

**Elizabeth Fearnley (1936 - 2019)**

*Bill Fearnley and Robert Fearnley*



St James the Less Penicuik

A Scottish Episcopal Church

<http://stjamesthelesspenicuik.org/>

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OUTREACH

# Elizabeth (Bet) Fearnley

## 1st December 1936 - 13th January 2019

*On Monday 28th January, a remarkable funeral and celebration of the life of Elizabeth Fearnley took place at St James the Less church, Penicuik. Family, friends, colleagues, neighbours and fellow Penicuik residents filled the church for the beautiful and poignant service which the Fearnley family had organised with the help of Rev Neville. The eulogy was delivered by Bill (Bet's husband) and Stephen (one of their sons). It was uplifting and inspiring to hear these memories of Bet's life. I wished I had been among the many people who had known her well. Realising that Bet had been very active in the Penicuik Community, I was touched and very glad that Bill was happy for Bet's eulogy to appear in "Outreach". Bill also kindly met with me to give me the background of Bet's life to provide this introduction. In that conversation, what resonated with me was the joy with which Bill articulated the spiritual connection which developed between them from the day Bet and he first saw each other. As he later expressed it, theirs was a union made in heaven.*

*I hope that her family and friends - those at her funeral and those who couldn't attend - might find that the words from her beloved husband and son bring back many happy memories.*

*Sue Owen*



*Bet's special 80th birthday celebration, 2017*

### ***Introduction and some highlights of Bet's life***

Elizabeth Fearnley (Bet) was born in India on 1st December 1936, the second of four children. Her parents were Major (on retirement) Edward Lloyd and Mrs Elizabeth Lloyd (nee Colvin). Her eldest brother Ted, was also born in India. Bet's younger brothers, Will and Steve were both born in England. Bet's primary education took place in India at several schools depending on where her father was stationed at the time. Some details of her early life are described in her son's eulogy.

Bill and Bet met in 1955 when Bet first went to University. Bill describes their meeting, early relationship and life at university very

poignantly in his eulogy. At university, Bet was an active sportswoman and a highly regarded debater and an active member of the Students' Union executive committee. She helped to organise a number of major social events, which included writing and compering the accompanying entertainment. After her marriage to Bill, Bet taught maths very briefly at Abergavenny High School for Girls. That was curtailed after 3 months - Bet was in the early stages of the pregnancy of their honeymoon baby, Stephen, and a Monmouthshire Education policy placed that limitation on pregnant teachers.

They moved to Linlithgow, Scotland in April 1965. By that time, they were a family with four children: Stephen, Belinda, Robert and Samantha, who was only 2 months old. Their youngest son Joe was born in Linlithgow in 1966.

In 1970 the family, now 7 in number, moved from their cramped bungalow in Linlithgow to the larger Eskmill House in Penicuik – Bill remembers the rain pouring down that day, but also the joy with which the children chose their very own bedrooms. In 1977, when Joe was aged 11, Bet undertook the obligatory year's secondary school teacher training course at Moray House. Subsequently she taught at Newbattle Comprehensive School until she retired in 1996.

In addition to mothering her large family, and working, Bet found time to volunteer for community initiatives in Penicuik. She very soon became treasurer of the YMCA/YWCA, and was heavily involved with setting up the Penicuik Community Council, believing that this was a good way of involving Penicuik's residents in decisions that affected them. Bet established its unusual management structure of elected members and representatives of local organisations. Bet and Bill were both keen on sport and set up the Penicuik Tennis Club but the use limitations and poor facilities persuaded them to reinvigorate the moribund but now very successful Dalkeith Tennis Club. Then, acting on the wishes of some ladies from Ladywood and Kirkhill, Bet became chairwoman of the Kirkhill Community Association, which, after much negotiation, and with Bill's help and support, eventually resulted in the realisation of Ladywood Leisure Centre as we know it today. Bill took major roles on the centre's Management Team for

many years. Subsequently he became Community Council chairman, not an easy task but one which, together with other civic activities he regarded as an important partnership with the Penicuik community.

Speaking of her teaching post at Newbattle, Ann Snodgrass (a friend of Bill and Bet) wrote "I recognised her (Bet) as an exceptional individual both in her private life and in her career. Newbattle was the most challenging secondary school in Midlothian and Maths was not, on the surface, the most exciting of subjects and yet Bet was an outstanding teacher. From staff, parents and pupils word leaked out of her ability to bring her subject alive, cope apparently effortlessly with potential discipline mayhem and care for each and every pupil however challenging. She always remained positive, openly admitting to loving her job, whatever the lack of resources, and must have been an inspiration to pupils and colleagues".

Eventually, Alzheimers disease made it impossible for Bet to continue her active life. She moved into Aaron House, and Bill moved in with her to support and comfort her. Bet died there, having lived an extremely fulfilling life, and knowing that she was very much loved by her devoted husband Bill, her five children and her fourteen grandchildren.

