Joan Cave MBE (1919–2010)

Joan Cave (née Bower) was an elegant, gracious lady who epitomised what Soroptimism is all about – empowering women to make a difference by helping other women and girls.

Born in Dewsbury, West Yorkshire, the daughter of a local policeman, Joan joined SI Dewsbury in January 1953. Joan once reminisced about her first meeting; she felt that she had arrived at a very upper crust meeting, not her sort of place at all, for the ladies were all wearing hats, gloves and furs! As a hairdresser, Joan never did wear a hat, only on special occasions.

Joan ran her own hairdressing salon from 1945 to 1974. This was a necessity, because sadly Joan’s husband, Sergeant Osmond D. Cave, was killed in action in 1942 aged 27. As a young war widow, with a small daughter aged 3 years, Joan became the sole bread winner. However, with her successful business, she was able to educate her daughter who went on to study medicine. Joan was able to purchase her own house, although she had to take her father with her to obtain a mortgage, as it was unheard of for a woman to take out a mortgage on her own!

This fighting, determined spirit ultimately led to her being awarded the MBE in the Queen’s 1998 Birthday Honours. Joan became a member of the War Widows Association when it was formed in 1971. She worked tirelessly as a committee member from 1976 and as National Chairman 1977-1979, holding several meetings with The Right Honourable Dennis Healey MP. Not only did she campaign for the right of War Widows to be represented at the London Cenotaph on Remembrance Sunday (which was eventually allowed in 1982), but also for the removal of the tax burden from the War Widows’ Pension. Partial success was achieved in 1976 with the removal of half of the tax, and the remainder in 1979, Joan’s last year as National Chairman. Joan also served as a voluntary visitor for 17 years and at one time was visitor to 37 widows.

Not only did Joan run her own business and champion the cause of the War Widows, she also found time to be an active member of the local golf club for 30 years, becoming Lady Captain in 1982. Joan was also a member of St Mary’s Mothers Union, Mirfield, and the Royal British Legion, for which she was an active poppy seller.

During her 58 years as a Soroptimist, Joan served as President for two successive years 1961-1963, as Club Secretary and as a member of the Welfare Committee. She also forged international links with SI Whittier, USA, visiting the club and providing reciprocal hospitality. As Honorary Member for 30 years, Joan was exemplary in offering friendship, kindness and support to all members. Times change, no hats and gloves now, but thanks to the influence of women like Joan, the club, as it approaches its 80th Anniversary, has developed into a caring, friendly, active club!