

Eileen Walker
31st January 1926 – 10th January 2016

Eileen was born on 31st January 1926. Her parents were Isabella and William Phillips and she had three sisters – Edna and Brenda, who were older than her, and Freda who was younger. Eileen was particularly close to Brenda and Freda, who were nearest to her in age – sadly they can't be here today but their children are with us.

Eileen was very close to her father, William, who was a market gardener and who had been very badly traumatised during the First World War. She grew up in Stapleton, which was then a village outside Bristol, where she loved exploring the countryside and swimming in the River Frome. She developed a life-long interest in nature, learning the names of wild flowers and trees and getting a lot of pleasure from recognising and remembering many different wild bird songs.

As a girl and a young woman Eileen was known for her beautiful red hair. She was the only one of the four sisters to have red hair so it must have made her really stand out in the family.

Eileen was always keen to learn – in fact this was a bit of a catch phrase of hers throughout her life – but her schooling was interrupted by the Second World War, which broke out when she was 13. At the age of 17 she joined the Land Army and was sent to work on a farm at Upton-on-Severn where she spent the next 3 ½ years. If you look at your Service Sheets you'll see a lovely picture of Eileen in her land girl uniform. She made some good friends during this period, including Iris, with whom she stayed in touch until recent years. She had many funny stories about her years as a land girl – and would entertain the family by telling them about the Italian and German Prisoners of War, who apparently spent inordinate amounts of time grooming their hair, and remembering the time when she sat on a tractor, got the accelerator wedged and then crashed it.

After the war ended Eileen went to work in Baileys, which was a department store on the Gloucester Road. She worked as a cashier, standing in a booth in the centre of the store, taking payments and sending money shooting around on wires to the appropriate department. She met Kinzie at Baileys who remembers being in awe of Eileen's lovely slim figure as well as, of course, her beautiful red hair.

Kinzie and Eileen became lifelong friends and Kinzie remembers a time when she and Eileen were walking along the top of a hill pushing Kinzie's children in a high pram (as they were called in those days). One of the wheels came off and rolled down the hill. Kinzie and Eileen were laughing so much that they weren't able to go after it. Fortunately a passer-by retrieved it for them, although no-one can remember who actually fixed the pram.

It was whilst she was at Baileys that Eileen met Reg Metherall. Reg and Eileen married and set up home in Bristol, where Hazel and Heather were born, before moving to Kelston, where they lived for a number of years. Later they returned to Bristol and settled in Cotham. Eileen gave up work to be at home with her daughters but later became a dinner lady at Hazel and Heather's primary school. During this time she met and became friends with Sue, Wendy and Audrey – friendships that lasted for the rest of her life.

Eileen was a great home maker. She was both practical and creative and taught herself to paint and decorate. Wendy remembers how homely the house in Cotham always looked, especially when the table was laid with attractive crockery ready for when the girls came home for tea. However the decorating didn't always go to plan as Eileen once mistakenly tried to come down the ladder on the wrong side and fell flat on her back.

Eileen was very good with her needle and made skirts for Hazel and Heather which were often hand sewn. Audrey remembers Eileen wearing beautiful dresses that she had made herself. Eileen didn't stop at dressmaking but also tried her hand at collage. Hazel and Heather remember a stunning felt collage of the Pied Piper of Hamlein, made by their mother, which hung in the family home for many years. Eileen was also a great knitter and made the family many lovely sweaters and cardigans.

Audrey and Eileen went to art classes together. They used to take a flask of coffee with them and do so much chatting and laughing that all of the other students wanted to be on their table.

In 1966 the family moved to Claremont Avenue and, for a while, Eileen had a job as chauffeur to an artist. He was obviously a larger than life character as Eileen used to entertain the family with stories about him; sadly these have been lost in the mists of time. Eileen used her skills with colour and design on her plants and created a lovely garden at Claremont Avenue.

Although Eileen was a good all round cook her speciality was pastry. On one occasion she served the family a chicken pie, but when she cut into it it turned out to be apple. I hope it wasn't served with potatoes and gravy!!

