

Joan Blass
April 20 1924 – March 26 2016



A Story of Predatory Marriage

Daphne Franks

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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 in secret on 26 October, 2015. He was 67: Joan was nearly 92 with a five-year history of diagnosed, worsening, vascular dementia.

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. I had Registered Enduring Power of Attorney and we lived next door to her.



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





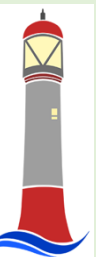
This is by the garden gate, where, in November 2011, Joan met the man.

She had been formally diagnosed with vascular dementia earlier that year.

He moved into her house within a few weeks.

He was then 62
Joan was 87

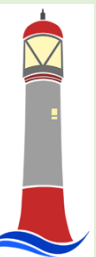
Police said they could do nothing “he’s there at your Mum’s invitation”

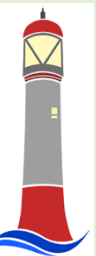


Joan's 90th
Birthday
Party
April 2014

"How old
are you,
Joan?"

"Ooh - - am
I seventy?"





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 to the house 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, Ireland, Northern Ireland 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, and inherited £270,000 of her estate (which was all of it!)

"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.

It is Forced Marriage if you marry someone knowing that they lack mental capacity to marry.

Marriage requires a much lower level of capacity than is needed to make a Will anyway!



The registrars said that the man had told them, before the wedding, that my mother:

- was very old
- was very deaf
- was terminally ill
- had had a stroke
- that she was forgetful

He did not mention my mother's five-year history of diagnosed vascular 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 lived nearby



The predators tend to be:

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



WHAT NOW?

The Law Commission's open consultation into Predatory Marriage and whether marriage should continue to revoke a Will reported on May 16, 2025

Marriage revoking a Will dates from Section 18 of the 1837 Wills Act

They are proposing to abolish the 1837 Wills Act so that marriage will no longer revoke a Will. They have prepared a Bill for Parliament.

More information: <https://lawcom.gov.uk/project/wills/>

Or google Law Commission Wills



WHAT NOW?

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



Campaigning:

I have given nearly 350 talks on the topic of Predatory Marriage to solicitors, registrars, police, NHS, safeguarding professionals and other groups

Talk at the United Nations, Geneva, Switzerland, October 18, 2024 for Widows' Rights International



I have been awarded a Churchill Fellowship for 2025, which will fund me to travel to Canada, the Netherlands and the USA to research marriage procedures in those countries with the aim of using this knowledge to make positive change in the UK.

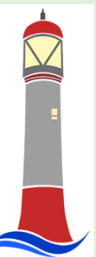
the
CHURCHILL
fellowship

**PROUD TO
BE A 2025
CHURCHILL
FELLOW**



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





With thanks to: (in no particular order!)

- Stephen, Olli and Alex Franks
- Professor Rachael Clawson of Nottingham University
- Professor Justine Schneider of Nottingham University
- Lisa Curtis of The Ann Craft Trust
- Sarah Young of Ridley and Hall Solicitors
- Andrew Bishop of Rothley Law
- Shoosmiths Solicitors
- Dr James Warner of Imperial College
- The Police who built a case and tried to help
- The relatives of other cases who have spoken to us
- Beth Chappell of St Gemma's Hospice, Leeds
- Fabian Hamilton MP
- Real Safeguarding Stories and all involved
- Hourglass – (formerly Action on Elder Abuse)
- Bridget Carter, Forensic Investigator, Financial Abuse
- Carrie Bower
- The Law Commission
- The Law Society
- Everyone who listened and believed us
- Everyone who has invited me to give a talk about it and all those who have listened

