

A tribute to a remarkable woman – Myf Hodkin

On behalf of all the family I would like to thank you for coming to say goodbye to mum and to spend a little while sharing some moments from her remarkable life with us.

The service is mostly mum's work. In her typically organised way and not wanting to cause us extra work, before she moved to Scotland, she put together a 'in the event of' folder. This included some 'suggestions' for a church service, in fact all the hymns, readings and poetry with an instruction to 'keep it short and have fun'! Just like her! Well we will try to do that mum but your life wasn't short and for the most part very full.

Mum was born Enid Myfanwy Bell on 13th August 1923 in Gosforth, Newcastle. Myfanwy is Welsh, as was her mother, but she was known by all her friends as Myf.

Two months early, she weighed 3 and a half pounds and was put on a hot water bottle to keep warm.

Prayers were said for her as very premature babies rarely survived in 1923, but mum didn't give up that easily, she was stubborn and determined and remained so the rest of her life. I didn't really know my grandmother, as she died when I was very young, but I know from mum's stories about her that she too was a strong woman and wasn't going to let her first born down.

Mum lived her life to the full. With an inquiring mind from early on she often told me that she was never too old to learn and she continued to explore the world near and far and make friends as she went. She was a people person and her skill at communication and her dedication and compassion for whatever cause she was involved in meant she has left her mark with many people and in many places. Whilst sorting through the inspiring collection of her notes, diaries and letters, I found one from a friend who had been involved in the One World Link with Bo in Sierra Leone with her. The letter included a photo of a mural of mum that had been painted on the wall of the OWL community centre in Bo that she had helped set up. Jane, her friend, said in the letter 'now you will see how you will go down in OWL history, and that that the link is thriving not least due to your dedication and persistence when it was so difficult to keep it going'

I'm jumping ahead here a bit, which I shouldn't as her early life had some significant highlights and, as with most children, shaped her life to come.

My mum's parents were practising Christians, the bible being the only book to be read on a Sunday. She knew it well! Her father, Albert, a chartered accountant, gave away quarter of his income to charity and the family were always involved in helping others less fortunate than themselves. Faith was a sustaining force in mum's life and practising that faith in church was very important for her with the hymns playing an important part in that.

Her solid faith guided her through difficult times, helping her get through the death of our dear sister, Julia, at 16 and the early death of our loving father, David. Mum's faith gave her an amazingly positive outlook on life and not long after dad died she said that she could thank God for 33 years of a very happy marriage and now she would move on and so she did, involving herself positively in so many people's lives. We have had several letters of condolence where people have talked about how she helped them through difficult times in their lives.

Mum told us that she doesn't remember not being able to read or swim, two passions that stayed with her for most of her long life. She didn't start school until she was 6 because the enlightened family GP thought, because she was still small, that she would benefit from being outdoors as much as possible, so her mum taught her how to read and swim well before she went to school. When she did go to school they immediately put her up a class! She spent the next few years making sure that she kept ahead of her bright younger brother, Arthur, who was only a couple of years younger and soon bigger than her. She, Arthur and later her younger brother Gordon, enjoyed many adventures exploring outdoors and came to love the Northumberland coast and its flora and fauna. Throughout her life come rain come shine mum would be out of the house walking, bird watching, picking blackberries, searching for interesting fossils, working in the garden and definitely avoiding the housework!

Mum was 16 when war broke out and her school, Newcastle Church High school, was evacuated to Alnwick and her two brothers were sent off to different places. Mum and her senior classmates went rather upmarket and were billeted at Alnwick castle, she tells us that, although it was grand, it was also rather cold, no Hogwarts magic to warm things up in those days! When the bombers went over, the girls slept in the air raid shelter underneath the Bailey and, as Head Girl, mum's fire watch task was to man the stirrup pumps on the roof. One of the best parts of staying there for mum was access to the extensive castle library, bookworm that she was! Among mum's papers I found her school report from her last year at school while she was at Alnwick and the Head Mistress had written 'We thank Myfanwy for her public spirited help to the school as Head Girl in these difficult years.'

Mum got an exhibition to Cambridge University to study Geography and was there for 4 years, doing her teacher training in the last year. During her last year a tall, dark and handsome man arrived at her door one evening, David Hodkin (who had been invalided out of the war and had also got a place at Cambridge) was paying a courtesy visit to a childhood family friend. Their parents had been friends and the two of them had been pushed in prams together, then David's family had moved to London. They struck up a friendship but David was already engaged. Later, sending her a Christmas card, he wrote 'I'm not engaged anymore!' They married in Newcastle in 1947, the day after our present Queen, and had a 48 hour honeymoon in York on the way back to London.