Bill's and Robert's eulogies (read by Bill and Stephen at Bet's funeral) now follow, with the family's permission. Thank you Bill, Stephen, Robert, Belinda, Samantha and Joe for sharing your precious memories of your wife and mum. It's an inspiring story.

*Sue Owen*

## Eulogy for Bet Fearnley delivered on 28th January 2019

### *Part 1, by Bill Fearnley*

May I thank you all from the bottom of my heart for joining me and my family in saying farewell to a wonderful wife, mother and grandmother. I have received many messages of goodwill; all of them highlight, in one way or another, the attributes which made me love Bet so much - her kindness, her helpfulness, her generosity, her conviviality (she lit up any room with her wit, her smile and her laughter), her resourcefulness, her fortitude. There were other aspects too, such as her formidable debating ability, of which I felt envious – but happily so because they painted my Bet as I knew her.

I'd like to say a few words about what many of you will know little – how and when I first met my beloved wife and how, almost immediately, we each realised that the other was going to become someone very special.

In Autumn 1955 I was just about to enter my final year studying Mathematics at Nottingham University. All universities have a so-called “Freshers week” in which the new students can get to know about university life and can join the numerous non-academic activities which are on offer.

I was one of three senior members of the mathematical society (MathSoc) waiting in the allocated room to welcome prospective members. In walked this girl - Bet was 18 at the time. She had a beautiful face set in a halo of golden hair and carried herself with a beguiling modesty. I lost my heart to her there and then. To get it back firstly I had to get to know her and then to persuade her that my heart was hers if she wanted it. All this proved difficult because, try as I might, I could not get near Bet for the throng of male admirers constantly surrounding her. I imagine the attraction for them was not only her beauty



*Bill's first sight of Bet, aged 18, October 1955*

but, as I later found for myself, her ready wit and an enviable ability for repartee and for giving as good as she got in any conversation. My intention, once I had gained her interest, was to ask Bet if she would like to go with me to Engineers' Ball, the main social event of the Autumn term. Good fortune came into play in the next few weeks when I was able to be alone with Bet in the Students refectory at Birmingham University where Nottingham University's Hockey 1<sup>st</sup> XI and the Rugby 1<sup>st</sup> XV had been playing on the same day.

The empathy between us was immediate. We had several other dates before the end of that term, including Engineers' Ball, by which time we had become soul-mates. Although we had yet to declare our love for each other ( that took place in our first ever holiday in Cornwall in July 1956) we had already begun to talk about a more permanent future together.

Around that time we discovered a lovely quotation which embraced the warmth for each other which later came to permeate our marriage. It is by George Eliot on “The Essence of Friendship”

*"Oh, the comfort, the inexpressible comfort of feeling safe with a person: having neither to weigh thoughts nor measure words, but to pour them all out, just as they are, chaff and grain together, knowing that a faithful hand will take and sift them, keep what is worth keeping, and then, with the breath of kindness, blow the rest away."*



*Bet aged 19, 1956 in a portrait photo for Bill on his 21st birthday*

In fact marriage was not possible until Bet had obtained her degree in mid-1958 and we had to endure being apart until then while I was working some distance from Nottingham to earn us some financial security. That separation was very hard for both of us but it did make our love so strong and immutable that we knew, when we married on August 9<sup>th</sup> 1958, that it would continue for our lifetimes.

When Bet and I declared our love for each other, it was with a sense of awe and wonder that we tried to comprehend the meaning of the profound commitment to each other which had just taken place. Bet's words to me were "I know I'm in love with you because I want to spend the rest of my life with you." My response echoed those beautiful words.

## *Part 2, by Robert Fearnley*

What lucky, lucky children we are to have had such a wonderful Mum. Not that we really knew that when we were growing up. She was just our Mum, so we took it for granted that she was always there for us. We thought every mother must be a talented artist with a maths degree, who was also a community activist and a fine tennis player and an incredibly hard-working teacher and a talented gardener, who could do all this yet still put her children first, at all times, and in all things. It was only when we became parents ourselves that we really understood just what skill and patience and love it takes to raise five children all born within seven years of each other, while leading such an active life that would exhaust even non-parents. But that was Mum. Yes - all Mums are special. But we of course know that our Mum was extra special.

We remember Mum ferrying us here, there and everywhere. We remember her driving the massive Ford Consul estate, where she needed a home-made booster cushion to see over the steering wheel. We used to go on holiday in that car with Mum in the passenger seat, Dad driving, four children on the back seat, and one in the boot. Moff the dog would be curled up under Mum's feet, sharing the footwell with bags containing vast supplies of Mum's cheese and tomato sandwiches, so that Mum could keep us fed as we sang and snoozed and sang again, all the way to Cornwall.

