

Anne and Bill Barbour
Thanks and a Tribute from
James Barbour

Friends of my parents, ladies and gentlemen

It is very pleasant to be here with you to remember my late parents. The shock and the suddenness of their passing was at first overwhelming, so Charlotte and Pauline and Tom and I opted for their joint funeral being family-only, and because of having chosen cremation, it made sense to hold it at the Crematorium in Belfast. And yet, for 58 years our parents made their lives in Fermanagh, and so many of their friends are here. So even before the funeral, we were beginning to think of how we might arrange for friends here to have a sort of leave-taking. And Tom Noble very kindly took charge, and arranged for exactly this, in this excellent setting.

When my parents arrived in Enniskillen in 1951, for my father to take up the teaching of Latin, Greek, and Ancient History at Portora Royal School, the only prior connection they had with the town was his service in the Inniskilling Fusiliers, which had come to an end four years previously. But over the next 32 years, his teaching, pastoral care and sports coaching forged strong bonds with hundreds of Portora's pupils and their families.; in the later years of his career this was shared with Mother when they were jointly appointed as houseparents for the girls' house at the School

And for about 22 of those years, he and Mother were rearing us- myself and my siblings- Tom, the last of us, left home around 1973. Half a century ago, child-rearing was even less of a picnic than it is now, as there were few labour-saving devices, and mothers were still expected to make most of the clothing of young children, at the sewing machine and on knitting needles, as well as masterminding the running of the home and making the money last to the end of the month! As well as doing all that for 4 children Mother did secretarial work part-time for the first few years in Enniskillen, for Colonel Grosvenor, then Westminster MP for Fermanagh and South Tyrone, and then, after a break of several years, as headmaster's secretary at Gloucester House. She took the four-year part-time training to be a Marriage Guidance counsellor, and counselled in this role for many years.. For a while she also visited women prisoners, I think in Armagh Gaol, but as polarisation worsened in the early years of the Troubles terrorist organisations ordered those in their control not to see Prison Visitors, so that came to an end.. And, on the lighter side, as their oldest child I well remember their discovery of the card game bridge, which swept Ireland in the late 1950s, and they got very good at this! And mother took part in quite a few choral and dramatic productions in Enniskillen

Robert Northridge from the school my father loved has sketched out their work for Portora, and Eric Bullick and Tom Noble and John Maxwell from the Integrated School movement have described his two and a half decades of achievement for that, after his retirement from teaching. And Billy Dixon has recounted the British Legion sheltered housing project in Enniskillen to which he contributed. This last had the added pleasure for him of increasing the population of the island centre of Enniskillen, which he was always very keen should not dwindle just to businesses and offices and car parking!

I think the parents were immensely fortunate. Their views on several matters were not widely shared in Enniskillen, but people made space for them, and respected their hard work and good intentions, and agreed to differ. They had many friends, and did not seem to make enemies.. And they loved the setting in which they found themselves, the countryside of Fermanagh. On foot, on bicycles, by car and by rowing boat, their delight was exploring Fermanagh's wild places, and they passed that delight on to us, their children. Forty-seven years ago Father bought the old National School at Topped Mountain Lough, and as he became more prosperous he gradually rehabilitated it as a dwelling. He and mother dreamed of moving to live there year round, but in the end did not do so-possibly there was some early intimation of Mother's Alzheimer's disease - and many years into retirement, they eventually sold the property.

Mother's Alzheimer's disease progressed slowly but relentlessly, and as the years went by, she lost the ability to converse sensibly. But they continued in great companionship because of their love of the open air, and they worked away steadily at their garden, and walked daily, except in the worst weather. Latterly, the grounds of FlorenceCourt House were their favourite choice. And, even on the morning of the 23 November, (which we now believe Father had known for some time would be their last day) when my sister Pauline called with them unexpectedly, it was natural for them to take her to walk with them on the wooded shore near Ely Lodge.

Father was a man whose beliefs could be very strong; he was ready to put his life at risk if he regarded the cause as important enough; as is shown by his three periods of volunteer military service, the last of which was when he talked his way into the newly-formed Ulster Defence Regiment to serve part-time for two years as a private despite then being past 50y old. Before her own illness, and in the early stages of it, Mother had been terrified of the loss of privacy and autonomy involved in the seemingly inevitable eventual permanent nursing care needed for advanced dementia, and had repeatedly said that she rejected this. In my ignorance I had thought that this was no more than wishful thinking, and I had just assumed that my father thought the same as I. Little did I know!

The warm-heartedness of people's response to their deaths has been a revelation. So many people have written to us, quite a few with accounts of being helped by one or other of them, sadly also very many with parents battling with Alzheimer's disease. And so many people have tried to comfort us and help us to heal, and it is humbling to know that a great many people have been praying for us, and for our non-religious parents. Fermanagh's politicians, well represented here today, have said kind things, -people holding to ideologies at variance with my father's, as well as being more electorally successful than he was! At this time of increased fear of a return to violence in Northern Ireland it gives a bit of hope, to find this empathy and compassion right the way across the political spectrum here.

I say again, the parents were fortunate people. Mother's progressive loss of mental capacity was a heavy and increasing burden, but for a very long time they were able to adapt their lives so that they could still be happy. They lived longer than most people do, and did not know physical infirmity. They lived frugally, but in their 66y together they always had sufficient. Their love and guidance is treasured by four children and ten grandchildren. They had the privilege of rearing their family in what still seems to me close to the best possible setting for doing this. The community around them accepted them, and they in turn served that community, and things they did have helped to strengthen it and make it better able to face the future. **And they were able to live independently** and privately as a couple till their very last evening. They are much missed, but theirs were full lives, lives to be celebrated.

We, their children, are very grateful to our speakers for sharing their memories of our parents with us, And thank you all for being here with us today.