

BRENDA MUNSON 1935–2026



Brenda was born in Lokengate, Cornwall, the third of seven children. Her father Joseph Pedlar was a farm worker and the family lived in a tied cottage. However, his death when Brenda was four meant an end to the tied cottage and a childhood of serious poverty. Her mother, Edna, and her second husband Bill moved frequently but could barely make ends meet. Despite the poverty there were, of course, good times, especially visiting Granny Denning who was a star in the granny stakes. She would take Brenda and her brothers, Colin, Bob and Mick, to the river to make a dam, build a fire and boil a kettle but the real star turn was Granny taking out her teeth and chasing the children round with a knife.

Brenda was a bright girl and attended two grammar schools. She wanted to train to be a nurse but the family needed a more immediate income so she went to work in a dress shop in Bodmin. She loved dancing and a dance was where she met a Royal Navy man named Sid Munson. Brenda is said to have been less than delighted at the prospect of meeting 'that drunken sailor' again but she did and they married in Bodmin in 1957 and lived initially at Porthleven.

With Sid working on Stilgoe's Farm, they moved first to Croughton, where Brenda's parents were settled, and ultimately, in 1961, to 4 Windmill Street, then newly built. Brenda was immensely proud of this house and enjoyed tending the garden too. The wonderful neighbours, Mary Tomkins, Sybil Ward, Maureen French and Evelyn Freeman, welcomed Brenda and Sid warmly and became like family.

Not only did Brenda she spend more than 60 years in this community, she made strong contributions to its life. She started work as a waitress at the Great Western Arms in Aynho before becoming a dinner lady at the school and spent more than 40 years as a general factotum at the Holcombe Hotel, with flower arranging a speciality. However, tragedy struck more than once. When she was 29, Brenda's second child, Angela, died in 1965 at the age of five, from a genetic problem causing kidney malfunction. Over the next years she gave birth to Paul, Jill, Andrew and Helen. In 1978, the seven year-old Helen died from the same genetic issue that caused Angela's death. She found solace in her remaining children though and perhaps her losses made her love all the stronger for the children she still had and, when they came, their children and then their children's children. She enjoyed immensely just being with the little ones of her family, observing with concentrated attention what they got up to.

Other enthusiasms often involved family. Brenda loved to travel: the family camper van made possible holidays in Porthleven and Portland Bill, where Ernie, Sid's older brother and Auntie Gwen lived; there was a coach trip to Austria with Andrew and Jill; expeditions with Robert and Andrew – New York, the Grand Canyon, Las Vegas and Robert's house in Spain. On a trip to Nice and a castle in the French Alps for Andrew's 50th, the temporary loss in transit of Brenda's wheelchair was compensated for by the replacement chair being pushed by 'a very nice Frenchman'. Only a couple of years ago she went with family to Iceland to see the Northern Lights.

Her later years were not a joy-ride. For a third time she lost a child when Robert, her eldest, was killed in a motor-cycle accident in 2011. She battled

throughas she had with the earlier tragedies and faced the indignities of old age with courage and humour. She survived falls and a broken back, stalwartly pushing her wheelchair some hard uphill yards in Porthleven to reach her favourite view of the sea and dealt with the degree of dementia she knew she had at the end with a resigned acceptance, not letting it get in the way of rebuking the staff at Featherton House when they failed to produce of 'a good cup of tea' (she was actually very happy with Featherton's respite care).

Above all, she followed keenly what was going on in the lives of her family across the generations – and there was a lot to follow: 11 grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren. Her love of life remained to the end, despite the hard times and the heavy blows life dealt her. She brought light into the lives of many others. Latterly, she knew that that her time was limited and could look death unflinchingly in the face. 'Death is a journey we all have to make – and make alone,' she said. She indicated that those who loved her needed to let her go.

The Munson Family