

Tribute

Cynthia Edith Taylor was born on 19th May 1922 to parents Stafford and Dorothy in Liverpool. She had an elder sister Joan, brother John and a younger sister Doreen with whom Cynthia was particularly close. Their father was a master baker who ran the family firm of shops and factory in Liverpool.

Cynthia went to the Merchant Taylors Girls' School in Liverpool from the age of five and was awarded a 'Harrison' scholarship on entry to the senior school. She was a very bright girl and a good sportswoman, being captain of both the tennis and hockey teams.

Cynthia went to Bedford College, part of London University, in 1940 but was evacuated to Cambridge where she gained her Upper Second degree in Geography in 1943. Whilst in London, Cynthia had taken on the role of fire warden and the family often recall Cynthia's story of asking an Air Raid Precaution warden what she could do to help and being told, 'Stand there and pass water!' During this time Cynthia was awarded an axe as a prize for leading a team of civilians in a fire fighting competition. In later years Cynthia's children were led to believe by their father that this was an award for bravery received for standing on the top of Nelson's column and singlehandedly repelling bombs!

Cynthia was called up and directed to work in the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries but after six months, and at her request, she transferred to a newly formed Department of Town and Country Planning, for which she had a particular interest and which was set up to prepare legislation needed for post-war reconstruction of the country. As an assistant principal, she was in charge of the distribution of wellington boots and 'glass' cloths to different counties in the south-west, much to the satisfaction of the farmers who received them. In her role of secretary to a sub-committee of relevant departments, Cynthia learned much about the arguments involved around compensation and betterment matters.

After the war Cynthia's work impressed the then new Labour Minister of Town and Country Planning, Lewis Silkin, who in a disputed planning application had written, 'I agree with Miss Taylor. This appeal should be allowed.' She was then asked to become his note-taker on visits to the Midlands and the South-west.

Having been de-mobbed, Cynthia now had to retrain and she undertook a two-year course in Social Science at the London School of Economics followed by a one year training in probation work.

It was here that she met George Newton and they both moved to Manchester to become probation officers and marriage guidance counsellors, the first of their type.

In June 1950 Cynthia and George were married in Liverpool and they lived in Daresbury Road in Manchester where Diana was born in 1952. The new family moved to Hampstead and later to Queensbury in London, where Michael was born in 1955 and Malcolm in 1958.

In 1964, once all the children were at school, Cynthia took up paid work again and used to cycle to work in Harrow where for seven years she worked in the Child Guidance clinic.

The three children remember their childhood years as being very happy and although they were not materially well off, they didn't want for anything. Holidays were largely spent in the UK in caravans or guest houses and there was one foreign holiday in France. Cynthia was, of course, the great organiser of the family and has certainly passed this trait on to Diana.

Diana, as the eldest child, remembers her parents as being very liberal-minded and she is proud that as a family they were able to discuss absolutely anything, no subject was taboo. As a lecturer, the children's father sometime invited students to dinner who came from different backgrounds and ethnicities and they in turn reciprocated with invitations to their homes.

Michael remembers the hours of teaching and support given to him to help him to read and overcome mild dyslexia, and the hours on the Priory Lodge lawn spent with Cynthia bowling over arm cricket balls so that he could perfect his batting technique.

Malcolm experienced mum as a wonderful source of advice and experience during his early days of work.

In 1971 the family moved to Bradford-on-Avon for George to take up the role of Director of Social Services for Wiltshire. Cynthia worked at 'Starfield' which was a reception centre for children coming into care. George was awarded an OBE and invited to Buckingham Palace with Cynthia, Michael and Malcolm. George's honour was a source of great pride for the family.

Tragically George died in 1978 when Cynthia was only fifty-six and although she is remembered by the family as coping stoically with the bereavement, she found solace in taking long walks along the river and on Westbury White Horse with the family's beautiful and intuitive golden Labrador.

It was during this period that Cynthia became very involved with the housing and integration of some of the many people fleeing Vietnam after the war there. They were known then as the 'Boat People', that mode of evacuation being the only way they were able to leave the country. He is one of the many people grateful to Cynthia for her care and support then and over many years. She has always regarded her with great affection and still regards her as a mother figure.

From 1980 and for the next twenty years Cynthia relished in the birth of her seven grandchildren, Nick, Jenny, Tom, Sam, Cora, Elizabeth and Lewey. The beautiful garden at Priory Lodge, Cynthia's pride and joy, which she tended and also opened to the public on occasions, became a wonderful playground and haven of adventure for the children. They had dens under the yew tree, a massive rockery and woods to explore and an annual Easter egg hunt which was always a highlight in the family's calendar. When Diana, already a teacher, retrained to work with the under-fives, Cynthia came down to Somerset to care for Jenny one day a week and they had

great fun together: baking cakes, making grass dens and walking the dog, memories held in great affection by Jenny.

Cynthia taught remedial reading classes, at Erlestoke Prison for young offenders and when retired she started the Adult Literacy Service in West Wiltshire, being the representative at meetings for the South-west. She was Chair of Wiltshire Life Society, originally based at Avebury Barn, did much work for Amnesty International, was a member of a reading group, and had interests in Lackham Agricultural College and the Bradford-on-Avon Preservation Trust.

In her eighties Cynthia moved into a flat in Bradford-on-Avon and became a volunteer coordinator for the Link community car service. The first of her great-grandchildren, Joshua, arrived in 2002.

Sadly, Cynthia suffered a mild stroke in February 2012 and moved to 'Highfield House' to be nearer to Diana. Always wanting to be useful, Cynthia became the focus of a group of girls from a school in Bruton, who were engaged in a social project. Cynthia's listening skills were well used and probably provided the girls with caring understanding and experienced advice, for which they were very thankful. Cynthia also became besotted with her second great-grandchild Evie, born in 2013, whose development she was fascinated and entertained by. Cynthia had spent her entire life caring for people, following their development and progress and having a huge impact on so many people's lives.

In old age, this inability, to 'be useful', whether a fact or merely perceived by others, is a great burden and sorrow and Cynthia suffered from this. She had long been a supporter of Dignity in Dying and had always wanted to be as independent as possible and in control of the way she lived, and the way she died. Despite the excellent care at the 'Castle House Nursing Home' in Keinton Mandeville, and the love and dedication from her family, Cynthia very sadly experienced the end of life that she had campaigned and continued to rail against. Her legacy however, is a hugely positive one, an example of a can-do-attitude, one of understanding and consideration for others, and for which, those who were touched by her humanity, are immensely grateful.