

The Funeral of Joe Spencer  
Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> March 2009  
Eulogy

We are here today to pay our last respects too, and to celebrate the life of a very special man, a man of faith. Yes, there is more, than just a touch of sadness, in all of us at Joe's death. However, the great love and service that he showed among us enables us to transcend our grief, and so make this service one of real thanksgiving and true Christian celebration.

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith."

St. Paul wrote those words to his friend Timothy at a time when he felt his life was drawing to its close. He feels what we now call in modern jargon 'intimations of mortality', as he says of himself.

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith."

Joe was I'm sure far less arrogant than St. Paul and he was far too modest to have said that of himself: but we can with certainty say it for him and of him.

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith".

Joe was born on the 1<sup>st</sup> December 1928 at No 57 Branch Road: he was one of a family of three brothers, Harold, Clifford and Joe himself. He attended Burnley Wood School and then Townley Technical High School and left at the age of fourteen to become an Apprentice Electrician at Simpson's Electrical at Hapton.

Joe continued his apprenticeship until he was called up to do his National Service in 1946. He joined the Royal Air Force as an Air Craft Fitter at R A F Warton near Blackpool where he was so close to home that he was able to come home almost every weekend.

His National Service completed Joe returned home and to his work, by now as a Qualified Electrician, at Simpson's Electrical in Hapton; where he worked for a couple of years before starting his own Electrical Business.

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Hilda and Joe met for the first time, when Joe was twenty and Hilda was twenty-three, she wanted a Toy Boy. Their first proper date was at The Romany Ballroom in Nelson, love as they say blossomed and Joe and Hilda were married in Salem Congregational Church on the 17<sup>th</sup> November 1951.

Their wedding was followed by a Reception at The Calf's Head in Worston from where they travelled to honeymoon in London and stayed at The Strand Palace Hotel and then went on to Bournemouth.

After coming home from their honeymoon, Joe and Hilda lived with Joe's Mum and Dad at No 20 Dall Street for a short while; before buying their own home at No 107 Branch Road, where they lived for the next eleven years.

And it was during those eleven that Gail was born and two years and three months later Linda arrived, both of them born in Bank Hall Maternity Hospital. Finally Joe and Hilda and their family moved to live at No 193 Todmorden Road where they stayed for the rest of their lives.

Both Clifford and Joe have only ever lived in Burnley Wood and only in three or four houses each as their parents wanted to live near the mill where they worked as they started work at 6-00am and had to walk there and also to be near to grand parents so that they could look after each other.

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Joe was a member of this Church of St Stephen for eighty years, quite literally all of his life. He was, "Christened" here and attended Sunday School here; he was prepared for and "Confirmed" here. He joined this Church Choir in the early 1940's and was still singing in it until 2007.

In his younger days Joe joined the Cubs and Scouts. Later, he was a member of "The Men's Fellowship" and a Parochial Church Councillor: He helped at Jumble Sales and Christmas Fairs and just about everything else that was part of this Church's life. Perhaps most importantly Joe was here in Church every Sunday for worship. The Christian life and membership of St Stephen's was a very large part of his life.

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In the early 1950's the new School was built and this Church had to find £20,000 towards its cost. So the then vicar The Rev'd Alan Francis Clarke insisted that the new School had a stage, which doubled as a Dining Area. And so came the Advent of The St Stephen's Operatic and Dramatic Society.

Over the next twenty-five years or so that society raised around £30,000 for Church funds. Joe was a big part of that society both in musicals and plays. He was a rancher in Oklahoma, played a lead in Rose Marie and was in the chorus line of many others.

He also took part in many plays and dramas and took a lead part in one or two of them. Almost obviously, in addition he helped with the stage lighting etc.

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Gail and Linda recalled many happy family holidays in St Anne's Newquay, Bournemouth and Scarborough often sleeping between suite cases in the back of dad's van as he drove overnight to their destination.

Also mixed in with all of that were holidays in Abersoch in the early 1960's with other couples who were good friends and their families, that fellowship grew and extended their horizons and six couples, no need to name them you know who they are, shared a house in France for two holidays when thirteen people shared one house.

Things changed again to eight couples who eventually all had caravans and for over twenty-five years they all holidayed together every July all over the continent. Every September they spent together in Scotland or The Lake District. Every Easter in various other venues and finally as they grew older or should I say more mature they went to Briercliffe on a small site for the last few years.

In May 1963 Joe joined Brun Lodge of Freemasons, perhaps not surprisingly it was known locally as the singing lodge. Joe was the Worshipful Master in 1973, was made a Provincial Officer in the mid 1970's and an honorary Member of Brun Lodge in 2008. Joe was also a member of Nativity Chapter.

Joe enjoyed his membership of Brun Lodge and made many new friends as a consequence.

There is an ancient ritual with which Joe was very familiar and which in describing certain objects has this to say about them.

These are to remind you to limit your desires in every station in life, that rising to eminence by merit, you may live respected and die regretted.

We can say with pride of Joe that he lived up to those words. He lived respected and died regretted.

Joe joined the Nelson Arion Male Voice Choir in 1974 and became a member of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tenor Section. He took part in many concerts both locally and abroad, and was a Committee Member for many years.

He was part of that wonderful choir of the 1980's which won the Llangollen Eistedfod five times and the B B C Radio Wales competition beating the best of the Welsh choirs at festivals.

He was a member of the Social Committee arranging many of the choir's annual dinners and other festive occasions. When he finally became ill he brought his singing career to an end but still found time and effort to support the choir by attendance at concerts and social functions.

The Choir paid silent tribute to Joe at their last rehearsal.

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As the years passed by Gail and Linda married and presented their Mum and Dad with four grandchildren, Gail two girls Laura and Hannah and Linda two boys Jamie and Matthew. For the birth of both of Gail's girls Mum and Dad had to return home from holiday in France.

Hilda and Joe looked after them on many occasions, took them out often and took them caravanning at weekends. Joe was devoted to them all and they thought the world of him, even though he was quite firm with them. He gave them the best of things - his time.

Gail and Linda said that their Dad was the very best sort of Dad, understanding, supportive and loving, but he really was quite a softie!!

After his retirement Joe started cookery classes at Burnley College, he took it very seriously and would practice new recipes at home, especially the puds and cakes! He was well known for his fruit scones and he made a mean date loaf too! Mum had to keep out of the kitchen when Joe was baking, as his teacher always knew best!

Joe also restarted another of his hobbies-throwing pots- not literally, but at evening pottery classes. He enjoyed these classes and often gave his products away as gifts to friends and neighbours.

Among many of the other things which he enjoyed were visiting Lakeland fells, Townley Park, picking and eating almonds, figs and olives from the trees in Linda's garden in Portugal, Tom and Jerry cartoons (he would howl with laughter and say "they don't make 'em like that anymore", 'Morecambe and Wise', 'Porridge', 'Antique Road Show', Countdown (and in particular Carol Vorderman), grandchildren, natural history and travel programmes.

Good food and banter with friends on a Saturday night and of course no such evening was complete unless rounded off with a good old sing song.

So, in spite of our tears and our sense of loss, we pay tribute today to a real Christian gentleman. Underneath all that Joe did, was his faith and devotion to the kingdom that this Church represents and the Lord it serves.

His faith was also a rock for him to lean on in times of difficulty and sadness; and Joe no doubt had his share of those. But he never allowed it to show he simply got on with his life. He kept faith with his Lord all his life long and his Lord was with him to the end.

A finer tribute can not be paid to Joe than to say, that he was respected by all who knew him a little, liked by all who knew him better, and loved by those who knew him best. So with pride we can say of Joe

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