



Celebrating the Life of

Thelma Charlton

20th November 1930 – 1st March 2017

Harwood Park Crematorium

Tuesday, 28th March 2017 at 2.45 pm

Celebrating the Life of

Thelma

*Conducted by
Steve Stacey - Civil Celebrant*

Entrance Music
Stranger On The Shore – Acker Bilk

Welcome & Introduction

Welcome here today as we meet to celebrate the life of Thelma and to pay our respects to her. We share our memories of her, our stories about her, our love for her and our grief at losing her.

Thelma was unique - there's never been anyone like her before, there never will be again. She was a one off and had some wonderful qualities.

She was an optimistic lady with a positive outlook on life. Thelma had a bright and colourful character, smiley and warm hearted, she was outgoing and gregarious – she loved being with people.

She was a kind and caring person who was always there to help. She was selfless and always put the needs of everyone else before her own.

There were times when Thelma could be stubborn – once she'd made up her mind about something, there would be no changing it. She was determined and strong willed – but she would be flexible too – if there was a problem, there would be more than one way of solving it. In her eyes there would always be an answer, she was very much a facilitator who made things happen.

She had an air of quiet dignity about her – she was always appreciative of what others were doing and what they did for her.

Her family are her greatest achievement in life and she was so proud of them.

Our hearts reach out to John. The pair were best friends, soul mates, a team and each other's rock for so many years. Chris and Kevin and Julia have lost a cornerstone of their family. She was a doting grandmother to Katie, Sarah and Hannah.

Her family are the wonderful legacy that she leaves behind – a living and growing memorial to her and a testament to the love of John and Thelma.

There is never a good time to die or a good way to die. We want the people that we love to be with us always, happy and healthy.

Her passing is a reminder to us all that we're all mortal and like all living things, only here for a brief moment. That moment is never long enough for those who really love us.

Our service is a celebration for her life and everything that she leaves behind, rather than simply focusing on our loss. I hope that you feel that our service for her does reflect, respect and honour the Thelma that you knew and loved and that it gives you the opportunity to pay your respects to her in the way you would wish.

Thelma would be very proud that Katie has written some special words to share today.

Angel of the North by Katie Charlton

At the head of the table
A lady of quiet beauty sits
Face glowing in the afternoon sun

She is holding court
She's got everything in hand
She's woman that I will always admire

Her histories stay with me
From the kitchen counter and the saucepan
To the way I brush my hair

She taught me tolerance
She taught me to follow my dreams
She is the internal compass I navigate by

She said her throat was made of copper piping
The hot tea she drank at speed
In-between telephone connections

She cooks the best carrots I have ever eaten
She can see the finer details
And she gave her all to everything

The number of times I've heard her say
*'As long as you've got a roof over your head
And a little something in the back pocket
You're doing alright'*

When I close my eyes
I see her breezing past all the boys on her
bicycle
And I hear she could out-party them too

I will feel her in my life everyday
From the meals I take time to prepare
To my patient listening ear
When others aren't doing so great

Nana, you may not know this
But you help me grow everyday
Your strength, your resilience, your dignity
Weave through my life

And at the most unexpected moments
Give me a lesson or two in how to do things
right

To me, you are the epicentre
You are the hub
Of comfort and ambition.
And of strong women
Who know their own minds

You give me hope everyday
That if you just believe in yourself
You can get anything done

You leave a lasting legacy
Of beautiful people
Full of love

You send cells of humility,
Compassion and self-affirmation
Rushing around my system
You radiate

And you got on with it
Whatever it was
You always strived for better things

A figure on our horizon
You broaden out your wings
Standing up bold
Strong, sturdy, smooth and always there.

We can rely on you
With your grace
You roll over the hills of our lives

What fitting tribute could we ever pay to you?
No statue a 100 metres tall
Could ever do you justice.

So all I can do is have you always in my heart
Angel of the North

Thelma's Story

Today we are celebrating the life of Thelma Charlton, a loving sister, wife, mother, aunt, nana, great aunt and friend.

Born Thelma Luckey on the 20th November 1930 at 28 Sunnyside, in North Shields to Kit and Minnie. She was one of five children, having 4 brothers; Bill, Jim, Chris and John.

