

A TRIBUTE TO MY MOTHER, EVELYN GEE: Duncan Gee, JDA Vice Chair



Duncan Gee, Evelyn's son and JDA Vice Chair, paid a loving tribute to his mother at her funeral on Tuesday 5 February 2013.

He also spoke on behalf of his sisters, Trudy and Caroline, Evelyn's sister H  l  ne and Evelyn's adoring grandchildren.

Our final farewell to my mother on Sunday night 3 February 2013 was a testimony that truly reflected the enormous impact that she has had on all our lives.

During her final hours, her family of 15 stood by the side of her bed totally immersed in their deep love and respect for this righteous, serene and totally devoted mother, grandmother, mother-in-law and sister.

My parents' home has always been a magnet for our family and the binding ingredient that created such an extraordinary haven was the unequivocal love and understanding that exuded from my mother, and this magnetism continued until her last breath, which came as we completed our prayers.

In an effortless way, she set the highest standards. She was totally unflappable and was able to calm the most difficult situations.

Almost every day one of her grandchildren would visit her – not there because of duty, but because of love, friendship and sound advice. Andrew reminiscing over an incident with his Grandfather in Outer Mongolia, Victoria sharing a recent experience in her child therapy class, Grandma relating to Isabel that she too had wanted to be a journalist, Esther comparing teaching notes with stories of wartime teaching experiences, Nicholas getting the seal of approval for a successful application to a law firm and Phoebe seeking advice from a very special confidant.

As my mother would often say regarding our dear father – she 'deeply missed him but did not grieve for him.' To her, grief meant hurt and pain and this was far from her case – what a full and eventful life they had together and this is how we feel today.

We will miss this remarkable lady, but we know that she was blessed with a long and healthy life, and she was the first to say "George and I had a wonderful life together."

She would then relate one of their overseas experiences, whether canoeing down the Sepik River in Borneo, white water rafting in New Zealand, trekking in the Himalayas or one of their many other adventures.

Trudy, Caroline and I would always smile when a grandchild excitedly outlined their adventurous gap year itinerary and received the comment from my mother – "yes, your Grandpa and I were there, I must show you his diary."

My mother dedicated much of her life as Chairman of the Jewish Deaf Association, which was founded by her late father. She was Chairman for over 30 years and then handed over the Chairmanship to her daughter Trudy. Through her unstinting efforts, £600,000 was raised fifteen years ago to construct and equip the current JDA premises in Finchley.

Sue Cipin, the Executive Director of the JDA, commented that Evelyn's "modesty, serene and unflappable qualities and selfless dedication to the JDA helped to bring a quality of life to so many people, and up to her demise was an inspiration to those committed to and involved in the JDA."

Only last year my mother hosted her annual garden party for the JDA members, receiving them with her usual warm and welcoming smile. So here ends a remarkable life – a life that has touched not only her family, but so many other people.

We are blessed that her final year was so eventful, during which time she celebrated the marriages of three of her grandchildren – Victoria to Olly in August, Isabel to Jonny in October, and Andrew to Badannie in December – and to each occasion she brought her love, vitality and inspiration.

She shared with my father a full and loving marriage - they really were quite a team - and although the love and passion of our mother, grandmother, mother-in-law and sister that created such a magnetic force has gone, she has ensured that our family bonds are cast iron and immutable.

Our parents were truly inspirational and together they have left a legacy, a family template, based on love and mutual respect which sustains us and which we shall always endeavour to maintain.

OBITUARY: EVELYN GEE 1921 - 2013



Evelyn Gee, our beloved JDA President and lifelong friend, passed away peacefully on the evening of Sunday 3 February 2013, surrounded by her close family.

Here at JDA we mourn the loss of a remarkable woman, an exceptional President and a loving friend, whose modesty, serenity, wisdom and dedication to the JDA served as a role model for us all for more than half a century.

Evelyn brought happiness and quality of life to so many of our members. Her warm disposition and lovely personality touched everyone she met at our Community Centre including staff, volunteers, friends and supporters.

Without Evelyn's inspirational leadership, the JDA would not be the charity it is today: which prides itself on being small enough to know each client personally and give everyone the individual care and support they need.



Gathering at Evelyn's home for a JDA garden party

Evelyn's tireless work enabled JDA to develop its services and thus enrich the lives of so many people. She regularly welcomed to her home Jewish Deaf and Deafblind people, who might otherwise have been excluded from mainstream society.

Evelyn dedicated most of her adult life to supporting hearing loss after Julius Newman, her father, founded the JDA in 1951, as Evelyn's sister Hélène had lost her hearing in her teens.



Evelyn with her husband George and Sue Cipin, JDA Executive Director

She served as our Honorary Chairman for over 30 years.

When her husband George died in 2008, Evelyn succeeded him as JDA President and continued to work indefatigably.