Mum loved gardening, and during weekends and summer holidays she would often be found in the front garden, keeping it looking beautiful. She would be followed around by the big, friendly cat who adopted us at Eskmill House. We would find Mum's half-drunk mugs of tea scattered around the garden, weeks after they were brewed. They were such a feature of the garden that they almost became part of it, mugs in harmony with marigolds.

When we first moved to Eskmill House in 1970, and for years afterwards, Mum was painter-in-chief as she and Dad re-decorated the entire house. It seemed that every time we came home from school Mum was up a ladder, and we felt that she must have painted every square centimetre of every wall and ceiling. In the front room, Mum and Dad stripped the old paint back to the natural wood to reveal the beautiful wooden shutters, a job that took nearly a year to complete between all the other commitments. It remains a beautiful room. But somehow Mum also found the time to paint oil-paintings. She was remarkable. Mum would help us wrap up in layers of old coats until we looked like mini-Michelin-men, and we would then waddle into the garden protected against the vicious thorns of the gooseberry patch. We picked gooseberries and raspberries and strawberries and blackcurrants that Mum would turn into delicious jam. And Eskmill House had industrial quantities of apples that Mum would turn into even more delicious apple pies for Sunday lunch. And on Sunday evenings, Mum would bake sausage rolls and jam puffs. She would always warn that if we ate them too soon, we'd burn our mouths, and in our young impatience we would too often prove her right!

Mum enjoyed costume dramas, and we remember watching the Nineteen-Seventies Poldark or Pride and Prejudice with her as we all sat glued to the television. And there were those lovely Christmases, with the coal fire lit and the living room beautifully warm and toasty, where we're all happily gazing at the telly, and Mum is sitting at the centre of things where she belongs, smiling contentedly with the family for which she is the rock. Mum was kindness and caring rather than laughter and jollity, but every now and then she would get a fit of the giggles and then there was no stopping her. We loved seeing her like that.

Mum was a dedicated teacher, and we remember her working past midnight to prepare lessons for the next day. Those would be long hours even by the standards of today's teachers, but Mum had the particular challenge that, when she was teaching final year maths, she was only learning the maths lesson the day before teaching it to students! She also drove a bright red, and very fast, Honda Civic coupe, which she told us drew admiring looks and offers to buy from the school's envious boy-racers.

As we grew older, Mum could spend more and more time playing tennis, which she loved. She had an amazing, heavy slice on backhand and forehand which was tricky to return because it would only bounce about two inches off the ground. She joined Dalkeith Tennis club and spent many happy times there. She became a ladies' champion in her fifties, which back then her children thought was quite old but we now realise isn't old at all!

And it was only as we grew older that we appreciated the remarkable story of Mum's own childhood. She was born in a British military hospital in India to an army officer and his remarkable wife, and Mum's family was in Singapore when the Japanese invaded in 1942. Mum's father commandeered an army car to rush his family to the docks, and put Mum, her brother Ted and her mother on an evacuation ship. Mum told us that from the quayside, her father threw a case up to her mother on the ship. It contained the family christening gown that we treasure still. Mum remembered seeing bombs exploding around the docks, but she thought they were just fireworks, because her brave parents stayed so calm throughout. Fortunately, Mum's father was one of the few soldiers to escape from Singapore before it surrendered, and the family was eventually reunited in India.

Then after the partition of India, the family returned to the UK and Mum first saw England. The family set up home on a smallholding in Herefordshire, with no electricity and no running water. Hard to imagine now how tough such a life must have been. Maybe that was the clue to Mum's strength of character – it was in her genes, and in her experiences.

The family grew as Mum's brothers Steve and Will arrived. Then Mum went to University, met our father, and the rest is history – or it will be when Mum's story ends. But of course, her story isn't over, because she lives on in the genes of her wonderful grandchildren. And what lucky grandchildren to have had such a wonderful gran!

She was a constant source of fruit pastilles or Werther's Originals for hungry grand-kids. She was your arts and crafts teacher, getting out the box of pens and paper and glue and scissors, and helping you create works of art to proudly show your parents. She was your patient patient when you jumped on your grandparent's bed in the early morning to play doctors and nurses. She was your much loved Ya-Ya.

Gran would play board games with you again and again, long after your weary parents had made excuses to go and put the kettle on. She would tutor you in maths and calm you before your exam. She would teach you badminton. She would play tennis in the garden, and football too, when gardening gloves became goalie gloves. She would advise you on relationship issues, while showing you how to make strawberry flan. She would happily watch your fashion shows as you modelled all the styles from her dressing-up box. She would listen to your piano practice and keep assuring you that she was enjoying it.

She would support you at gymnastics competitions; watch you play football; cheer

you by the tennis court. She would babysit you at Eskmill House or in your own home, and your parents knew that with Gran you were always in the very safest of hands.

