

## EULOGY

### **Elizabeth Anne Maskill (née Bingley)**



*The following is a transcript of the Eulogy given by Caroline Maskill at Elizabeth's funeral on 5 September 2019 at the Chapel of Faith in the Oaks, Waikumete Cemetery, Auckland, New Zealand.*

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“I’m now going to attempt to give you a 10-minute potted history of Elizabeth’s long life. I know I’ll miss out some important things, but here goes.



*Elizabeth around the age of two*

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### Birth

Elizabeth Anne BINGLEY was born at home on 4 December 1931 at 23 Watson Avenue in Mansfield, which is an English coal-mining town near Nottingham and Sherwood Forest. Although she was born in Nottinghamshire, Elizabeth's ancestors were mainly from Yorkshire, with some other family from Derbyshire, the Isle of Wight and Northumberland.

Her parents were Jack BINGLEY, a mining engineer; and Rhona – whose maiden name was TATE – the daughter of a local GP. Although Elizabeth was an only child, she had a large extended family and ended up with 16 first cousins, of whom she was the oldest.



*Elizabeth (far right) in the early 1940s with other members of the Bingley family; (from left) her mother, Rhona Bingley (nee Tate); her grandparents, May and John Bingley; her aunt, Kathleen Wish (nee Bingley); her cousin, David Wish; and her father, Jack Bingley.*

### Elizabeth's early life

Jack and Rhona were busy people, and during her early life Elizabeth was looked after by nannies much of the time. She loved her nannies, Olive and Alice, and probably came to identify more with them and their lives, than with her parents' reasonably privileged circumstances.



Granny Tate in 1954

Jack and Rhona were county golf champions and Elizabeth always referred to herself as a 'golfing orphan' – at weekends they played golf and she went to her grandparents' house to be looked after. Consequently, she became very close to her grandmother Janet TATE, a plain-speaking, strong-willed Yorkshire woman with whom she had much in common. Both displayed an extraordinary lack of pretentiousness, and an occasional lack of diplomacy, that could be rather startling to the rest of us!

At times, Elizabeth had quite a difficult relationship with her mother, who seemed to disapprove of much of what Elizabeth did throughout her life. Elizabeth got on much better with her father, to whom she was devoted.

At the age of eight, she was devastated when he was conscripted to serve in the Second World War. While for five long

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years he was away supervising the construction of defences along the south-east coast of England, and later airfields in France and Belgium, Elizabeth remained at home with her mother and a strict aunt whose husband was a prisoner of war. Elizabeth really missed her father, and all the time felt very anxious about the danger he was in. This whole war experience affected her for the rest of her life.

### **School, university, etc.**

Elizabeth went to pre-school and primary schools in Mansfield when she was young. At the age of 10 or 11, after an unsuccessful attempt by her parents to send her to a private boarding school in Derbyshire, she attended Queen Elizabeth Girls' Grammar School (known as QEGGS) in Mansfield. This was the school to which her mother (Rhona) and me and my sister Julia also went.

Elizabeth made many life-long friends at QEGGS. She did very well at subjects she enjoyed such as Art, Maths, French, History and Geography, and she loved playing tennis on the school's beautiful grass courts. However, she famously deliberately failed an exam in Latin, which she hated, but was forced to take, so that she could take another subject instead.

When Elizabeth finished school in 1949, she went to the University of Sheffield to study architecture, a very unusual subject for a woman to study in those days. However, she managed to get through the gruelling five-year course without failing a year, the first woman ever to do so at Sheffield.

### **Meeting and marrying Alec**

During Elizabeth's second year at University, she met my father Alec. He was in the year ahead of her, also doing architecture, and

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they started going out together in the following year. As was perhaps inevitable, he was a lad from Yorkshire!



*Alec and Elizabeth on their wedding day.*

Elizabeth and Alec were married on 26 July 1954, and quite soon after that Alec had to do his two-year, full-time, national army service, mostly in Salisbury in the South of England. For some of those two years, Elizabeth worked in architects' offices in towns

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near where Alec was stationed. As Alec's meagre army salary, combined with hers, was not enough for them to afford to live in a house, they bought a big caravan and lived in farmers' fields. However, they really enjoyed the outdoor lifestyle and continued to go on camping and caravanning holidays together from then on.



*Elizabeth relaxing outside her caravan home*

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*Elizabeth and Alec with daughters Julia (centre) and Caroline (right) in 1960*

### **Children**

Once Alec's national service was over, Elizabeth and he made their way back north, first to Doncaster and then to Elizabeth's hometown of Mansfield, where Alec eventually set up his own architectural practice.