Thelma was a self-made lady who started life in the pit villages of Tyneside. She lived her childhood through the war years, was evacuated to Wales for a while and started working as a clerk aged 14 after only a short, fragmented, formal education.

She took up cycling with the local colliery bike club where her father Kit worked and she rode around the beautiful Borders countryside, where aged 16 she met her man, John Charlton on his racing bike in those lovely surroundings.

They got on famously, rode together and went to the Newcastle dance halls where they made an elegant couple on the floor.

They were married on 31st March 1951, the date chosen to take advantage of a tax break.

This was the start of a long and loving relationship that always centred around the family. Their own family started soon, with Chris born in North Shields in 1952, before they moved to Cumberland for better work prospects. Kevin was born in Workington in 1955 and the family moved south shortly afterwards; they were again following work and settled in Letchworth Garden City.

Letchworth was a different environment to the North, but their first home there still had an outside Nettie. There, they supported the local community, helping out with making hot dogs at school fairs and later Thelma took on the leadership of the local 4th Letchworth Cub Pack, based at St. Paul's. During this period she became very well known in the local community.

They were not the average northern working class family; John worked long and hard as a craftsman his whole life, starting with pattern making in the shipyards and moving on through a range of jobs. He ended up make cutting edge prototype models of lorries and cars, with the occasional foray into the unexpected such as making original props for the first Star Wars film.

Thelma was an original model as well. As soon as the boys were old enough, she started working in the evenings, at what was then the GPO, as a telephone switchboard operator... "Number Please?"... We should remember that these were the first "Call Centres", serving the new generation of private and business telephone owners by manually connecting extendable cables into sockets and dialling up the connections.

They were also surveillance centres, with the operators holding on the line to make sure the connections had been made, then sometimes a little longer. It was OK; everything was under the Official Secrets Act.

It was probably at this point Thelma first realised she had excellent numeric and customer service skills, which combined with a very soft version of the friendliest accent in the country allowed her to move onwards and upwards, like Buzz Lightyear... "to infinity and beyond"...

She moved into middle management, making time and motion studies with multiple stopwatches and then hand cutting computer data entry cards for analysis. This was the start of business

operational use of computers.

We now know from films like “The Imitation Game”, that the GPO was the birthplace of the computer and Thelma came close to the leading edge of the technology that resulted from that. She moved further up into management, becoming Supervisor of the Hitchin telephone exchange, but never really enjoyed the people management aspect, preferring liaison, meeting people and customer service.

Thelma became one of a small team of Travelling Supervisors, where she had to provide her own car, enabling her to drive around the length and breadth of the extensive Bedford Telephone Region on a daily basis.

She organised the installation and testing, then the training and customer handover of the largest company -based telephone switchboard systems of the day to companies such as of Borg Warner and British Aerospace.

This was a period of regular training in new systems and technologies, with residential courses away in London, Brighton and also at Bletchley Park, where they were routinely “locked in” at night. We don’t know what she saw, or knew about the history which was locked up there.

The GPO became BT and Thelma was always BT’s biggest advocate and supporter, buying many BT shares along the way, which are still held today.

She was an early user of the mobile phone, where mobile was a relative term considering it took two engineers to carry the battery pack to put it on the floor of the back seat of her car. Thelma was a keen and excellent driver who with her love of colours in turn had a bright red and bright yellow Ford Cortina.

Unfortunately, her career ended in early retirement after receiving a diagnosis of Retinitis Pigmentosa, which forced her to stop driving.

Thelma loved her garden, flowers and birds in particular and supported the RSPB, she was also a lifelong supporter of the RNLI.

The arrival of her three granddaughters, Katie, Sarah and Hannah brought great joy. Nothing was ever too much trouble, whenever it was needed Nana and Granddad would be on hand to join in and make anything possible with a hug, a smile and a song. Trips, events, holidays, celebrations, achievements or just moral support were always available and supported by the endless supplies from Nana’s amazing ever-expanding handbag, just like Mary Poppins.

