

## Jill Eulogy by Greg

*Greg asked me to speak in his place today because basically he said he would probably fall at the first fence and consume too many Kleenex...*

It is really humbling to see so many of Jill's friends and family here today. We are here to celebrate a wonderful wife, mum, and friend to us all.

Firstly I want to talk of her courage and fighting spirit.

In 1998 she bravely underwent surgery and then recovered from a life threatening bout of pneumonia. The following year she was forced to go through yet more surgery and chemotherapy on learning that she had Breast Cancer. She was then clear for 7 years before cruelly her cancer came back in 2006. During this time we got on with our lives – more or less. I say that because at each check up Jill would get anxious. Because I'm sometimes a bit dumb it took me sometime to realise what was going on. Imagine that every three months you go into a room, someone does a few checks, and then they tell you whether you are going to live. Then you get some idea of what it must have been like. Since 2006 she fought back gallantly and led as near normal life as possible. She never gave up and she never lost her sense of humour. From my biased perspective, she demonstrated the sort of courage, determination and zest for life to which we should all aspire but often fail to attain.

Moving now on to earlier and happier times I had better start at the beginning, or at least our beginning. I met Jill at Essex University in 1972. Our eyes first locked across the kitchen of my flat, where she was having coffee with some of my flatmates. At that point I noticed Jill and thought ..... Well, I won't tell you what I thought, but let's say that she made an impression. That evening she joined us for a drink. I talked to her at length and I vividly remember nervously grasping her hand walking back over Wivenhoe Park. Jill and I were talking about this only a few weeks ago and she gave me one of her grins, the sort that could light up a room, and said, "Of course, I noticed you weeks before, but you being a geek, always rushing about with arms full of computer print out, YOU never noticed ME"!

We felt right together from the start and ten weeks later I proposed and without any hesitation Jill said "yes of course"! Announcing our engagement to our parents over Christmas caused a certain degree of consternation but both parents handled it well. Perhaps they noticed that having made up our minds objection or the voice of caution would fall on deaf ears! Being *boringly* sensible we then didn't marry until a year after we graduated, on 5<sup>th</sup> July 1975.

Jill was very smart but always very modest. After each University exam Jill would return saying, "Oh! I've failed", or "That was really hard, I didn't finish the paper". Everyone would raise their eyebrows and then typically Jill would get A grades. After graduating top with her 1<sup>st</sup> Class Honours she joined Unilever as an Internal Auditor. She also decided to become an accountant and started an ACCA correspondence course. Jill liked badges and certificates. I have a safe full of them, including some very obscure ones.

She continued to notch up badges and diplomas throughout her life. Of particular note was her MBA. When we lived in America our visa wouldn't initially enable her to work. So she decided to enrol on an MBA in Finance course at the University of Chicago, which ranks up there with Harvard and MIT. She completed her 20 units in an amazing 15 months and graduated High Honours and Alpha Beta Gamma. Yet more certificates! In recognition I bought her a surprise diamond eternity ring. And like an idiot I said I'd seen another which had more 'carats' but wasn't sure which one she wanted. I took her to see it and she gave me one of her 'you silly boy' looks and the bank balance went down another few thousand bucks!!

Work wise she moved from Unilever to Shell, where we worked together. This was brilliant because we used to be able to leave work, catch the 5:08 and be home at our newly bought house in Sanderstead before six. We spent the evenings and weekends renovating the house. Within a year we had finished, including new windows,

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extension, kitchen and bathroom. At this point Jill didn't think she was getting anywhere at Shell, which was still something of a male dominated domain, so she took a management accountant role at Findus in Croydon. She enjoyed her time there before giving up work to look after Kiran and then James.

