

OBITUARY: Jane Eyre Scott, a woman of many words

By ANITA BEAUMONT - July 19, 2015, 9:30 p.m.



Alf and Jane Scott enjoying a convivial moment.

JANE EYRE SCOTT, 1934-2015

WITH such a literary name, it is little wonder Jane Eyre Scott found herself so drawn to the written word.

For much of her life and career, Jane found joy in language and books and hearing people's stories.

Sadly, Jane passed away on June 27, aged 80.

Jane's mother, Cynthia Campbell, had been a great reader of the English classics. Her father, Archibald, wrote poetry. So when Jane arrived on July 12, 1934, they named her after the eponymous character in Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*.

Merewether born and bred, Jane spent her formative years at The Junction Primary School and Newcastle Girls High, where she was elected school captain in her final year.

Prior to studying teaching at Armidale's then-named New England University, Jane spent a year working at Newcastle City Library. After university, she worked as a teacher in Muswellbrook, before setting off to work, live and travel in England.

Jane also spent a year living in Paris, where she worked as an aupair and studied at the Alliance Francaise. On her return to Newcastle, she met Alf Scott at a cafe.

"It is still in hot dispute as to who picked up whom," Alf said in his eulogy.

At the time, Jane was working as a reference librarian at the University of Newcastle.

Prior to their first date, Alf said, "By the way, I have four children".

Jane had replied, "Oh that's all right, we'll only be going out the one night."

They were married the following year.

In her vows, Jane promised to adopt and love and care for Alf's children – Campbell, Mark, Gwen and Kaye.

“And she did, she honoured that promise,” he said. “I met Jane, and Jane really saved us all. It was like a fairytale. I thought she was terrific. I could see that if I was able to win her, she would be a real prize.”

Later, the couple had another child, Andrew. Throughout their 44 years of marriage, Jane taught the children, as well as Alf, the importance of education. Her passion for academia was contagious.

“My father was a Scottish fitter and turner,” Alf said. “Jane's father started off as an electrician, but ended up becoming the head of N.E.S.C.A., the electric supply company.

“My family wasn't academic at all. I was mad about sport, and later about singing. But when I married Jane, I encountered this more studious atmosphere that I hadn't been used to. I changed.

“Whatever I decided to do, she encouraged me. She was very essential to my being.”

Jane supported and encouraged Alf and their children, as well as keeping busy herself.

“I suppose you could say Jane remained an academic most of her life,” Alf said.

“She was particular as to how she used English and she studied all the great English writers.”

Jane worked full time until retirement.

“She was very happy as a librarian – she cried when she retired,” Alf said.

When they became empty-nesters, they decided to convert part of their Merewether home into a bed and breakfast, where visitors from all over the world flocked for 18 years.

“Jane was a people person. She loved people,” Alf said.

Cindy Grahame, Jane's niece, agreed. She described her aunt as a “fabulous” woman.

“Having announced herself, in she would flourish, in an embarrassment of colours,” Cindy said in her eulogy. “And then no-one was safe: safe from her natural curiosity and genuine love of people.”

Jane had been a “great, great talker”.

“But she was also one of the rarest of beings: a great listener,” Cindy said.

“A rara avis [rare bird], as we say in Latin. Oh how Jane would have loved that flash of pretension!

“Yes, she was an inquisitor, to be sure, but she would really listen to you, try to understand and get to the bottom of your story. And then, perhaps, offer a soupcon of wisdom.”

While her friends from university knew Jane as a quiet, shy girl, as she matured she blossomed into the vivacious, articulate extrovert who floated from one social occasion to the next.

“She delighted in company,” friend Patricia Taylor said in her eulogy.

“She loved nothing better than convivial gatherings with friends over good food and good conversation.”

The avid letter writer was a passionate supporter of causes important to her, such as the city of Newcastle and its development, the improvement of mental health funding, and the situation of refugees.

“But she didn’t just express support,” Patricia said.

“She was an active advocate and letter writer and attended meetings when some situation stirred her passions.”

When she was diagnosed with cancer, she decided she didn’t want to go down the brutal route of surgery and chemotherapy – particularly when doctors said the chances of it prolonging her life were slim.

“I love my quality of life and I’m not going to give it up,” she had told her friend, Patricia.

“We will all miss her, none more so than Alf and the family, who have our deepest sympathy,” Patricia said.

“She was loyal, caring and loving, and will leave a space in our lives that we will have to fill with memories of the good times we had with her, and gratitude for having known and loved her.”

More than 190 people paid their respects by attending Jane’s funeral on July 3. Her family and friends will remember her as articulate, clear thinking and gregarious, as well as caring and compassionate.

Alf in particular will remember her “tremendous determination”.

“If she set her mind to something, something that was worthwhile doing, she’d go to no end of trouble to accomplish it. And usually, she did.”