Along with their love of dancing, Thelma and John were great fans of musical theatre and regularly went to the West End to watch shows like *Cats*, *Phantom of The Opera* and *Les Miserables*, some of them multiple times. That passion is reflected in some of the music chosen for today.

Thelma was always great at planning and managing money, a talent she had inherited from her mother Minnie. Always on the lookout for bargains and investments, she dabbled in stocks and shares for a while and she also loved gold especially her serpentine bracelets and rings.

John and Thelma loved to travel and as retirement approached, they travelled more and more, especially to the north of England and into Europe. They particularly liked Switzerland and later Spain, where the Ladro collection often grew. The Netherlands too became a favourite; they would regularly bring Katie and Sarah to visit Kevin, Julia and Hannah. A country where the bike is king, John and Thelma had their last ride together on a tandem through the North Holland dunes.

The family often organised celebrations and special events and John and Thelma especially enjoyed family get-togethers, such as Christmas at Shelwick Court, John's 80th Birthday in Morpeth Castle, the 60th Wedding Anniversary at Cavendish Hall where so many family and friends came to visit during an Easter weekend of celebrations. And of course the annual Family Golf weekend.

After her marriage, Thelma Luckey became Thelma Charlton and was often referred to as TC. TC, *Top Cat*, a famous cartoon from the sixties. TC, *Top Cat, the most effectual, Top Cat, the indisputable leader of the gang, she's the boss, she's a VIP, she's a championship, she's the most tip top, Top Cat.*

Thelma passed on the 1st March.

I hope that you can take comfort in the fact that she had a good life, and an interesting life and that she was able to spend it with the man that she loved. She does leave behind that wonderful legacy of family, friends and some great memories of a life well lived.

During the next few moments, think about the things that you've heard today. Think about your own memories of her - they will be every bit as special and unique as she was. They will be special, unique to you and her and no two of you will have exactly the same ones. Think about why it was good to have had Thelma as part of your life - the impact that she had on you. Remember that she was very proud to have had each of you in her life too.

While you do that, we're going to listen to Memory from Elaine Paige.

Music for Reflection
Memory – Elaine Paige

Quiet Reflection

We're going to spend a few moments in silence. Think about a single memory – one that will make you smile. Perhaps you'll remember her smile or the sound of her voice.

If you have faith you might like to say your own private prayer for her.

The Committal

Sadly, Thelma has reached the end of her journey here with us.

She has left behind all of the cares of the world. She is now free of all the troubles of the world - she is free of illness and of pain. She is at total peace.

Thelma...

To everything there is a season
A time to be born and a time to die.
We are glad that we shared our lives with you.
We will cherish all of the good things that you brought into our lives.
We will remember your character and your personality,
Your love of fun and your love of life.
We will recall the things that you did with us
And the happy times we shared together.
We commit the memory of you
To our hearts and minds.
With love and tenderness we leave you in peace.

Closing Words

Each of you here will have your own thoughts about death. Some of you may feel that death is simply the end. Some of you may believe that we go on to a different existence or that we are reborn in some way. Some of you won't know what you believe.

Whatever your faith, though, it is in remembering that we live on in others. While you remember Thelma, she will live on.

Be thankful that Thelma was and still is a part of your life. Your lives have been made all the better by knowing Thelma and having shared some of your life with her. Remember, we never lose the people we love.

When we finish here today, you are all invited to The Tilbury. When you get there enjoy sharing your stories of her, laugh at things that she said and things that she did. I'm sure that as you do there will be more laughter than tears.

Perhaps our last reading reflects how she might want to be remembered. Simply...

Afterglow

I'd like the memory of me to be a happy one.
I'd like to leave an afterglow of smiles when life is done.
I'd like to leave an echo whispering softly down the ways,
Of happy times and laughing times and bright and sunny days.
I'd like the tears of those who grieve, to dry before the sun;
Of happy memories that I leave when life is done.

Thank you for being here today for Thelma and for each other.

Thank you Thelma for all those memories.

Our final song is a reminder of that wonderful optimism that she went through life with – she was born in Sunnyside – she went through life bringing the sunshine with her.

Exit Music

The Sunny Side of The Street – Peggy Lee & Benny Goodman



Steve Stacey

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