A golden thread running through Margaret’s life was the spirit of the words she used in her acclaimed 1995 broadcast on *Desert Island Discs*:

“Whatever happens you just have to get on with it!”

In its understated way “just getting on with it” was Margaret’s mantra of courage.

It symbolised the remarkable resilience which she used to cope with the challenges of her life, especially after the Brighton bombing 36 years ago.

So today let us take some grateful glimpses of the way Margaret “just got on with it”.

Always remembering that her strengths were built on the rock of her marriage to Norman and their family life together with John, Alison and William plus their five grandchildren and five great grandchildren.

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Margaret began her life with a hardscrabble childhood, growing up on the Fens in a family of 10 children of a small tenant farmer.

Money was short so “getting on with it” in those days meant going into the fields with her siblings to pull up the carrots and dig up the potatoes to have enough food for meals.

Leaving school at 15 Margaret showed an iron determination to get out of the Fens and to move to London where after a spell as a John Lewis shop assistant she was accepted for nursing training at the Westminster Hospital.

While qualifying as a nurse she met Norman. After a 6 month courtship they were married in Westminster Congregational Chapel in 1956- 64 years ago.

The bride and bridegroom were both young people of faith. So they took their marriage vows with serious commitment both spiritually and contractually.

Let’s return in a few moments to the significance of those vows.

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The early years of their marriage were happy but not easy.

Much later, at a party to celebrate their 25th Wedding Anniversary, a friend breezed up to Norman and said:

“Your old mates never thought of you as the marrying type. So how do you account for the success of your marriage?”

Norman in one of his mischievous moods gave a laconic one-word answer:

“Continence.”

Then seeing the startled expression on his friend’s face he continued:

“Continents in the plural; Separate continents!

As a BOAC pilot doing long airline stopovers in those days I was often parted from Margaret so we enjoyed each other’s company all the more whenever I got back from those darned continents”.

There were pains as well as joys caused by these separations.

Margaret had to spend her first Christmas as a newly wedded wife parted from Norman who was flying to Australia.

During such absences, there were periods when Margaret had to be both Mum and Dad to John, Alison and William.

After the birth of their third child Margaret suffered from severe post-natal depression which developed into even more serous clinical depression. This required long stays in hospitals and nursing homes.

But Margaret showed courage in battling through her illness, and when her lithium treatments began to work she returned to normal home life as the mother of three, and as the wife of a busy Member of Parliament.

Margaret was not excessively enamoured of political life but she did her duty.

She was tenaciously loyal to Norman both in the constituency where her near-photographic memory for names was a great asset and also at Westminster where she could be intuitively astute in her assessments of the characters of Parliamentary colleagues.

Sometimes she was heard to say, tongue in cheek, of one or two of them:

“Never judge a book by its cover”.

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When Norman became a rising star in the Thatcher Cabinet, Margaret enjoyed his ascent without losing her down to earth charm.

A few weeks before Brighton, the *Daily Telegraph* published a survey which reported that, of all the wives of Cabinet Ministers, far and away the most popular was Margaret Tebbit.

Norman’s Private Secretary, in those days at the Department of Trade and Industry, Sir Callum McCarthy recently recalled:

“All of us in the private office were absolutely delighted by this newspaper report which we knew to be true. Because Margaret was such a wonderfully warm and normal human being - and she treated us civil servants like normal human beings too!”

Alas, before long life would never be the same again.

The terrorist bomb that blew apart the Grand Hotel Brighton on the night of October 12 1984 inflicted terrible injuries on Norman and Margaret.

As a nurse she almost immediately knew the severity of her devastating disabilities.

She spent the next two years in the Spinal Injury Units of Stoke Mandeville Hospital and the Royal Orthopaedic Hospital receiving superlative medical care.

It was a period of great suffering in which she had to draw heavily on her reserves of courage.

But amazingly when Margaret came out of hospital she found new ways of ‘just getting on with it’.

She had learned something from her previous experiences of being a hospital patient.

She was determined to lead as ordinary an existence as possible.

So completely free from bitterness, she created a new way of life for herself.

She recovered some limited use of her hands and arms but she was permanently confined to her wheelchair.

Nevertheless, her life was a full one and often a fun one.

She got out to restaurants, theatres and parties.

She had a passion for gardening in the Devon home that she and Norman loved.

Shopping at Peter Jones was one of her enthusiasms.

So was Charity work with *Riding for the Disabled* and *Aspire.*

And of course she enjoyed family life with Norman in their specially equipped London home in Chapel Street SW1 – a generous gift from the Duke of Westminster.

For many of the years after Brighton Margaret had only one carer on duty - plus Norman with whom she shared a beautiful tenderness.

Their tenderness takes us back to those marriage vows.

They were written by Thomas Cranmer whose mastery of the English language is second only to that of his contemporary William Shakespeare.

Cranmer’s vows were the foundation stones of Margaret and Norman’s married life.

Harken to them now:

* To have and to hold….
* Forsaking all others….
* For better for worse….
* For richer for poorer….
* In sickness and in health….

Here in this Cathedral where Margaret so often worshipped I do not have to elaborate before today’s congregation — whose intimacy Margaret would have loved — about how deep the mutual commitment of those vows went.

But one can ask if in the enduring love story of Margaret and Norman’s marriage, have these vows ever been more perfectly honoured?

We can almost hear this question answered by the trumpets sounding on the other side.

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The final Cranmer vow from the Marriage Service in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer runs:

“To love and to cherish, till death us do part”.

Thanks to the locust years of Lewy Body Dementia, which Margaret faced with the help of her devoted caring team in her characteristic spirit of fortitude, death has now parted Margaret from Norman —and from all of us.

Yet she will continue to shine in public and private memories as a beacon of inspirational hope reminding us of:

* Her Courage;
* Her Sense of humour in adversity;
* Her Resilience

And above all for: “Just getting on with it!”

May she rest in peace and rise in glory. **Amen**