She realised a dream when, together with George, she worked for two years to move JDA from its outdated premises in Stamford Hill and build a new, purpose-built, community centre in North Finchley. She raised the fantastic sum of £600,000 to construct and equip a new building tailored to the needs of people with a hearing loss. This included an exceptionally well-equipped specialist Technology and Information Centre, demonstrating equipment to enable deaf and hard of hearing people to lead more independent and fulfilling lives.



Surrounded by her JDA friends, Evelyn celebrates her 90th birthday at our Day Centre

In later life, Evelyn learned British Sign Language so she could communicate better with her JDA friends. She also encouraged her family to become involved in JDA work.



Evelyn on her special bench, given to her by JDA

Evelyn's daughter, Trudy Kling, who is now JDA Chairman, is a regular and valued volunteer, as is Evelyn's younger daughter Caroline, who runs JDA's Happy Mondays group. Evelyn's son Duncan is JDA Vice Chairman.

Her grandchildren enthusiastically undertake voluntary work when they are needed.

Evelyn always had her special 'hands-on' approach to JDA work. She spent days each week attending Day Centre, helping out with social events, fundraising and spreading the word about JDA as an independent organisation which is needed now, more than ever before. Hardworking, kind-hearted, generous and selflessly dedicated to the JDA, Evelyn was respected and adored.

We will miss her always.

IN LOVING MEMORY OF EVELYN GEE

Pat Goldring, former JDA Executive Director, has wonderful memories of Evelyn Gee



As Chairman of the JDA, Evelyn was my boss for 29 years. During that time she was always there for me and if I had a problem, I knew I could call upon her to help me.

Way back in the early nineties, sign language courses were few and far between. I put my name down to participate in a course at the City Lit College in Covent Garden. When I told Evelyn, to my surprise and pleasure, she said "please put my name down too." As well as learning, it was great fun, as we used to meet in Covent Garden for lunch. It wasn't easy for her to spare the time as George was President of the United Synagogue and needed his wife with him on communal occasions.

Whenever I had to attend meetings, I always informed Evelyn, as quite often she would come with me. I was very grateful for her support and company. She was always ready to be actively involved with anything that would benefit the JDA and gave great encouragement.

When I decided I wanted to open a Resource Centre in Cazenove Road, I put the idea to Evelyn and she gave me the go-ahead. Over the years the Resource Centre, now in Finchley, has flourished and is widely known.

When Julius Newman House was being built, we met almost daily to oversee the progress of the building to ensure that it was tailored to Deaf people. If Evelyn wasn't in London, she made sure that I could reach her.

When the doors of the new building finally opened, we got very emotional and knew we had achieved something which we thought would be impossible, and we did it together.

Evelyn came to the centre often and knew all the members by name. The members were always pleased to see their friend Evelyn and she was always glad to see and chat with them.

When I retired and left the JDA, Evelyn sent a personal letter to my home which I kept and will always treasure. It said we would always keep in touch. Well we did keep in touch and I will miss our little telephone chats.

It was a great pleasure knowing Evelyn, and in my 29 years at the JDA, nobody could have had a better and nicer boss.

Sue Cipin, JDA Executive Director, is proud to recall her many years working with Evelyn

Our very best friend

Soon after I joined the Jewish Deaf Association, I happened to mention to Evelyn that I had a work problem which was troubling me. Without hesitation, she told me to come over to her house that evening. When I arrived, she led me into the sitting room, where George poured me a drink and we sat down and chatted. I was overwhelmed with a sense of being part of something so intimate and special. I was made to feel like one of the family - and the warmth and support I felt that evening has stayed with me throughout all the years I've been here.

That's the secret of Evelyn Gee. She was like our very own Queen Mother. Her grace and love never failed to make people feel good. She was always positive, dynamic and full of compassion. We all respected and adored her.

Evelyn wanted to be involved, and JDA asked a lot of her! But she never made me feel like I was being too demanding. There was nothing I couldn't ask her to do.

She had a lot of talents and was happy to take on any task - from visiting a member in hospital, to paying respects to someone in mourning, to judging a JDA competition, to attending a member's birthday party, to giving a presentation about our services, to encouraging a wealthy neighbour to leave a legacy to JDA. She was our best friend.

She took her role seriously and with a determination to keep the JDA buoyant and successful.

Evelyn and George Gee were a shining example in every aspect of their lives. They led their family and the JDA with integrity, generosity of spirit and gave their time to everyone of us who needed them. They were very proud of their family's achievements and they would be proud, and we are lucky, that their commitment to the JDA is now being continued by Trudy, Duncan, Caroline and their families.

We are blessed to have shared many happy times with Evelyn. We will cherish her memory and do all we can to ensure that her legacy lives on for future generations.