



# PAMELA EVELYN JEFFERYS

7 MARCH 1927 – 12 NOVEMBER 2021

I first met Pamela in 1960 at the flat she had started to share with my Dad in Rue Regnard, the second shortest street in Paris. She had married him the year before at the Consulate of the British Embassy, after living with him in the Rue St Dominique for about 18 months. She was a huge mystery to me and my brother Peter. But as 14 and 16-year-old boys only in Paris for a few brief days each year we sadly didn't spend much time trying to find out more about Pamela. In hindsight I can see how difficult it must have been for her. But she was always extremely friendly and rode through the barrage of often open teenage resentment with immense dignity.



Aged 32

It was only when I spent six months in Paris in 1965 that I really got to know Pamela well. I would eat at the flat at least three times a week. Once during a freak summer thunderstorm, a lightning strike came through the open window between me and Pamela, missing both of us and hitting a picture on the wall above the fireplace. Pamela remained totally calm, picking up the pieces of glass from the floor and then going out to the kitchen to bring in the desert.

Pamela was improving her own French all the time, as well as becoming active in the British community in Paris, making many life-long friends. But she was frustrated with being unable to work in France after she had become the wife of a foreigner.

My father didn't help. His job took him to other European capital cities several times a month. So getting away from the small flat for just one week a year on the Normandy coast with Pamela (sometimes with myself, my brother and cousin) alongside an occasional weekend out of Paris wasn't great.

In the early 1970s, after it became clear that my father had fallen in love with another woman, Pamela returned to London to a flat overlooking Queen's Wood in Muswell Hill.

## Pamela before Paris



Aged 16

Pamela was born in Tonbridge Wells, Kent, on Monday, March 7 1927. She was the only child of Victor Wood and May Jester. Children of a carpenter and a stone mason her parents were 23 and 24 when they married in January 1922.

Aged 12 Pamela was on holiday in August 1939 when her father was suddenly recalled to his job in the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries in London. On September 3 wearing her best Sunday frock Pamela and her mum were invited by their landlady to listen to Chamberlain's 11 o'clock declaration of war on Germany.

After Victor's office was evacuated from London to Colwyn Bay Pamela and May stayed in West London, sleeping most nights in the Anderson shelter in her aunt's nearby garden. Some years later Victor, who had got an OBE for helping design the ration book system, married the woman he had lived with in Colwyn Bay during the war.

In wartime West London, schooling resumed as normal. Pamela wrote '*There were no concessions for missing schooling, or for sleepless nights*' but also that '*Miraculously I passed matriculation*' - which in another time could have led to her going to university.

Instead to avoid being called up to the Women's Land Army or to an arms factory she left school at 17 and enrolled at a secretarial college in Central London.

In April 1945 Pamela's first job was at the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Association. But on VE Day May 8 1945, rather than going out to join the revelry, she took the tube home *'to sleep in her own bed with clean sheets and without being woken by the sound of anti- aircraft guns from the nearby Northolt aerodrome'*.

Unable to travel with the UN to Europe because she wasn't yet 21, she took various secretarial jobs. In 1949 she was working at the National Institute for Economic and Social Research, where she first met James Jefferys, my father.

In the early 1950s she got a position as the personal assistant to the longstanding editor of the *New Statesman*, Kingsley Martin. There she met many leading left-wing politicians of the day and had lunch one day with Roy Jenkins. She also met Vicky, the leading political cartoonist of the day Victor Weisz, whose self-portrait that he gave her she later proudly displayed in both her Muswell Hill flats.

In 1957 Pamela decided to try and get into a university. Not having had any contact with my father since he moved to Paris three years earlier, but as her only university-educated friend, she sent him her application form. The next time he was in London she met him to hear his comments, but instead he asked her to move to Paris to marry him.

Surprised, Pamela nonetheless agreed. She was initially able to get secretarial work at the OECD. But she had to give this up in 1959 when, just after my father's divorce came through, they were married.

