



LIVING WITH LOSS:
Lady Wilnelia at home in
Wentworth. Inset right:
Bruce and Wilnelia
celebrating 30 years
of marriage in 2013



CRAIG HIBBERT / SCOPE



SIR BRUCE FORSYTH CBE 1928 - 2017

Bruce's ashes were laid to rest here by his beloved wife Wilnelia and children Debbie, Julie, Laura, Charlotte, Louisa and JJ.

On the stage above, in 1958, Bruce first hosted Sunday Night At The London Palladium and, in 2015, he performed his One Man Show for the very last time, book-ending a career that spanned eight decades.

Without question the UK's greatest entertainer, he rests in peace within the sound of music, laughter and dancing... exactly where he would want to be.

AND HERE'S THE PLAQUE SHE UNVEILED AT HIS PALLADIUM RESTING PLACE YESTERDAY

peacefully on the afternoon of August 18, 2017, surrounded by his children. I was holding his hand. Then a beautiful rainbow appeared which we will never forget.'

It is notable that their house on Surrey's exclusive Wentworth Estate – the famous golf course is just around a corner – remains a family home rather than a temple to fame. Bruce's oak panelled 'den', where we sit, is filled not with celebrity portraits or trophy discs, but with silver framed photographs of his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Photographs of Bruce with Wilnelia are everywhere around the house.

At the start, she says, she could hardly bear to leave the front door. 'I remember going out to the village and seeing people being so happy and thinking: How can they be, when I'm so sad?'

'It was hard to go to the supermarket and see things I knew he would like. Only people who have lost someone so dear know what you go through. People feel that, because of his age, I was really prepared to lose him. That's so wrong. 'Something I'm learning about

grief is that it grabs you when you least expect it. It has a mind of its own. You can be smiling or happy and then any little thing can send you back. I remember going to the airport with my mother. I was standing in line to get a coffee. A gentleman in front of me offered to pay because he had so much change. 'He said, "Your husband must be a very lucky guy." Suddenly I had tears in my eyes and couldn't speak or even say thank you.'

As if the devastation of losing her husband were not enough, Wilnelia then had her life shaken again a few weeks later when she was caught up in a hurricane that ravaged her native Puerto Rico. She had returned there to be with her elderly parents and to organise a memorial service for Bruce; now she was trapped in a shaking sixth-floor apartment with her mother. 'The noise was incredible, like having a monster outside your house,' she says, and while Wilnelia survived the storm, an estimated 4,600 did not.

'The next day, the island was under water. People were on their roofs on the phone but there was no

electricity. I had to look for my family; I didn't know if my father had made it. I went with my heart broken and... it was the most horrible time being there and seeing the people suffering. That completely destroyed me.'

The news that Sir Bruce Forsyth had died brought an outpouring of emotion from the public. For Wilnelia it was overwhelming and, at

'Life will move on but the pain will never go away'

times, it still is. She continues to receive letters from fans who say how much they miss her husband.

'He was lucky in a way,' she reflects. 'There are not many people who feel the love of an entire nation. He was very professional and had incredible stamina.'

Steeped in showbusiness, he had strange superstitions associated with his trade. 'He had 24 at the last count,' she says laughing. 'He would never put a hat on the bed, he would

throw any green sweets away and, if somebody whistled in the dressing room, you had to go out and knock on the door three times.

'But Bruce treated everyone the same. He cared about everyone, from the doorman to the producer. That's how he conducted his life.'

'The real Bruce was charming, romantic, thoughtful, caring and extremely funny. He was very giving and generous.'

'I always let him believe he was in charge,' she smiles. 'That's another way of keeping a marriage happy, but I organised a lot of the things in his life. He liked it that way.'

Now, with her late husband in his final resting place, Wilnelia is starting to think about her own plans – including her charity in Puerto Rico, the Wilnelia Merced Forsyth Foundation.

'I've started to play golf and to paint again. I've been baking cakes and doughnuts. I've been extremely busy. I can decide what I want to do. I'm making decisions now.'

Eyebrows were raised when it was revealed Bruce left his £11.5million fortune solely to her, but she explains that 'he looked

after his children in his lifetime', adding: 'I'm not only the girls' step-mother but their friend too. I will always be there for them.'

'His daughters have been unbelievable in my life, especially this year. It's been like having five best friends. It doesn't matter where our lives take us now.'

'I can count on them and they can count on me. I am a sister, mother and a friend to them. Our son JJ – short for Jonathan Joseph – has also been a rock.'

Wilnelia doesn't know whether she will remain at Wentworth but says she doesn't want to rush a decision: 'It's a big house so I will probably move eventually but that doesn't mean I'll move away from the life.'

'I don't want all this to sound too sad because that was the last thing Bruce wanted me to be.'

'He told me he wanted me to move on and be happy. He always tried to see the positives in life. I will miss absolutely everything about him and I know life will move on, but the pain will never go away.'

'I now have to learn to live without him.'