

Audrey May Hotten

16th March 1924 – 6th January 2019

Audrey was born in Clapham, South London to Harriet and Percy Barnard before her parents moved to Benfleet, Essex where Mary was born. This move was fortuitous for Audrey as the headmistress of her primary school spotted that Audrey was very intelligent. With the encouragement of her headmistress, Audrey's parents moved her to a small private school to continue her education.

With the support of her parents encouraging her to work hard and do well at school, Audrey continued to shine, winning a scholarship to Westcliff High School in Southend. Audrey had a couple more changes of school, to a boarding school in Bury St Edmunds, then at sixteen to the City of London school. Despite the upheaval of her London school being evacuated to Keighley in Yorkshire in 1940 to avoid the bombing in London, Audrey continued to do well and won a scholarship to Oxford University. This was a tremendous achievement and one that she was very proud of, as were her family.

However, Audrey was called up to join the war effort and she was denied the opportunity to start her studies at Oxford. In later years Audrey spoke of her extreme disappointment and frustration at this turn of events. Audrey did not talk very much about her war work in the Army. She was fortunate to be posted to the south coast of England, not too far away from her family.

Soon after VJ day Audrey was given early release from the Army. She obtained a place at the London School of Economics to read History and achieved a 2:1 degree, followed by a Teacher Training Certificate. So, Audrey's life as a teacher began, a career that meant a lot to her and in which she excelled.

With her first husband Denis, Audrey was living in Benfleet but teaching in London. With the birth of Stephen and in the following year Jill, Audrey took only six years out of work, before returning to her beloved teaching.

When her first marriage ended, Audrey moved to Harlow with Stephen and Jill. She continued to teach History and English before moving to Basildon to take up a more senior post at Woodlands School, eventually becoming Deputy Head Teacher there. She ended her teaching career as the Deputy Head Teacher at the Test Valley School in Stockbridge, where she had moved, after her marriage to Edwin in 1973.

Throughout her thirty-one years of teaching Audrey was a dedicated, gifted teacher inspiring many pupils to explore their talents and use education to become successful in their own chosen careers. This did not stop when she retired. Actually, it should not be called 'retirement', as Audrey continued to fill her days with many interests happily shared with Edwin.

Audrey and Edwin decided to make the most of their time together, so Edwin also retired. They decided to buy a motorhome to be able to travel around Europe. In 1987 they started their adventures, taking an extensive touring holiday in France. Edwin remembers they each sent a postcard to the staff at their last schools. On the back of the postcards they wrote the same brief message: 'Missing you, but not very much!'.

For nearly twenty years Audrey and Edwin enjoyed planning their motorhome holidays. They travelled through many countries including Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Hungary, Romania and Holland. They would spend six weeks in Europe during early summer and then another three weeks in September. It was a relief that at last they could avoid the school holidays!

Audrey and Edwin had always wanted to visit the Soviet Union, so they started learning Russian and German. Unfortunately, they never actually got there. Instead they visited

Czechoslovakia where Audrey had hoped to practice her Russian. Unfortunately, the Czechs did not want to speak Russian!

On another holiday Audrey was pleased to be able to use her German. Edwin was ill so she took herself off to a chemist and carried out a conversation with the chemist to buy medicines for Edwin. Fortunately, her German was good enough that they were the right medicines and Edwin recovered!

In more recent times after Audrey and Edwin had sold their motorhome, they continued to visit France, returning many years to Carnac in Brittany, one of their favourite places. They enjoyed the superior facilities offered by French caravan resorts, in particular the more comfortable beds which gave them more restful sleep than in their motorhome!

Back at home and before her retirement Audrey was always active. She went to 'keep fit' three times a week and enjoyed learning ballroom dancing with Edwin. One of the few times Audrey was competitive was when she and Edwin played table tennis together, the matches were quite close. Whereas their weekly games of golf together, often with their neighbour and friend Arthur, were less about winning and more about enjoying the exercise and fresh air of walking around a golf course.

After her retirement Audrey particularly enjoyed her involvement with the University of the Third Age, joining a poetry group and leading history and play reading groups. She was also a keen photographer and was at one time Chairman of Southampton Camera Club.

I will now hand over to Jill (daughter) to say her tribute to her mother.

Mum was often a hard act to follow. I asked her once whether she was proud of me. She thought for a bit – then said that she was and explained exactly why. She gave me the respect of an honest, thoughtful and detailed answer. That was Mum.

Rarely demonstrative, she was always supportive – and, usually gentle, she could be fierce. I was in hospital, years ago, falling apart after surgery. She came into the ward, sat by my bed and said "I'm staying here as long as it takes. If the doctors don't like it, they'll have to drag me away!"

Mum was immensely generous with both time and money. The fridge and washing machine she gave when I was setting up home with a young family, lasted twenty years. The leather jacket I am wearing now, is the last present from her that we bought together.

Career woman as she was, Mum was never happier than knitting, sewing or baking for the family. For years, she made Christmas cakes for all of us who wanted one.

More than any other person, Mum shaped me, taught me how to be. She's there in the way I cook, the way I do housework (or don't!), in the way I approached my career and now my retirement – and in the way I brought up my totally brilliant children.

I am enormously proud of my Mum and am only now allowing myself to realise how much I have missed her for the last few years – and, particularly over this last difficult year. But her influence is still there and gives me the resilience and resolve to do more than cope – to go on and live my life. Thanks, Mum!

Stephen (son) completes the tribute to his mother:

I will keep this brief; there are time constraints on events like this. We have already heard perspectives on my mother's life and I just want to add three further anecdotes.

The first is from that category, surely compulsory, to be used whenever a person lives to a

substantial age, the “were things really like that in the past?” category. Mum talked to me occasionally about her childhood, and I recall her telling me that one of her weekly chores was to take the accumulator to the village store to replace it with a charged one, so that the radio could be listened to during the week. Yes, she really did go to the shops and come back with a week’s electricity in a bag.

Given that my recollection of my mother is of someone perhaps more at ease with her intellect than her emotions, to give balance I want to share a moment during the ending of my first marriage. I was talking to her, disappointed, confused and unhappy and she suddenly said, “I wish I could still just pick you up in my arms and tell you everything will be alright.” There was a pause, she looked me up and down, and said, “But I can’t really, can I?”

The final memory, to share, is of her delight in the arrival of her youngest grandchild. Alzheimer’s left Mum increasingly different from the person she had been, but for the first four or five years of Joseff’s life she visited him regularly in our home in South Wales and on each occasion the same thing would happen; she would largely ignore myself and Alison at the front door and walk straight into the living room, to get immediately on the floor with Joseff and his toys or to give him a hug and show him what she had brought him or to ask what he’d been up to in the nursery. I came a distant second!

I would like to thank everyone who came here today, and, in front of you all, to thank Bunny for the honourable, caring and compassionate way he looked after Mum. I find it almost impossible to believe that, given the ravages of her illness, it was only the last forty-eight hours of her life she spent being cared for by anyone else.

And finally, I hope you spotted that I used the correct “different from” rather than “different to” in this short speech, and I must let you know that I removed a split infinitive from the first draft; my Mum would have noticed! I shall miss her. Thank you.