## **Pamela after Paris**

Returning, saddened, to London in the early 1970s Pamela soon got her own life back. Her first job was as secretary to Nora Beloff, the political editor of the *Observer*. She left after six months, writing that that

was *'as much as I could stand'*. Pamela remembered Beloff as an awful snob, surprised that a mere secretary could live in the same street as a Tory MP friend: *'You don't live in Onslow Gardens, do you? It's very nice there.'* And rejecting a candidate to replace her, with *'My dear, I couldn't have her. She is on the same social level as I am, and we would meet out of office hours'*.

Pamela went on to get an administrative post in the Polytechnic of North London where she was soon surrounded by student activism and protest that she much enjoyed witnessing though not participating.

Pamela's top-floor flat in Onslow Gardens overlooked Queens Wood, so it was natural that she would get involved with the *Friends of Queen's Wood*. She became a tree warden during the major renovation of the car park next to Highgate Underground Station, carefully making sure that the oldest trees were kept safe.

Pamela also joined the *Friends of Muswell Hill Library* and was active in all three campaigns to retain the well-located free-to-use public library. In June 2014 Pamela proudly sent me her first email written on her iPad while she was at a class given to pensioners held at the library.

Pamela retired from the North London Polytechnic in 1992 just as it became a university. She then joined and became active and soon was a committee member of the Muswell Hill & Highgate Pensioners Action Group. To broaden its reach she successfully proposed its change of name to the wider *Hornsey Pensioners Action Group*.



Pamela made her closest friends in the Pensioners Action Group, travelling on outings and also to the National Conference. She remained involved right up until her death, using nearly her last breath as *'the background controller and organiser'* (in the words of another committee member) to assert the right of pensioners to die at home rather than in hospital.

Pamela was a big supporter of *Greenpeace* (please make donations in her memory to <https://www.greenpeace.org.uk/support-us/donating-in-memory/> ).

Most recently, inspired by seeing *'eager children'* on TV *'countering doom and gloom'* by *'starting on restoring nature and preventing waste'* in responding to the *Earthshot* prize Pamela wrote this seven-point plan:

1. CLOSE LONDON AIRPORT
2. CLOSE ALL MOTORWAYS
3. BAN PRIVATE CARS
4. BAN THE INTERNET
5. BAN MONSTER CRUISE SHIPS
6. BAN MOTOR RACING
7. BAN ALL WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION.

Pamela's greatest times, however, over the past four decades, were personal. She enjoyed her yearly week holidays in Dieppe with my dad that continued up to his declining mobility. James would also visit for a few days at Xmas each year, usually spending Xmas day with Pamela at my brother's.

Pamela gradually became more and more integrated into my family, participating in all our parties and events and generously helping out when called upon. We reciprocated, too, buying her Onslow Gardens flat when she needed to move to Bishops View Court to have an accessible home with a lift, where there were other neighbours of her own generation, some of whom became good friends.

Recognising there was no 'blood' connection between her and my family, she sometimes said she couldn't understand why Joan, Michael, Kerry and myself all accompanied her on hospital appointments and emergencies and did what we could to ensure she was having as good care and support as possible. My explanation was simply *'that's what families do'*. My dad's choice of partners had effectively led to *my* and then *our* being around. And the fact that Pamela was a good honest decent person was a great help too.



Aged 88

But most important of all to her was her very close relationship with Jeff Bissell-Thomas, who died in 2005 and next to whom she is now buried.

Pamela met Jeff at a Fabian weekend school shortly after returning to the UK. She was soon totally in love with the kindest man she had ever encountered.

With Jeff she went regularly to her Eastbourne Harbour flat and for nearly 20 years they were always there for the International Tennis Tournament. After the 1996 death of my father, the couple made several short trips to Paris. Jeff spent half his week with Pamela and the other half back in Kew. Jeff's picture was by her bed throughout the 16 years since his death in 2005.

We lowered Pamela's remains into the ground next to Jeff's in a brown cardboard coffin. My family and Jeff's son and grandson said goodbye to her there, on a beautiful sunny day under a tree at Springwood Woodland Cemetery on the Isle of Wight.

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