

Joan Blass

April 20 1924 – March 26 2016



A Story of Predatory Marriage

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facebook.com/predatorymarriage

Joan died on Easter Saturday, 26 March 2016.

On Easter Tuesday, 29 March 2016, the man arrived at Joan's GP surgery with a marriage certificate.

He had married her on 26 October, 2015. He was 67: Joan was nearly 92.

The witnesses were his son and a lady from the pub.

None of Joan's family or friends was present and none of them knew it was happening.

We set about trying to find out how the marriage could possibly have taken place.



Ron and
Joan, pub
lunch

Ron died in
2008 from
pneumonia
following a
virus



Joan in her eighties
on Caldey Island
near Tenby, South
Wales



Joan, age 89





This is by the garden gate, where, in November 2011, Joan met “Ranlyn”

She had been diagnosed with vascular dementia earlier that year.

He moved into her house within a few weeks.

He was then 62

Joan was 87



Joan's 90th
Birthday
Party
April 2014





Before Joan's death, we sought help from:

- Joan's GP – they didn't know what to do and suggested we call Social Services
- Social Services – they have no right of entry in England. “Nothing to worry about, no safeguarding concerns”
- The Police – “People will say you just don't like him”
- The family solicitor – “She won't be able to marry or to make a new Will because of her dementia”



Problems we found after my mother's death:

In England and Wales (though not in Scotland) marriage revokes a Will, as though it had never existed.

My mother had made a Will in 2004 leaving everything to her children.

Now: "Your mother died intestate" - this was very distressing.

The man now had complete control of my mother's funeral and possessions.

"Why don't you go into the house and get your things?"

"The Law protects the predator."



Power of Attorney

In 2004 Joan had set up Enduring Power of Attorney so Daphne could look after her affairs if she lost mental capacity to do so.

To many people's surprise, Power of Attorney has no link with marriage. There is no requirement to tell the attorney if the donor plans to marry. This applies to the newer Lasting Power of Attorney too.



Lack of safeguarding:

No robust procedures at marriage: no standard list of questions

Registrars are not highly paid, not trained in mental capacity or safeguarding – and yet expected to assess capacity to marry

Separate interviews not always carried out – lack of basic safeguarding training and “it’s not mandatory”

Misunderstanding of the Mental Capacity Act

Lack of knowledge about dementia from everyone!

No accountability if procedures are not followed



The Marriage and Civil Partnership (Consent) Bill

Fabian Hamilton MP

November 21, 2018

Passed unanimously for a second reading but then ran out of
Parliamentary time



Crown Prosecution Service

Unable to prosecute because of lack of evidence: no video or audio recordings kept at marriage.

There have been no prosecutions for Forced Marriage with dementia.



Letter from the Registrars

I proceeded to ask Mrs Blass for the same information. The questions that proved problematic were her age and house number. All other details were given easily. She reminded me jokingly that a lady never gives her age but I replied by saying that on this occasion, she had to. However, by recalling how many years separated herself and her brother, she eventually answered to my satisfaction. In respect of her address, she was able to name the street but could not remember the number of her house. Mr [REDACTED] started to intervene and he was reminded that Mrs Blass had to answer by herself. In view of her memory problem mentioned above, I decided that the street name only would be acceptable.

When the couple left the room after this initial interview, the DSR asked me if I thought Mrs Blass was fully aware of why she was there and should we proceed with the ceremony. I replied that, in my opinion based on the interview, how her information had been given and her demeanour, we should go ahead.



Letter from the Crown Prosecution Service: Decision Not to Prosecute

“The evidence given by the registrars simply does not support a situation where a person (the registrar) would sense any concern that both parties were not in agreement to the marriage. They identified with a lucid, happy and content woman thus suggesting awareness of the situation and the surrounding matters; thereby giving full and free consent. To imply she did not do so is not enough to prove the case for forced marriage.”



The man who married my mother - - -

- Insisted that my mother should be buried when she had always wanted to be cremated
- Kept all the money (and possessions) and refused to leave the house
- Used my mother's blue badge to park and was caught and prosecuted and failed to pay the fine
- Remarried in 2018 to another elderly lady who lives nearby



The predators tend to be:

- Charming
- Plausible
- Manipulative
- Scary when crossed
- This combination is very difficult to deal with!



WHAT NOW?

How many other cases are there?

Nobody knows.

Professor Rachael Clawson at Nottingham University has begun some research.

The Law Commission Weddings Consultation (published July 2022) is proposing that some of our goals should be implemented.

Channel Five documentary (in “Inheritance Disputes” series) will be shown shortly.



WHAT NOW?

The Law Commission will be having a further consultation in September 2023 as to whether marriage should continue to revoke a Will in England, Wales and Northern Ireland

(1837 Wills Act, section 18)

Changing this law would remove some of the incentive for predatory marriage. Better safeguarding at marriage is needed, plus joined-up safeguarding between different organisations to address coercive control.



Joan Blass's
grave is the
patch of grass in
the middle,
with no
headstone





With thanks to: (in no particular order!)

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- Fabian Hamilton MP
- Real Safeguarding Stories and all involved
- Hourglass – formerly Action on Elder Abuse
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- Everyone who has invited me to give a talk about it and all those who have listened

