

## TRIBUTE

Wednesday 19th March 2003 marked the death of an extraordinary woman, Muriel Lillie Brand (known to most of us as "Granny Brand"), who has touched the lives of all who knew her in a rare and enduring way. This season is a time of deep mourning and loss but also the celebration of a long, rich life lived with passion and joy that has been an inspiration to us all.

Granny's clan, consisting of her two sisters, 4 children, 12 grandchildren and 29 great grandchildren, owes its existence to Beatrice and Percy Freeman, the latter being the youngest of 17 children, all from the same parents! There is no doubt that Granny Brand inherited the stamina and staying power of her formidable grandmother, to whom we are eternally grateful for producing that 17th child, the father of our beloved Matriarch.

During the hours and days before her death, it became clear how utterly adored and admired Granny was by everyone who knew her. She was affectionately known for her excesses and generosity, but also for the unstoppable river of love, which seemed to pour from her heart during all the 94 years she spent on this earth. Granny's favourite (and only) speech at every social occasion ("fandango") was: "I just want to say how happy I am to have you all here today. It's so wonderful to have all this food and all these flowers and all you lovely people around me. It's such a pity so-and-so isn't here to enjoy it, otherwise we would have had everyone here, but I just want to say how much I love you all. You are so wonderful and I love you so much..." etc. etc! After each successive glass of champagne the speech would be repeated with a few additional "I love you's" dotted around! In fact, on the day before her death, as she struggled for breath and was trying desperately to communicate, it was so fitting that her whole family gathered around her bed to talk to her and support her. During those very special hours together, we would all imagine Granny sitting up in bed, defying her pneumonia and giving her famous speech! She would have been horrified if she'd known that we'd failed to provide the usual feast of hams, several roasts, 6 vegetables, 10 desserts and, of course a generous supply of drinks and Quality Streets for all her guests!

Granny's love for people was totally instinctive and without ulterior motive. Her love was not merely sentimental but translated into action. She saw a need among Cerebral Palsy children, and without hesitation, threw all her energy and passion into creating the Muriel Brand School which grew from small beginnings to the wonderful facility it is today. The children singing here today are living testimony to the selfless love and determination of Granny Brand who refused to accept an unsatisfactory situation but would move heaven and earth to achieve her worthy goals.

There were many qualities in Granny Brand which made her such a unique person, a legend in her own right. The one quality that epitomized her was that she was larger than life and did everything in excess. In recording events of her life there is no need to exaggerate, because her rich and colourful life provides better material than any novelist could conjure up in her wildest imagination!

Granny's legendary parties at 18 Edward Street are still spoken of today with wonder and delight. One of these was a charity event in aid of the Muriel Brand School which was attended by 300 guests and held in 3 enormous marquees in the garden. Granny enjoyed the party so much and wanted to make full use of the marquees, so she held two more banquets of the same scale of the following 2 nights! Notwithstanding some hurling of pots and pans around the kitchen and attempted murder of the servants, Granny always took full responsibility for the catering at these lavish affairs!

Where food is concerned, Granny always catered for the five thousand and was most content when her table groaned under the weight of the crayfish, hams, roast potatoes, petit fours, ice cream and strawberries, and of course her notorious gravy! Even during her last few months, whenever one of us visited Granny she would interrogate us about the dinner party we had attended the night before. We would have to recall every detail of the evening, including the entire menu, the table setting, the number, names and outfits of all the guests who attended, and what time everyone left! As far as she was concerned, a party could only be declared a success if it ended in the wee hours after a lot of dancing!

A few months before she died, Granny insisted on having a party in her flat for all her small great grandchildren. Despite our pleas to hold the party at another venue to preserve her and Grandpa's sanity as well as their home, she remained resolute. It was truly remarkable to watch Granny at 94, in her near blind state, unfazed by the carnage caused by 20 children under the age of 6, all gorging on chocolates, fizzy drinks and jelly, having the time of their lives and basking in their great grandmother's extraordinary generosity and joie de vivre. What a privilege for them to have experienced such an abundant spirit!

Granny's motor cars were larger than anyone else's, her fridge at home was a walk-in cold room, her jewellery, earrings and rings were huge and chunky, and she was always a glamour queen in her flamboyant home-sewn dresses and hats. There was nothing sensible or nondescript about Granny in her youth or her old age. On a visit to a favour nightclub in Johannesburg, Granny started dancing on the table, grabbed one of the musician's imported Spanish tambourines and proceeded to bang a hole in it with her knee! Poor Grandpa had to pacify the irate musician while Granny continued to dance the night away! Chippy remembers Granny visiting him at boarding school when he was a little boy, arriving in her Hudson Hornet, and after embarrassing him in front of his friends with a great show of affection, gave him not one slab of his favourite chocolate like most sensible mothers would do, but a "gross" of peppermint crisps, which constituted 144 slabs!

For Granny, money never was an issue, whether or not she had it. There was the time she bought so many toys from Hamley's in London for her grandchildren that she was made to pay duty at the airport because Customs was convinced she was starting a toy shop! Where presents were concerned, her favourite saying was always "if you like it, it is not expensive!"

Toad of Toad Hall is an amateur next to Granny Brand when it came to driving. Everyone who was a passenger in Granny's car at one time or another will know the meaning of true fear! No disrespect intended, but the truth of the matter is that Granny Brand drove like a maniac! Brian Thorp recalls a hundred mile trip on a dirt road which Granny completed in an hour (i.e., an average speed of 160 kms per hour!) Dougie and Rosie remember sitting in the back of her Valiant as she sped down Oxford Road, watching nervously as Granny sideswiped several parked cars, oblivious to the few wing mirrors she removed en route! Everything about Granny was extreme. She didn't know the meaning of moderation or how to play things safe. The guiding principle of her life was always "Carpe Diem" and that is something she practised right up to her death.

Apart from being larger than life, another unique quality of Granny Brand was that she was an extraordinary combination of contrasts. The flamboyant, glamorous party hostess showed true character when she and Grandpa fell upon hard times and she poured all her energy into selling vacuum cleaners, and sell them by the thousands she did! When Chippy needed someone to help him with his asparagus crop, Granny dropped everything and threw herself into setting up a packaging factory and welling punnets of asparagus personally to restaurants, getting far higher prices than her competitors.

In all her jobs, her cooking, her sewing, charity work and achievements before and during her marriage, Granny stood out as someone exceptional. However, the amazing thing about Granny was not so much her remarkable achievements and abilities, but the relationships she forged and the kind of person she was. She helped people because she loved the Lord and cared deeply about His creatures. She never slandered anyone. She never surrendered to hopelessness or despair even when life was hard but always embraced the positive. She always saw the funny side of life and her joy was contagious. She had a truly indomitable spirit and was generous to a fault. Although she was passionate and volatile, she had no enemies. There is no one we know who can compare to Granny because she was a rare phenomenon. We can only hope that some of her genes have been passed on to ourselves and our children. We were so privileged to have had her with us for so long and can only imagine that Heaven is overjoyed to have this remarkable lady among its host at last.

We stand beside you today, Grandpa, and share your grief for the loss of your dearest friend who has walked beside you for nearly 71 years. May the Lord be your comfort and refuge. You have been a tower of strength to Granny and your marriage has been a wonderful example for all of us to witness. You have selflessly allowed Granny to flourish all her life and we love you for being the kind, humble, fun-loving, wise Patriarch you are to this family. May you know God's peace and assurance at this lonely time.