

## Chapter 11 The Condolence letters

The Military Condolence letters are in Appendix 7  
The Family and Friends letters are in Appendix 8 with an introduction.

This chapter hinges around the official documents and letters that followed as a consequence of Tony Guise's death, all of which were kept by his wife of less than two years, Joan Guise. Fortunately there are copies of nearly all her letters of that period which gives remarkable insights into the personalities of both Tony and Joan and the suffering that Joan endured at the time.

It has to be remembered that millions were dying tragically all over the world; each death mourned by many, so it seems problematic to single out one death and a few people's grief to consider worth documenting. However please let this be a representative account that will apply to many others over and over again.

There are about 75 letters, about 34 associated with the war office or military colleagues including Joan's replies where we have copies. Many of the family and friends letters which amount to about 40 are valuable as they give not only an insight into Tony and how he was loved by many but also some idea about the relationships between many members of a very dramatic Fleuss family.

The letters from Joan not only give us some inside story to Joan's deep grief and how she coped with it and planned for the future, but also some insight into her approach to her son. Initially in letters he is referred to as the boy, although later his name, Raoul, is used. Reference is made to Tony's plans for his future at Downside and how Joan assumes the full responsibility for his upbringing and her hopes that he will be someone of whom his father could be proud.

The letters portray Tony to be someone of exceptional qualities and who had the ability to relate well to all. This is interesting when put along-side the fact that he was a trained and obviously competent artist, which is generally seen as an introspective occupation. His highly social and sociable nature can probably put down to his upbringing with a flamboyant and dramatic mother and two doting younger sisters, a combination that, coupled with a strong religious faith, would be a good foundation for a confident outgoing personality.

His last letter to Joan was written on 22 July 1944 in which he refers to his yacht, the work he had done on it and the difficulty in getting sail cloth. This last letter also mentions the difficulty he had in getting to the Golf Club because of the heat in Ceylon being so close to the Equator.

Appendix 6 contains the last two letters written by Joan to Tony in Ceylon. Neither of these he received as they would have arrived after his death. All other letters from Joan to Tony have been lost, maybe amongst the belonging that never got back to England.

The last letter, written from Meols on the 20<sup>th</sup> July 1944, 3 days before Tony died, is particularly poignant, in so far as she asked if Tony is alright because she had not heard from him. Joan is then quite forcefully requesting answers and opinions about whether or not she should plan that they move from London in the long term, particularly from Stanthorpe Road, as the flat was rather small and could well be bombed anyway.

To see the irony of this young woman struggling with the worry about her husband's safety and with the responsibility of supporting a child while moving around England like a refugee, asking advice and wishing to share decisions with her husband

who was about to die, is a tragedy which is only soothed by the knowledge, in retrospect, that she and her child survived and thrived.

It is sad that the ultimate understanding of Tony, this exceptional individual, is acquired through letters written by his colleagues after his death.

From Joan's last letter to Tony 20<sup>th</sup> July 1944

"I went up to town last Tuesday week {this was the 11<sup>th</sup> July 1944} for the day just to see how things were getting on. There were 8 or 9 raids while I was there and just at first I went through ghastly agonies of mind lest anything should happen to me and leave Raoul all alone in Nottingham where I had left him. One came very close – over the house and landed I think near Tooting Bec Common – I was all alone in the house so it wasn't very pleasant. The place was in a filthy state with dust and plaster and the whole of the bedroom was just a carpet of glass – with enormous chunks of plaster as big as your hand thrown in for relief!! I really couldn't do anything about it in the short time I had, so I just collected a few things I needed and threw moth balls into everything I could lay hands on, also under the carpets, and generally tidied up and ran necessary errands around Streatham."

The previous chapter makes reference to a few letters from Tony's immediate officers and colleagues however there is much to be gained from the other letters that were written by them over the following months. It will be noted that Joan got, in a time of war, letters from two women, one from the matron in the local military hospital giving details and referring to lilies on the grave. Her replies to these two women show that she was able to be open and less that official. The letter from Richard Souray offers a delightful although sad narrative giving us details of their last get together in this country before embarkation at the Pub called

the Captain's Cabin which was at 4-7 Norris Street off the Haymarket. The letter gives us some feeling of being settled in a cosy bar for those last few moments in wartime London, before parting. Joan says in her reply how pleased she was to have met Richard knowing he was going to be with Tony on the trip to India. Thanks goodness he survived the sinking in the Mediterranean.