Mum's first job in 1946 was teaching Geography at North London Collegiate School, she had to ask permission of her Head Mistress to carry on teaching after she got married as it wasn't the 'done thing' in those days for married women to teach. But then mum didn't do the 'done thing' if she didn't agree with it! Fortunately, the Head Mistress was an enlightened sort too. Before they married mum and dad spent every weekend together. He was passionate about engines so their weekends were spent attending Vintage Car Rallies and everything to do with cars and motorbikes. Mum learnt to drive dad's Triumph 500 motor bike and they went off to Norway on it together one school holiday. We used to tease her about that as it was before they were married!

Before we children came along, they spent 7 years in London, with yearly adventures on bikes and cars.

Mum left her teaching post in North London Collegiate school in 1950, ready to start a family and, although it took a while to get going, brother Dave, was born in 1954, I came along in 1955 and our sister Julia in 1957. Two years later Mike was born, making our family complete. Dad was a brilliant car engineer and was head hunted by international companies. Mum devoted the next 20 years bringing us up and supporting dad, whose expertise took us all over the country and for a spell in Germany. Once we were at school she went back to teaching and taught herself Geology so she could offer that as an extra course for her pupils.

Mum had many different strings to her bow, never daunted by trying something new, even delivering babies! Mum and dad shared their first home in London with two of my uncles and when they moved in a young couple were sitting tenants in a summer house in the garden. One morning, shortly after mum had had my brother, Dave, the young man came knocking at mum's door asking for help as his wife had gone into labour. She was in 3rd stage labour and very frightened, mum calmed her down and 'caught' the healthy baby girl, tied off the cord and cut it. The husband had gone for the midwife who arrived shortly after, checked the baby over and told mum that she needn't have cut the cord but everything was fine! Mum then went to make bacon and eggs for everyone!

Mum made sure that as we grew as a family our lives were filled with opportunities for us to both share in the things that were important for her, like her faith, nature and the great outdoors, books and poetry, swimming and jigsaw puzzles but she also encouraged us to take our own paths and make our own decisions from early on. She was a lot more broad-minded than many of our friends' parents but provided us with a role model that we have, all in our own ways, been grateful for and aspired to over the years. There were some boundaries that were not to be crossed with mum, Enid Blyton was never allowed to darken the door as her use of grammar was 'atrocious' and TV watching was strictly limited when we were younger, generally only 'educational' programmes were allowed. The stories that she loved to read aloud

to us became favourites for all of us: any Beatrix Potter, with Mrs Tiggy Winkle becoming my favourite, Rudyard Kipling's the Just So Stories and the Narnia series.

Mum was a wonderful story teller, so animated she brought the stories alive. She had a wonderful imagination or perhaps she had super powers, Mike remembers her telling him one of her favourite childhood memories where she was at the end of a rainbow with the air being full of all the different colours of the rainbow and full of light.

Mum also wrote very well and we will be able to enjoy many years reading her memoirs which she was working on before she came up to Scotland. There's a worthwhile project for me when I retire, finishing this for her!

Mum may have been very busy bringing us up but that didn't stop her getting involved in her local community and her church. When we were living in Leamington Spa in the 60s mum befriended a young Kenyan called Kariuki who came over with his young family to study as a nurse. Mum invited him to tea with us and a life long relationship with him and his family began and continues today with one of his sons, who is mum's godson. After Kariuki finished his studies he took his family back to Kenya and mum and dad continued to support his family financially. Shortly before dad died, mum and he went on a long overdue holiday to Kenya to visit the Kariukis and were treated like royalty, Kariuki had built a special little house on his shamba for them to stay in, called Thingira. Mum and dad had a wonderful holiday together, going on safari and staying on the coast. It was the first holiday alone together for a number of years and when dad died a few months later, mum would treasure these special memories. Times had been hard for the two of them for a few years after our sister Julia died. Brother Dave had married and left home, I was at university and stayed on in Nottingham and Mike also eventually went off to Cambridge University. Dad decided to start his own air taxi service, flying was another of his passions, which mum supported him in, as always, but she was never very happy about it. He had to sell the business in the end, leaving them very short of money but by the late 70s, Dad had another prestigious job with Austin Morris and life was looking

5

brighter. In December 1980 Dad died of an aneurism on a business trip to Dublin and once again it was mum's faith and determined positive spirit that helped her through the next years.

Mum would remember with joy their time together and their shared projects but would journey on into the next 36 years of her life with a determination to carve her own way and to begin a new set of adventures.

The different organisations that my mum became involved in over the next decade are too numerous to mention but there were several that became dear to her heart and where she made so many very good friends. Initially she volunteered in a Women's Refuge in Warwick and one of her good friends, Kay, who phoned the other day after the news of mum's death, was telling me that they used to have a meal together every week and often mum was 'on call' for the refuge and they several times found themselves in mum's car tracking down nappies and baby food and clothes for a mother who had arrived late in the evening at the refuge. No 24 hour Tesco shopping then!

