine's Way  
London E1W 1LB  
<http://www.alzheimers.org.uk/>

**Funeral Celebrant**

Simon Nightingale  
58 New Street  
Shrewsbury  
SY3 8JQ  
01743 362 302  
[simon@nightingale58.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:simon@nightingale58.fsnet.co.uk)

British Humanist Association  
1 Gower Street  
London  
WC1E 6HD