In 2013 August there was the opportunity to visit this same pub and at least have one drink there as a memorial, only to find out that within a week or so it was going to be closed and the whole building demolished.

One very important correspondent, Captain Don Courtenay not only acted in an official capacity for LT Col. Sharpe, but was also a close friend of Tony's. He, who as the company Adjutant did so much for Tony and Joan on Tony's death, did keep in touch with Joan over the following months and eventually after letters and a telegram, they did meet up at 4 Pinfold Road, as Stanthorpe Road was in a mess as described in Joan's letter. This visit enabled the whole family to benefit from a first hand debriefing from someone who cared. There was so much chat that Don Courtenay spent the night there. It was good for Don to meet Tony's family and an opportunity for the family and Joan to hear about things that could not be written down in letters during wartime.

Sadly none of this information was recorded and the only anecdote that has filtered through the years is the story that when Tony's transport ship to India was sunk in the Mediterranean, his apparently readiness for such an event was based on the determination not to lose a good pair of shoes. More detail has been found in two letters from Tony as discussed previously, however all that passed between Don Courtney and the family is lost forever.

The second letter from Lieutenant Colonel Sharpe in November was of a less official nature than the first and he related how he and Tony owned a sailing boat between them and Tony rebuilt the thing using army resources. He sent a photograph of the boat to Joan. Yet another of those surreal realisations is to find that as best as can be judged from the photograph his boat was very similar to one that I owned during the first few years of marriage.

Capt. Don Courtenay and Lieutenant Colonel Sharpe did keep in touch with Joan during 1945 and wrote further supportive letters to her as did the Padre Fr. J.W.Murray

Don Courtenay worked closely with Tony.

"Naturally living together in the same Mess etc. we were very friendly and Tony particularly endeared himself to us. He was always so bright and cheery ... nothing got him down and was a grand example of an officer making the best of a job of work out here. He often spoke about you when we used to have our little chats after dinner and in fact, I have four photographs before me now."

As may have been mentioned before, in later life Joan always blamed her delay in writing letters down to the trauma of this period of her life and all the necessary letter writing. It must be noted that because of her upbringing to write letters in reply and thanks, she was unwittingly able to generate an easy dialogue and hence friendship with many people who directly or indirectly supported her.

Amongst all the letters from military personal, who must have, to a certain extent, been hardened or trained to deal with death in wartime, there is one letter from the wife, in England, of a soldier who did all the funeral arrangements for Tony.

These "Military Condolence letters" are all available in full in Appendix 7,

In Appendix 8 there are many letters and summaries of letters from "Family and Friends.

These are useful as they give a tremendous insight into how various people saw and related to Joan and Tony. Also we get a wonderful spectrum of how the various families approached the issue of expressing their grief and support for Joan. Most people seem to be aware of and recognise the double blow to Joan of losing the two close men in her life, her brother and her husband, and also the shadow of her loss in 1933. There is much reference to how her son will be a great help, which may also be an oblique indication that she has responsibilities and so buck up and get on with it.

The Fleuss family not only expressed their sympathy for Joan, but also poured out their anguish at the loss of a son, brother nephew or cousin that was obviously well loved by all.

Joan's own generation took a more down to earth approach but the older ones grieved bitterly. The cry from that generation included the plea as to why God took someone so young and so good.

The first few letters show this beautifully as they are from Tony's mother and two sisters. Marie's letter, although very expressive, is very down to earth, demonstrative of her strong faith at the time and like many other letters uses Raoul as the signpost to the future.

Her brother in law, Neil Callow, wrote a short but meaningfully supporting letter but of greater interest is Joan's reply in which she gives the reader a very clear idea of the load of grief she was carrying from the past and the pressure she was going to feel in the future.