Through her work with Warwick Third World Information Centre she was brought into contact with people and issues that kept reminding her of Kenya. A friend suggested that she volunteered for VSO (Voluntary Services Overseas). So in January 1984 she found herself once again in Kenya in a rural school as a VSO teacher, delaying the start for a few month so she could welcome my eldest, Dougie, into the family.

During the two years that she was at Ekambuli she enjoyed several holidays on the Kariuki shamba, staying in Thingira and sharing the life and work of his family. We all visited her and the Karuikis at points during her stay, so cementing lasting relationships across the generations. Mum continued to visit Kenya for one project or another right into her 80s always spending time with her African family, as she called them. You may now understand why we have an African theme to the Order of Service.

I have already mentioned the One World Link that mum was involved in but I would like to quote you from a letter that I received this week from another of her dear friends, Gian, who is with us today.

'In those early days Myf was there with her tremendous energy and drive in helping to establish the One World Link. She was one of the first people to visit Bo in Sierra Leone to help cement the link. Her contribution and involvement with OWL was right up until she left Leamington – a service given over 30 years or more. Myf was there with us in the early 1980s to establish what is now the longest running Festival of its kind and will celebrate its 40th anniversary this year - the Leamington Peace Festival. Also from the early days Myf got involved in the United Nations Association serving on the committee for many years. She was always there at the branch meetings helping with preparations of the Ploughman's Lunch and be there afterwards to clear up in the kitchen. As Chairman of the Branch during the past 25 years I often looked to Myf for advice and guidance.....I could go on and write a book about your mother and all the contribution she made to the town of Leamington'. Thank you for this, Gian. I think this gives us a measure of the woman that was our mum.

It would be wrong to think that mum spent all her time on worthy causes, she was also fortunate to have a good widow's pension that allowed her to explore the world with family and friends.

She was a member of the Field Studies Council and went to climb glaciers in Iceland, watched Golden Eagles on Arran and red kites in Wales and went collecting fossils in Shropshire to mention just a few.

Her brother Arthur lived in Texas for several years and she visited him there in 1989 and took in the Grand Canyon while she was there. She experienced the Himalayas in Nepal with a friend in a small tent; spent three weeks in South Africa visiting a friend in Jo'burgh, and Hillcrest, a township which was linked to her church in Warwick and which she was involved in, and had a wonderful trip to Canada to see the magnificent Rockies. She had three holidays in New Zealand with the excuse to check up on brother Mike, in fact catching the new millennium in before us with him. Here she had a go at paragliding at the young age of 79, she loved it!

On her 70th birthday her brothers and their wives took her down memory lane to Northumberland and visited many of their old haunts, including Alnwick Castle, where she was given a private tour and shown the room that used to be her bedroom.

The list goes on but I mustn't forget the many holidays that she had with my brother Dave, both sharing a love for the outdoors. These included the Eden project in Cornwall and the Shetlands to see sea otters where Dave fondly recalls that they drove 600 miles around the 75 mile long 5 mile wide island for 11 days until on the twelfth day of their fortnight's holiday (to their delight and relief) they found a family of otters and spent half an hour watching them play.

As I said, Mum loved to swim and was fortunate to be fit enough to do this regularly for most of her life, recognising this and wanting to use this in a practical way she decided to swim 80 lengths of her local pool as a sponsored swim on her 80th birthday. She raised £1,600 for the international links she was involved with and said this was to say thank you to her friends in developing countries who had enlarged her horizons and shared their hopes and fears with her.

It should come as no surprise that eventually mum would decide that she needed to slow down a bit. Her heart valve had been leaking and she needed to have it replaced, so in 2012 she came north and joined her Scottish family in Newtongrange and started to make friends here. She seemed quite happy to be having her heart operation in the new Edinburgh Hospital and recovered well so she could get back to the business of helping out at the toddler group, Jelly Tots and getting back to her swimming and blackberry picking! Unfortunately, her dementia did eventually get the better of her and her last 18 months weren't easy for her. My family here are just very grateful that they had the chance to spend so many happy times with her while she was with us. She was a treasured grandmother and great grandmother.

Grandson Chaz will remember her wonderful smiles and her kisses and how she always, like him, left all the cupboard doors open behind her, much annoying me!

Granddaughter Julia shared a passion for the theatre especially all things Shakespeare with her grandma and will remember an adventure to the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford to see MacBeth.

Grandmother and Granddaughter shared equal delight in the feisty, wicked, portrayal of Lady Macbeth and had a hearty disagreement about many other aspects of the modern production.

Mum lived her life with love, love of her family and love of many, many more people across the world. In her work with 'Christians Aware' she attended a course called 'Women of Faith', any faith, where she met and shared with some wonderful women, Islamic, Jewish, Buddhist and from many Christian denominations. She wrote 'It has made me much more aware of our common spirituality and of the stupidity of exclusive dogmas.' Mum lived her life through her faith.

In farewell to her today, I leave you with her own words.

'Truth cannot be the monopoly of any one faith: Love is the essence of all true faiths.'

Goodbye, Mum x