

In loving memory of my precious mum and dad

Mum-of-two Joanne Stott will fulfil a lifelong dream when she opens her first business on Tyneside tomorrow in memory of her parents. She chats to LIZ LAMB

EVERY love letter, birthday card and handwritten note Joanne Stott's parents sent each other during 60 years of marriage was signed Y.A.P, a heartfelt inscription that stands for You Are Precious.

It was a poignant symbol of the born-and-bred Wallsend couple's happy marriage which lasted more than five dec-

ades until their deaths in the last three years.

Today, their daughter, Joanne Stott, opens her first business in Newcastle city centre in their memory and has called her bridal boutique Y.A.P as a tribute to her mam Mary and dad Johnny, both 79.

Hanging on the wall of the shop where Joanne will help North East brides find the perfect dress for their big day will be a photograph of the couple taken on their wedding day on August 26, 1950.

Joanne says: "Three years ago dad dropped down dead on the club floor in Wallsend. He was a larger than life character, a very charismatic man. It was just so sudden.

"When he went out the door he had said to mam, 'I won't be long angel', and he never came back. He was dead just 40 minutes after leaving the house.

"Dad suffered a heart attack. It was a huge loss to the family. We are a massive family. I have three brothers and mam was one of seven and we are all really close.

"Mam could not get over his death. She died of a broken heart 17 months to the day."

The Laings were both from Wallsend but brought up Joanne and her three brothers in the family home in West Moor.

Mary was a full-time mum to the children while Johnny ran his own business J W Laing and Sons, a shop fitting and joinery firm located near St James's Park.

Part of his work was fitting out Ladbroke's stores across the North East and Joanne's brothers, Chris, 47, John, 50 and David, 51, later went on to work as shop fitters for the family firm.

"They had been married nearly 60 years," says the 40-year-old, who is married to Chris and has two children Abbie, 15 and Ryan, 23.

"It was horrendous when they died. Mam adored us all but she could not get on with life after dad died.

"She was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer on the Wednesday and the following Wednesday she died.

"I held her in my arms as she died. She wanted to be with her dad."

Grief-stricken Joanne threw herself into charity work, trekking across the Sahara desert with 16 other fundraisers to raise money for Newcastle's Marie Curie Hospice.

"When my parents died my whole world fell apart," she says. "My cousin died in a Marie Curie Hospice so I knew their work really well and when I heard about the trek I just thought it would give me something positive to focus on.

"I have a wonderful husband, amazing kids but I needed something to help me. I had to have closure.

"It was a brilliant experience trekking in the desert but you come back and you get on with your life. You have to, everyone has to."

Joanne returned refreshed but a



WEDDING BELLES – Joanne Stott from Birtley, who has opened a bridal boutique called Y.A.P in memory of her parents, John and Mary Laing

SO IN LOVE – John and Mary on their wedding day with a letter signed Y.A.P.



FAMILY BUSINESS – John and Mary as a young couple, Joanne as a child with her dad outside his joinery business in Newcastle



of her work colleagues.

"It was time for me to do something for myself," she says. "I had turned 40 and I thought I would love to set up my own business.

"Dad had his own business for 40 years in Newcastle city centre so I was inspired by him.

"I have an old photograph of my dad

wedding anniversary the same day.

"It was very emotional," says Joanne. "There was quite a few tears.

"I could not have called the shop anything but Y.A.P. I found lots of old letters from when dad was in the RAF he signed them all Y.A.P.

"Over 50 years in every single piece of correspondence, from letters to birthday cards and cards sent with bouquet of flowers, he always signed them Y.A.P.

"It meant so much to them."

Joanne has spent months sourcing designer dresses from around the world for the shop and she hopes her new business will help other happy couples.

"When mam got married she couldn't afford a wedding gown, she wore a suit," says Joanne, of Birtley.

"I think from what we have been through this business has become a legacy to us. It means so much and I feel so proud.

"I am very proud to be from Newcastle and there is a real pride here for people to do well.

"I couldn't have opened anything else but a bridal shop. It's such an important time and my parents had such a happy marriage, I want to do my little bit to help other people have the same."

Y.A.P bridal boutique, 6 St Mary's Place, Newcastle 0191 340 7983. www.yapbridal.co.uk



DEVOTED COUPLE – Every letter John and Mary Laing, pictured above, sent to each other during 60 years of marriage was signed Y.A.P

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