"He (Tony) was buried in Liveramentu Cemetery, Colombo. Perhaps, one day, before I die, I shall have the opportunity to go out there myself....

They are all accidents, Neil, my parents, Peter and now Tony ..and I cannot help wondering sometimes if there is some curse upon me or through me on those who are dear to me, and I dread and fear for Raoul. He is my last tie to this earth now, and if a anything should happen to him."

How often do we here of young lovers concerned that life seems to be too good and they are worried about feeling too happy !

"I used to be afraid sometimes of having too much happiness...now I know why those three years that we knew each other we must have lived a life-time of happiness, and perhaps I have had my share"

The two Frankland cousins, Paulos and Jiminy, wrote down to earth and supportive letters and in one there is reference to how the rest of the family must be feeling. Joan's response does indicate her concern for Mater and recognised her natural wish to be involved in Tony's child.

Studying these letters has made it possible to build up further understanding of the relationships within the Fleuss family. Vera Perrier who was three years younger than Joan, was in fact Tony's first cousin once removed. She was the granddaughter of Mater's sister, the infamous Katherine, who rumour says, ran away with a Count. Despite Katherine's disappearance from the scene, leaving five daughters, it seems that her offspring, the Wilson girls, kept in touch with Mater, the youngest of Katherine's sisters, and some appear in wedding photos. Vera's sister, Doreen Perrier, had married Paul (Paulos) Frankland, her first cousin once removed, at the end of 1942, just after Tony and Joan and Betty Perrier married in Jun 1944. Betty also wrote to Joan in a knowing way. Judging from Vera's letter, she knew Joan well and so must have been quite involved in the Pinfold Road clan.

Audrey, Mater's sister, wrote, again expressing so much grief for the loss of her beloved nephew, Tony. Also, from the same address, a letter in a similar vein from Geape, indicating that she was well aware of Joan overall suffering "in your short life".

Johnnie Sloan, another close friend of Tony and the family, wrote dismayed that he only heard of Joan's loss as he was about to leave England supposedly for France. As it happened he ended up in Greece. It is his letter that gives first hand insight into the sociable nature of Tony, with his description of the welcome that he received sometime before the war. His letters that are included in full in Appendix 16, all follow on from his initial condolence letter. These are included for special

interest because they give a detailed analysis of his work in Greece after the allies took over and during the period of the Greek Civil War, during WW2 and after. They are especially interesting in so much that his description of his own behaviour and attitudes, act as a reflection of much of Tony's.

It seems that, like Don Courteney, he felt a strong desire or responsibility to keep in touch with Joan, following on from his friendship with Tony.

David Muir's letter is like a blast from the past. He is the friend and next door neighbour and so expands his letter with news of all the locals from Sutton. In fact throughout the early part of the war, he was always in touch with Joan and having been a close friend of her brother, Peter, he was always available to help out.

Other friends who sent letters include those who were neighbours in Sutton and those that she had got to know while in London and during the early part of the war. Any that were from the Pinfold Road acquaintances generally relied on a religious tone to add support and so presumably were in some way connected through the local church. The two main hopes seem to be that Tony was in a better place and looking down guiding Joan and others and that Joan had his incarnation in the form of Raoul.

Jean Irvine who was to be a lifelong friend was quick to offer practical support and help.

Among the letters is a copy from Joan to Mrs Priest in the Shetland Isles. Tony had stayed there for a short time while on military duty and as a result she had kept in touch with Joan for some years, right through to the 1950s at least. She gave Mrs Priest such details as she could.

For so many women at that time, death of their loved ones must have seemed to be a such a close possibility.

Letters from Joan's immediate family, the Dibdins and Haycrafts, tended to be rather clipped and to the point but no less sympathetic. All were very pleased that she was with Aunt

Christine in Meols whom they knew would be practically and emotionally very supportive. Don Haycraft was shock as he it was that formed the initial friendship with Tony way back in May 1941.