Eventually she decided it was time to get back to work and she joined John Lewis. However by 1989 she was thinking that perhaps running John Lewis Oxford Street wasn't what she wanted and I got a chance to work in Chicago for three years. So we jumped at it and off we all went. Her last job was with Ernst & Young. She joined them in Chicago and transferred to London on our return. She worked on the Canary Wharf restructure but then didn't really get the job satisfaction she wanted in subsequent projects. In 1999 I remember saying to her, "You don't have to work, why don't you retire and do some of the things you really want to"? She said, "Do you really mean that?" Of course I did, so in April she started a new life of leisure. Except in 2001 she was enticed to spend a year working within the Treasury on the 'Sandler Review' of UK pensions. This was her last regular job before voluntary work and leisure became her full time occupation.

Turning to voluntary work Jill has actively supported Breakthrough Breast Cancer since her retirement. She worked one morning a week in their lab in London and made many friends within Breakthrough as a result. Jeremy Hughes, their Chief Executive, will say a little more of this later.

She has also worked as a mentor volunteer for the Prince's Youth Business Trust.

Jill sat on the Woldingham Parish Council since its creation 8 years ago, and for the last 3 years she has been their Chairman. She and the other councillors work tirelessly to try and preserve the quality of life for residents in Woldingham.

Less well known to many of you, Jill also sat on the East Surrey Patient Forum, part of the 'new' NHS structure. Here, as I understand it, she was typically straight talking and very probably a breath of fresh air. One of her achievements, through doggedness and persistence, was to have changes made which brought down the waiting list for digital hearing aids from two years to a few weeks. I know making this sort of real difference gave her great satisfaction.

Holidays and travel were other passions of Jill's life – she just couldn't get enough of the world. We liked the outdoors and walking, and being mortgage strapped in our early years our travel started humbly and became more 'comfortable' as we got older; from a tent in the rain in Cornwall to sailing in the Caribbean. We did a lot of walking in the Lake District, Cornwall, Wales and Scotland. Jill really enjoyed the scenery, the solitude, and the feeling of accomplishment after a tough climb.

When Kiran and James were old enough they came with us. In 1990 James, aged 7, walked with me Jill and Kiran 15 miles and 5,000 ft into, and then back out of, the Grand Canyon! It was a fantastic experience. But I'm not sure if this has scared them off or imbued them with a similar love of wild places! One of Jill's habits on our walks was playing little mind games. For example towards the end of a walk she used to say, "I wonder if there will be a nice tea place round the corner with home made cakes and proper tea"? As you can imagine this generally was not true. But I was reminiscing about Jill with Kiran and James the other day and we all remembered how, at the end of a walk around Newland's Horseshoe she had no sooner wished for a tea shop than we walked into a farmyard where the farmers' wife had set up a tea shop complete with her very own home cooked cakes. Jill was absolutely ecstatic.

Sailing is one of my loves and whilst I don't think I converted Jill I did get her pretty keen on it. We have probably had a dozen or more yacht charters, and have sailed all over Europe and the Caribbean. I have sailed in the Solent but Jill's idea of sailing is bikini and iced martini on the deck - not usually desirable in the Solent. On our sailing holidays Kiran and James have been with us on most and we have had a number with friends and even one where we took my dad – to fulfil one of his dreams. I recall he ate nothing but Margherita Pizza for two weeks!

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Now I said that Jill liked to lie on deck in a bikini and by implication the actual sailing was of little interest. This is true, but it masks another side of Jill, her competitive streak, which as you probably know was significant. Flotillas always have a race and Jill was always **full on** for the race, as our friends that sailed with us will all know. She would change from this 'bronze bikini babe' into a veritable Ellen MacArther. Typically Jill would Helm and I would rush about pulling sheets and trimming sails. We were a very successful team, winning most of our races. However due to a gross navigational error, for which my crew never forgave me, we came 2<sup>nd</sup> in our last race in the Caribbean, beaten by a couple with young kids with whom we exchanged several buckets of water during the race!