Gran was loving, caring, kind, patient and wise. And you are lucky to have had such a wonderful gran. But of course, Gran always believed *she* was the lucky one, to have fourteen such wonderful grandchildren. She loved you all immensely. You are her greatest, proudest legacy.

### *Part 3, by Rev'd Neville*

It was my privilege to welcome the Fearnley family and their friends to St James to ease their sorrow at the passing of their beloved Bet, and help them celebrate and give thanks for her many, many achievements. In the preceding ten days, I had got to know the family better than any other in Penicuik. It was now the turn of the congregation to be blessed as the family related a remarkable story of love and devotion.

Regular worshippers might have noticed something unusual because we were well into the service and had reached my reflection, yet we had barely mentioned the G-word. This was carefully planned with the family and reflects the fact that Bet Fearnley had remained staunchly 'Agnostic' throughout her adult life. In her early 'teens she was taken to the local West Country church by her mother, Elizabeth Lloyd. After Bet's father died, her Mum moved here in 1975, lived close by for 23 yrs and joined our congregation. Her funeral took place here in 1998. It felt so right that Bet should be following in her mother's footsteps, having maintained her agnostic view in the face of husband Bill's staunch atheism for over 60 years!

The congregation would have noticed lots of use of the L-word in the family tributes and there were more to come.

*Anyone who does not Love does not know God, because God is Love.*

*God is Love. Whoever lives in Love lives in God, and God in him.*

*(1 John 4:8 and 4:16b)*

If John is right, the life-story we have heard suggested that Bet and Bill had known God every bit as well as the rest of us who regularly use the G word during worship here at St James the Less church.

Mathematicians like Bet and Bill thrive on proof:

If  $x = 3y^2$  and  $y = 10$ ,  $x$  must equal 300: period.

Bet's mother may have considered the family's deliverance from Singapore as proof of God's existence and intervention, but debater and logical thinker Bet would be unconvinced by such evidence. What did God have against the equally good people who sailed in the opposite direction, East not West to the UK, and tried to make it to Australia?

I suggested another equation that united believer, agnostic and atheist, and not just on that special day.

If "G" = "L", we were One! Love changes our perspectives, and should change those of the church.

Bet and Bill found love through the Maths Soc: if the church were branded as a LOVE SOC, how its fortunes might change!

When we love, we become part of the one we love as we give ourselves utterly selflessly to

the other. When we are loved, our lover becomes part of us. The two become one flesh. Bill & Bet became one when they fell in love and remained united all Bet's life.

To paraphrase Alfred Lord Tennyson 'We are part of all whom we have loved'.

This is a 'life equation' that can sooth our pain today. For love is stronger than death, dispersed and not ended by it. Partial proof is our presence here today, atheist, agnostic and believer, all united as beneficiaries of the love dispensed by Bet in diverse ways. Further proof will come in the weeks, months and years to come as Bet's love continues to bear fruit in us.

So let us give thanks to the ground of our being and our loving (that some call 'God'), for all the riches that Bet dispersed amongst us, as wife, mother, grandmother, teacher, community activist and friend: for her gifts as artist, cook, sportswoman, gardener and lover of nature.

Our desire is that the resilience instilled and learnt from the toughest of childhoods may continue to be expressed in our lives;

that her loving devotion to husband and family may mark our family relationships;

that her concern for community and environment may be multiplied in us;

that our compassion for those that grieve may be a source of healing;

that together we may prove that love is stronger than death, as Jesus proved by the manner of his living and dying.

# Elizabeth Ann

A refugee from brutal war  
You're forced to flee from Singapore  
Your parents calm as bombs rain down  
Their courage imbues the christening gown

You sail home to a foreign land  
And not the rural idyll planned  
Hand pump water, boil out blight  
Homework under paraffin light

To Nottingham – you catch the eye  
Of classic mathematics guy  
You meet, you talk, you laugh above  
Equations, showing proof of love

Then motherhood: career must pause  
A Fifties female teacher's clause?  
Attend to all your babies' needs  
While snatching sleep between the feeds

Your flowers bloom 'neath Scottish sun  
Your infants walk; your youngsters run  
You garden while they laugh around  
With feline friend - with hapless hound!

Return to teach from years away  
Inspiring students through the day  
Who stay oblivious of the times  
You work beyond the midnight chimes

Your children grow, have children too  
Who love you as a Gran is due  
And know in turn they can rely  
On your love 'til the seas gang dry

That younger generation rises  
Filled with skills, achievements, prizes  
Fourteen stars you know will be  
Your greatest, proudest legacy

Then illness comes, and so unkind  
It tries to steal your very mind  
Yet you are guarding all the while  
Your ready wit, your beaming smile

And as your soul this world departs  
We mend the breaking of our hearts  
With loving memories of your life  
Adored as Gran, as Mum, as Wife

*Robert Fearnley*