

## CHRISTINE ANNE RAMSAY

(December 7<sup>th</sup> 1935 – February 13<sup>th</sup> 2018)

Chrissie had a rich life, and contributed immensely to her family and our community. Chrissie was born in Luton in 1935 and was an only child. She developed her love of cooking when very young. And cooking became her forté at school where her culinary creations won several prizes. This gift, together with her smile, were key elements in the beginning of her relationship with Eric, who became her lifelong friend, partner and husband. He tells the story this way:

*September 1946, 11 years old, Chrissie arrived at the Priory School Dunstable to start her first year as a senior pupil. I have an indelible memory of seeing her arrive with the other girl students. Occasional smiles were exchanged in the first two years until one day during a break Chrissie came into the art room and handed me a large slice of lemon meringue pie she had created in the domestic science class and said, "This is for you" then, blushing, quickly left the room – the start of a friendship that lasted for nearly seventy years (with one or two intervening spaces, including my army service): sixty two years of which we were married.*

*Chrissie also played the piano very well – notably another indelible memory I have was when Chrissie was 15 and I was 17 years old and Chrissie played 'Autumn Leaves' to me at her parents' home. When she finished she turned and gave me the most beautiful smile that has stayed permanently in my memory.*

Chrissie and Eric married in March 1956 and Paul was born the following year. Paul remembers from quite young being aware of one of his mother's very special qualities - her empathy. The first time was when he was about four when they were out and came across another mother and her child who Paul could see had a distinct disability. Anyway the two boys played while their mothers chatted. The boy's mother became tearful and explained that it was the first time that anyone had let their child to play with him. Chrissie just said, "Well they're children."

Looking back Paul can see how his Mum hated all discrimination and hypocrisy, and welcomed diversity and different cultures. An example of this was in the mid 1960's when, after Kenyan independence, the Asian population was pressured to leave Kenya, and a girl and boy arrived at Pauls' school from there; Chrissie befriended their mum and aunt. There was no pretention to this. For her it was just what you did.

Unlike some of his contemporaries, Chrissie ensured their home was always open and welcoming – and quite progressive and informal for the 1960s. You could just drop round -

you didn't have to make an arrangement weeks in advance. As a mother she encouraged Paul's creativity and flourishing. Paul says that whilst they didn't always agree, she was everything you would want at a time of teenage turmoil – she was positive and provided a light touch and a clear moral compass. Paul also remembers his Mum's wonderful sense of humour which shone through at all times.

As we have heard, Chrissie always had an interest in good food. At a time when most of us were eating white bread all the time, Chrissie was buying wholemeal. She had developed her cooking interests and repertoire and was an enthusiastic follower of Elizabeth David, a cookery writer who brought the ideas of Mediterranean cooking to the UK. And she was innovative too herself – as Paul says she had a natural ability. She taught him to look after himself and especially how to cook.

Now let us turn to Chrissie's life in the community, to which she gave so much of her time and energy. Chrissie was employed as a teaching assistant at the Collett School, a school for children with learning difficulties. The headmaster soon realised how relaxed the children were when she talked to them, compared to the more authoritative teachers. In fact there was one young lad who had never ever spoken to a teacher, but after Chrissie started talking to him about his favourite subject, football, he started talking and just would not stop. As a result she was sent on a short child therapy course and then worked with children therapeutically. So by the time she retired from that work, many of the children she had helped were able to face their future lives in a calm and positive way. When she left, the school gave her a small party and, knowing Chrissie's love of nature and the countryside, presented her with a book about British birds which she treasured.

She also worked for a while as a carer at the Copse in Redbourn, a home for retired missionaries. Not being of any religious faith herself, she was vetted rather closely before finally being employed. Twelve months later the home was sold privately and the missionaries dispersed to various other homes in the UK.

Chrissie undertook a considerable number of voluntary activities that benefited our community and in fact our world as a whole. For instance she frequently helped the staff in the Oxfam shop in Hemel Hempstead Old Town and was involved in a number of fundraising activities for them. She helped a friend who managed a children's nursery in Boxmoor as a nursery assistant for over 18 months until they obtained a full-time assistant. And with another friend she joined with a group of other ladies to help raise funds for the St Francis Hospice in Berkhamsted. She also assisted with the Redbourn Stroke Club and for a long time with the Redbourn day centre for the aged held in the St Mary's Church annexe.

Chrissie was always very active through Paul's childhood and teenage years and beyond, right up to her mid-sixties. Her life was always busy. On top of helping others in whatever role or roles she had at the time, she would be walking the dog, making lovely food and working in the garden. She especially loved gardening and the weekend walks in the

country side and along the canal. She always looked forward to the camping and walking holidays with Eric and Paul and Kerry their cocker spaniel - in the Lake District, Wales, and many other parts of the country.

Then she was rushed into hospital with a severe hepatitis problem. Fortunately this was treated successfully, but in the next year or so she began to feel the early stages of osteoarthritis, which sadly reduced the distances she used to walk and unfortunately it restricted her ability to garden in the way she had done before. Her hip replacement gave her complete relief from pain, but then she had some heart problems and despite having a pacemaker fitted her activities remained rather limited. But she accepted it all rather stoically without complaint; she ignored her problems and certainly did not take up the life of an invalid. Not able to walk the fifteen miles or so she was able to only a few years earlier, Chrissie still walked as much as she could until dependent on a wheel chair to travel any distance. Chrissie eventually enjoyed going by car into the countryside and using the wheelchair along the paths she used to walk. Chrissie loved the garden she and Eric worked on together and the wild life it attracted, and spent many hours appreciating the plants and flowers and observing the antics of the birds in day time and the hedgehogs at night.

Rebecca reads an extract from Paradise Gardens by Geoffrey Hamilton.

*Once you become used to seeing yourself as a small part of the great pattern of nature rather than the controller of it, once you get into the rhythm of the seasons, once you begin to feel the heartbeat of the natural world, your life will take on a different meaning and your garden will become a precious sanctuary – a paradise.*

*Don't underestimate the therapeutic value of gardening. It's the one area I know where we can all use our creative talents to make a truly satisfying work of art. Every individual, with thought, patience and a large portion of help from nature, has it in them to create their own private paradise: truly a thing of beauty and a joy forever.*

And these words are so true of her approach to nature and life in general.

**Mary Porter**