

**Dorothy EASTY : 5<sup>th</sup> October 1924 – 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018**

**Tribute: Jill Easty - her daughter**

My mother, Dorothy, was born in 1924 in Amble, Northumberland. She was the youngest child of Charles Usher, a pharmacist who ran his own chemist's shop which the family lived above, and Maria, who kept the home and brought up their three daughters. Like her older sisters, Muriel and Brenda, Dorothy gained a place at the Duchess' School, in Alnwick, and showed an early aptitude in sciences, as well as languages and music.

Despite the school not being keen on Dorothy sitting science A levels, as they felt she should leave school and help with the war effort, my grandfather insisted she be allowed to, and she subsequently studied Chemistry by means of a wartime bursary at University College London. After gaining a 1<sup>st</sup> class Honours degree, and a PhD, she then became more biologically orientated, and worked as a Cancer Research Scientist for the rest of her career, becoming a Senior Lecturer in Cell Biology at the Institute of Cancer Research.

She welcomed collaboration with fellow scientists from places as diverse as Italy, Romania, Russia, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan and the USA, and was responsible for organising meetings of the Study Group for Human Tumour Cultures which were held all over Europe. She enjoyed encouraging young scientists, and invented various methods of improving cell culture techniques in order to study the behaviour of cancer cells, which helped in the development of treatments to combat the spread of cancer tumours. She published many papers on the subject of tumour spread, and in 1967 her first book 'The Cancer Cell in Vitro' was published, followed in 1970 by her second, much larger book, 'Cell Biology', which at that time became the leading textbook on this subject and was translated into many other languages. I can still vividly remember her writing this at the dining room table each night after the supper dishes had been cleared away. She did all this whilst working part-time, so that she could spend more time with her children and in the home.

Dorothy met Gerald Easty, another chemist at UCL, when they found themselves sharing a postgraduate laboratory. They shared a love of film and music, and quickly became friends. They were married in 1948 in Corbridge, Northumberland, where her parents had by then moved to and where her father had opened a second chemist's shop. Gerry was also a Cancer Research Scientist, who became Head of Department at the Institute of Cancer Research. Gerry and Dorothy worked together in the same laboratory for 28 years until Gerry retired. Their son Anthony, my brother Tony, was born in 1952 and I followed 6 years' later. By this time they had moved to Mill Hill, in north London, where they lived until 1976, when they moved to Streatham following their laboratories being relocated to the Royal Marsden Hospital site in Sutton.

When young, Dorothy was an accomplished tennis player, becoming Women's Tennis Champion at London University. Later on, she pursued her love of languages, particularly French and German, and even revived her knowledge of Latin by doing crosswords in that language!

She enjoyed gardening, and was knowledgeable about plant species. She had a lasting interest in all things biological and zoological, and loved reading and watching films about wildlife and the natural world. She had a deep appreciation for music, film, art and literature, and enjoyed introducing her children to these, although this was never compulsory. She always thought it important to allow and encourage whatever genuine interests Tony and I had. A highlight of my childhood week was to be taken on Saturdays by my parents for my ballet class whilst Tony had his violin lesson, and then going as a family to Louis' café in Hampstead afterwards. Dorothy enjoyed knitting and sewing, making several very special party dresses for me as a child. She was a great cook, and I still rely on a number of her recipes.

Dorothy and Gerry were perhaps at their most happy in their small village house in the Languedoc region of south-west France, which they purchased in 1973. They spent many happy holidays there with family and friends, and longer periods after they had retired. They enjoyed walking in the beautiful unspoilt countryside around the village, and became friendly with their neighbours, at times helping them with their grape harvest. After her retirement Dorothy volunteered at the Streatham Oxfam shop, and regularly supported the Streatham Youth and Community Trust, which

runs activities for disadvantaged children. Dorothy was always very proud of the achievements of her children and grandchildren. She enjoyed visiting and helping with her grandchildren as much as possible. She and Gerry were able to continue to enjoy their love of music, especially Mozart, by going to concerts and exhibitions.

In latter years as Gerry's health failed, Dorothy devoted herself to caring for him, sometimes at the expense of her own health. After Gerry's death in 2011, Dorothy felt his loss keenly, although she never once complained, and in her usual steely way declined to stay with her family even for one night, saying that the sooner she got used to being alone, the better. It was her fervent wish to remain in her home for the rest of her life, and as she became frailer, the family was able to support her in doing so, with the help of her wonderful carers.

Dorothy was able to die peacefully in her home, as she had wished, with her family by her side.

Dorothy was kind, tolerant, and full of empathy for others, although once she had made her mind up about something that would generally be that. She believed in equality for all, and did not appreciate pretentiousness or hypocrisy. She had a great sense of humour. I am immensely proud of her achievements in her career. Most of all, she loved Tony, me and all the family unconditionally. She taught me so many good ways to live, particularly not to sweat over the small things, and to enjoy life in the present. I consider myself very lucky to have had her as my mother.

### **Tony Easty - her son**

Jill has given you a wonderful sense of Mum's life and her accomplishments. For my tribute to her, I would like to share with you a few anecdotes which for me capture her spirit of adventure, her love of life, her caring for others, and her strong sense of fairness and justice for all.