The older members of the family had been through all this before in WW1, such as Rex Dibdin and Stanley Haycraft who must have taken death at war for granted unlike many of the youngsters who somehow had developed the impression as exemplified in the words of his close friends and now cousin by marriage, Vincent Poole.

"I think we all thought that Tony would have come out unscathed, but apparently the power that be decreed it otherwise although one cannot help wondering why out of the countless people it should be Tony."

One of the letters that does not show the writer's own hidden saddest, is from Sheelagh Davis who during the war, had married Joan's cousin Geoffrey Davis, son of her mother's sister. Geoffrey was a trained doctor and had joined the navy as a Naval Doctor and a month before Tony died, he was drowned at sea, leaving his wife with a son due to be born in Oct 1944. He was near enough Tony's age. There is a copy of a reply from Joan congratulating her on the birth of her son Geoffrey,

Last but not least, it is important to mention Mrs Midd, full name Middleton, who was the prop for the members of Dibdin family ever since she moved in with the previous generation, as a young companion, down from Derbyshire. She lived in Victoria St., opposite the Station and had open house to any family member that wished to drop in. She was sympathetic and interested to know all the details. Her second letter, written in November 1944, is interesting as it explains that her son Mac, also married, had just come home from Burma "The Germans are Babies compared with the Japs" ..

Mrs Midd was going to carry on being a tremendous support for Joan over the years as she had been when Joan first arrived as a young girl in London.

As the war came to a close, these letters seem to wrap up an era in Joan's life. This is because about a year later she had moved with her son away from Streatham and the envelopment of those family and friends that she had acquired over the last 6 years.

I think this was with the intention of closing the door, as best she could, on the grief that once exacerbated all that she had suffered, 6 years before the war started.

In some respects it may be sad that because by the end of 1946, by circumstances or choice, she had moved away from those family and friends who had demonstrated such support in the previous couple of years. Their letters suggest that not only did they have a liking and understanding for her but also considerable respect for her strong coping capabilities.

As an interested observer I find it sad. Since producing the 1<sup>st</sup> edition of this book in 2011, many more letters have come to light and I have acquired some detailed knowledge of the Guise and Fleuss Families. At that time, 9 years ago, there was enough available information to piece together a narrative about Tony's time in the forces, in India and Ceylon and regarding his death but it is fair to say that I had given up any idea of knowing any detail of my father's family background other than the disjointed stories and myths that I had picked up over the years of my childhood. Since then I am delighted to have been contacted by a number of second cousins, one Sarah Guise who had done an immense amount of research about the Guise/Giese family roots and in 2015 I was handed an enormous archive relating to the Fleuss family that had been created by Richard Michael Stenning whose mother was a member of the Frankland family which itself had roots in the Fleuss dynasty.

With further analysis of all the condolence letters from Family and Friends things began to drop into place and it was possible to fully empathise with the grief felt and expressed by Aunts and Cousins. It was possible to see how emotionally close this family was tied together and from the knowledge gained and now documented in "Aspects of the Fleuss and Related Families" and the dramatic stories about the seven daughters of Henry Otto Fleuss and his one son, one gets a inkling of how they interacted socially. Somehow, 4, Pinfold Road, Streatham became a magnet not only for members of the extended family but also for their friends and local neighbours. Through serendipity Joan, her cousin and her brother were drawn into this clan, which, if nothing else, knew how to party in wartime. There can be no doubt that the youngsters of the family that were involved in the war either in the military or in an auxiliary field, used Streatham as a stopping off point when in London.. Streatham Hill was about 30 minutes from the centre of town by train. And so it was that Joan would have met so many of the family who will have acquired an understanding of her background and her position when Tony died.

It is a cause of some sadness, although totally understandable, that after 1946, Joan was unable to continue the relationships with those she had got to know over that wartime period and visits to family slowly reduced to duty trips to Streatham, a few times a year. How Mater really felt about Joan is not clear but there is reason to believe that there was always tension based on Joan "stealing her son".

It is of some delight that, in my autumn years, I have been contacted by some of those second cousins whose parents will have known my father.

Transcripts of letters of condolence over Tony's death and many of Joan's replies are available in in Appendix 7 and 8.