I was born in Mansfield in 1958, and Julia in 1960. During this time, Elizabeth's main focus and passion was her family. Despite not really enjoying cooking, she did it every day for our sake; as well as sewing clothes for us and keeping the house clean and tidy (with some help from her old nanny Alice). I remember she was pretty keen on spring cleaning, which was frequently necessary in a town with a lot of coal-dust flying around!

Once Julia and I were older and going to school, Elizabeth worked part-time as an architect in Alec's office. She also went regularly to see and chat with Granny Tate who by this time was almost completely immobilised by arthritic hips. Elizabeth and Granny Tate always enjoyed each other's company and the special bond they had.

### **Moving to New Zealand**

Fast-forward to the 1970s, and the situation in England wasn't the greatest, and looked like it would get worse. The troubles in Ireland were affecting everyone on both sides of the Irish Sea – we even had a bomb threat at our school. There were also frequent miners' strikes leading to regular electricity blackouts, during which we had to use Bunsen burners at school to keep our hands warm. Not much fun!

Elizabeth and Alec eventually decided it would be better for Julia and me to complete our schooling, and our growing up, in another country. Elizabeth really hated snakes, all four of us loved beaches, and Elizabeth's cousin Jane had already moved to New Zealand, so we chose to emigrate to Aotearoa rather than Australia.

Of course, it was a big emotional wrench for Elizabeth to leave her parents behind in England, and although her father supported the move, her mother was very upset and did not directly contact Elizabeth for quite a while, addressing letters to Julia and me, rather than to Elizabeth herself.

Another regret was losing the opportunity to go on our very regular holidays with Elizabeth's extended family to the delightful little seaside village of Morfa Nefyn in North Wales.

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Nevertheless, on 4 August 1974, we boarded the cruise ship *Oronsay* in Southampton and five weeks later, on 12 September, arrived in Auckland, having had a wonderful and eventful trip halfway around the world.

### **Christchurch**

We lived in Christchurch first. Elizabeth tried to get a paid job there, but there were no opportunities for a part-time woman



*Elizabeth and Alec, with Jimmy the dachshund, outside their Christchurch home, circa 1975.*

architect in those days. So, she joined the Federation of University Women and soon became their local secretary. She also played tennis and badminton, making some really good friends and thoroughly enjoying the new lifestyle we had in Christchurch.

### **Wellington**

However, four years later, Alec was promoted to a new architectural job at the Ministry of Works' Head Office. This meant another move, this time to Wellington. Elizabeth was very sad to leave Christchurch and her new friends but made the best of the situation.

She was appointed to the Real Estate Agents' Licensing Board where she worked part-time for six years. The job included going on trips around the country for hearings, and working with the other members of the Licensing Board, although Elizabeth didn't always agree with her fellow board members on every issue! She also enjoyed the mental challenge of understanding the licensing rules and figuring out what to do with errant real estate agents.

Elizabeth hated any kind of injustice, and during the 1981 Springbok tour helped keep vigil at Parliament Grounds. She also insisted on talking face-to-face with the local MP about the violent events on Molesworth Street.

### **Auckland**

Fast-forward again to the early 1990s. The first of Elizabeth's grandchildren were starting to be born and raised here in Auckland; and I had decided to move here as well. As family was the most important thing to Elizabeth, in 1992 she and Alec set off again on yet another migration, and they have been in Auckland ever since.

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Again, Elizabeth made new friends, this time through the New Lynn PROBUS group with Alec and playing bridge at the club in Mount Albert.

Eventually Elizabeth had four grandchildren, all of them Aucklanders, and she was always very interested in what they were doing and loved them dearly.



### **Health issues**

About seven or eight years ago, Elizabeth started to find playing bridge was getting a bit more difficult than usual – she couldn't always remember what cards had been tabled in a game, and consequently she got into a bit of trouble with her bridge partners.

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Operating electrical appliances also started to become tricky; as did finding her way around Auckland and driving to and from the Coromandel for holidays. Her car sustained some mysterious scratches and dents. Other signs of dementia gradually started to appear.



*Elizabeth in recent years in her room at Hillsborough Care Home*

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After a serious fall and a health crisis four and a half years ago, she ended up needing full-time hospital-level care. Since then she's been carefully looked after by the staff at Hillsborough Care Home, and Alec has loyally visited her nearly every day. When she came down with another infection last week, it was decided, because of her now-severe dementia and her failing state of physical health, it would be best to let nature take its course.

Elizabeth died at 1.30am on Monday morning with Julia by her side, and that's why we're all here today."