I am told that when I was just a few months old, Mum took me to the local health clinic to be weighed and examined. She said she was worried that I

wasn't growing quickly enough. It turned out that I was doing just fine but Mum herself had lost several pounds since the previous visit. She was told to go home and spend more time on herself.

Jill has mentioned Mum's athletic prowess and she was very game for new experiences. As an example, Mum and Dad used to drive up to Northumberland to visit her parents at Christmas, and in the early days they had a three-wheeler called a Bond minicar which was basically a small motorbike with two seats and some metal wrapped around it. One year in the early fifties, they were close to her parents' house at Corbridge when the very small tires on the car got stuck in the snow. Mum jumped out and helped to push the car the last few miles into Corbridge. Truly the golden age of motoring, and Mum to the rescue.

In 1960, we took our first summer holiday abroad, to Les Lecques, in southern France. The many different sights and smells were a wonderful revelation for us, and soon after, Mum and Dad started to cook using some of the ingredients we had met on our holidays, which were now becoming available in London. They were great cooks, and just like Jill, I still use some of their recipes, and am passing them down to my children, too.

Our first cat was Alec, a large and very handsome animal with a strong personality. In summer, his favourite spot was sitting on the manhole cover in the middle of the intersection between our road and a side road. One day, Mum was walking by when she saw a woman who had stopped her car in the middle of the road and was saying, "Shoo, shoo pussy", leaving Alec completely unmoved. She said to Mum, "I am appealing to his better nature", and Mum replied in a flash, "He's our cat and I'm afraid to say he hasn't got a better nature".

Mum and Dad introduced us to music, art, literature and film, and really gave us the legacy of a lifetime's enjoyment of the arts. Mum was a polymath who did very well at everything she tackled, set high standards for herself and expected a lot of others, too, but never boasted about her achievements. She was intimidating at crossword puzzles, loved Sudoku and on one visit she had me helping with her Latin crosswords, although as I recall, she got 90% of the clues herself.

Jill has said that Mum was great at encouraging us to develop our own interests, and I have to agree. I was one of those kids who loved to take things apart, to find out what made them go. At one time or another, I took apart many of the appliances round the home but was often less successful at putting them back together again.

Looking back, Mum and Dad were extraordinarily tolerant of this, but I finally went too far when by mistake I spilled dilute nitric acid all over the coal-burning stove in the dining room while etching copper off a circuit board. It etched off the stove enamel instead! It was made clear to me that I should focus on less dangerous pursuits.

Mum was a gifted scientist, and her textbook, Cell Biology, was a standard university text. I have met many people who remember using her book as soon as they hear my family name. She was a gifted and natural writer, researcher and teacher.

For many years when Jill and I were young, Mum worked three days a week and was paid a half salary with no benefits. She tackled this inequity head-on by joining the union ASTMS (the Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staffs), becoming a shop steward which enabled her to negotiate with management for salary and benefit changes, including the introduction of pensions for part-time staff, almost all of whom were women. Typically, she did this without ever raising her voice. She simply used her formidable intellect and powers of reasoning to convince others that her cause was just. She would look you in the eye and out-reason you, and you knew you had no option but to acknowledge she was right. She would have been a wonderful arbitrator!

The last few years were not easy for Mum as her health gradually declined. She was adamant that she wished to remain at home, and I would like to give heartfelt thanks to those who made it possible for her to live her final years on her own terms; Jill and Graham, who supported her tirelessly throughout, the carers from Home Instead, the District Nurses and the St. Christopher's Home Care Team, all of whom did so much to help her

remain as comfortable as possible.

Finally, I must say that she loved her five grandchildren fiercely, always asking after them and wanting to know what each one was doing and where they were in the world. In Beth's and my recent visit with her, she spoke of them all.

After my Dad's death, I found that things he had said and done came back to me often, and that this was a great comfort since through this, he lived on for me. I have already started to find this is so with Mum too, and so, "Mum, thanks for everything! We won't forget you!"

### **Dorothy's grandchildren: Austin and Lewis Laylee**

On behalf of my brother Austin and myself, I would like to share a few fond memories that we have of Grannie. As we have always lived near her, we were lucky enough to see Grannie every week as we grew up and developed a special bond with her.

Most people who knew Grannie are aware that football was not one of her passions, however having two obsessed grandchildren, she would come and watch us play junior football on Tooting Bec Common in the cold and mud and cheer us on. She would also ensure that she checked the football results in the news so that she could chat about it with us the next day.

Something she was more naturally interested in was the French language. She was patient in helping me in my preparation for my French GCSE, and I feel her aptitude for languages has been passed on to my brother.

As well as being a loving Grannie, she is a role model for both me and Austin, not just for what she achieved in her life but in how she treated others. We will both miss her dearly, but she will stay with us for the rest of our lives.

**Daniel, Laura, Anna Easty**

She will be remembered with love by her three grandchildren in Canada; Anna, Laura and Daniel, who, though they could not be here today, will be thinking of her, and of all of those there.