We also travelled to many parts of the world. When we lived in Chicago we saw most of the US as well as visiting Bermuda, the Virgin Islands, and Canada. We have visited most of Western Europe, South Africa, and Asia. On getting Kiran's GCSE results Jill couldn't resist taking her shopping in New York! Meanwhile James and I went to a very wet Little Langdale!

Five years ago we bought our dream home in Spain and Jill saw to its decoration including her personally making of all the curtains – and there are a lot of them. We have spent many happy weeks there and watched many beautiful sunsets together.

You can gather from this that Jill led a very full life. But I think the most important thing in her life was me; well actually all her family and friends. I can remember many times where Jill and I have been talking about our family and friends and what they mean to us. We have gathered friends as we have wound our way through life; starting from school, through university, different jobs, and different houses in Sanderstead, Woldingham and our house in Spain.

Kiran was born in 1981 and James in 1983. I think it fair to say that Jill devoted herself to setting them off in the right direction. Whilst I was doing my corporate thing and making the money to keep Jill in the manner to which she **wanted** to be accustomed, Jill focussed on making a wonderful home for all of us. I recall arriving home late from some meeting or business trip to find Jill patiently helping them with their homework. Jill pretty much relearned Maths A level during this. Kiran and James are both very able but I think that their Mum had a large hand in their success.

They might want to put their hands over their ears at this point but I need to say just how proud their mum was when Kiran got into Cambridge and James got into Oxford. And only a week after Jill died Kiran had her PhD confirmed. I still remember going to the annual Oxford versus Cambridge varsity match at Twickenham. Jill and Kiran went to the light blue side and James and I went to the dark blue side and we made an awful lot of noise. After the match we joined Kiran and James and their friends in a pub for rather too many drinks. As a result I can't remember who won the match. This was a very precious time for us as a family. Jill and I both felt privileged to be able to socialise with them and their friends, many of whom we still see.

I think we have always been close as a family but never more so than in the last few months. In early December it became obvious that Jill was becoming weaker. Since then Kiran and James have been home every weekend and have been very supportive. For her last four weeks they have more or less lived at home. Jill had spent several weeks in hospital since December one of us was with her 24 hours a day. I want to thank them on mum's behalf for their support, because she probably didn't get a chance to thank them herself. I would also like to thank their partners, Mike and Amy for their part in supporting all of us.

I want to finish by mentioning some groups of friends who I know were really very important to Jill. These friendships were what helped sustain her over the last two years and kept her positive and resulted in her living her last two years rather than just giving up.

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Firstly there are her school friends with whom she reacquainted in the last few years. Then there is the 'curry club' four friends she met 28 years ago during anti-natal classes in Sanderstead and who have shared a curry together once a month ever since. That's a lot of curry. There are the Parish Councillors; and, Woldingham Wives who delivered fabulous dinners to our door in January and February. Thank you for this it made life so much easier. But we are sworn to secrecy regarding the best fish pie! There is the 'gym club' with whom Jill used to work out. There is the Bridge club that Jill initiated. There is the 'park view road' club, who know how to have fun together – remember the 3 location 18 hour millennium party?

Finally there are those personal friendships that Jill nurtured and valued, many of these friends visited her in her last few weeks, and most are here today. One of my last memories of Jill was on the day before she passed away. Shirley walked into her bedroom and Jill's face lit up into a massive grin. All her friends were very important to Jill and they are now very important to me. You are all very special and I thank you.

Jill and I were married for a truly wonderful 32 years, 8 months and 9 days. Like all couples we had our disagreements but we loved and understood each other at a very deep level and nothing could or did come between us – including her disease – which like everything else in our lives we faced together. I have always been very proud of Jill, as a person, and for what she has achieved. I remain so today. I have many happy memories of our life together which I will cherish for the rest of my life.

Some people only realise what they have when they have lost it. For me my greatest joy is that this isn't the case. I have known and never forgotten just what a special person Jill was from that moment that I grasped her hand in 1972 in Wivenhoe Park and on every day since then till now.