As the girls grew older Eileen was able to think about developing a career of her own and, in 1973, she enrolled to train as a psychiatric nurse. She finished her training in 1975 and went to work at Barrow Gurney hospital going on to become an "acting Sister". During her time at Barrow Gurney she met Odile, who became another close friend.

As well as running the home and working shifts at the hospital, Eileen loved to walk Skippy and Pippa, the family's cairn terriers. Her nieces, Pauline and Gail, remember joining her on some of these walks and said they were certainly LONG walks!. Eileen particularly loved taking the dogs

to Ashton Court and onto Durdham Downs. She also found time for home brewing and made extremely alcoholic home-made wine – mainly because she always put in far more sugar than the recipe required. Eileen was a bit of a party girl and liked a glass of wine. There were many happy evenings with family and friends enjoying a meal and wine around the breakfast room table, or visiting Howard's Restaurant, which was one of the family's favourite places to eat.

Reg and Eileen separated and Eileen met Laurie Walker. They married very quietly in Taunton with just a few friends present. By now Heather was married to Tim and *his* parents, Derek and Eileen (another Eileen) had become friendly with Eileen and Laurie. They remember receiving a call from Eileen and Laurie asking them if they would like to meet up whilst they were on holiday in France. When they arrived they discovered that Laurie and Eileen were on their honeymoon. They treated Derek and Eileen to an evening at Portoson and a picnic the next day near Mont St Michel.

Laurie and Eileen settled at "Trotts" in Ash Priors, where they lived happily for many years. Eileen carried on nursing, working at Tone Vale Hospital. Laurie's children – Carol, Andrew and Elaine – became a part of Eileen's family and later so did their children, who used to visit.

Meanwhile Eileen had become a grandmother to Ben, Matt and Anna. She would visit them in Weston most weeks and stay for a night or two. Although she wasn't an overly demonstrative person she was always very generous. When visiting she would arrive with a freshly baked cake, or some other home-made goodies, and would always treat the family to a fish and chip supper washed down with a glass or two of wine.

When Hazel and Heather were growing up Eileen used to watch "Top of the Pops". She loved the Rolling Stones, the Beatles, Tom Jones and many other bands and enjoyed dancing (or bopping) to the music. Later she got into bands like Abba and Hot Chocolate. Anna, Ben and Matt remember coming home from school or college and finding an answer machine message. When they played it back the room would be filled with the sound of Abba or Hot Chocolate and they would know that their grandmother had been enjoying a glass of wine, preparing her evening meal and listening to the radio.

We're going to take a break now and listen to one of Eileen's favourite pieces of music, and one that she loved to dance to – it's Abba's "Dancing Queen" and it's going to be played by Ali Blasdale. (Note – I am a bit surprised that you've chosen to have Ali play this as I thought that the point was that it was the Abba version that your mum enjoyed. However this is, of course up to you to decide).

Music: "Dancing Queen" played by Ali Blasdale

Laurie and Eileen were very happy in Ash Priors and made many friends. They enjoyed the many activities and social events that went on in the

village. Once retired Eileen acquired a dog called Tommy. She and Laurie belonged to a local walking group so Tommy enjoyed many a long walk, although I'm told that Laurie wasn't so keen. However Pauline and Gail remember many lovely long walks around Ash Priors when they were visiting. Eileen got a lot of pleasure from the various dogs who shared her life and would always ask the kitchen to prepare a doggie bag of scraps to take home whenever she was out for a meal.

Eileen enjoyed her garden at "Trotts" and could often be found wandering around the village taking cuttings, with or without permission. She continued to be creative with her plants and flowers and would always arrive with a beautiful posy if she came to visit. She and Laurie also enjoyed doing the Telegraph Crossword together and this was a part of their daily routine.

In Ash Priors Eileen expanded her home brew repertoire to include Sloe Gin. It was apparently lovely, but she was very protective of it and only the chosen few (and they were very few) actually got to taste it. I'm told that Hazel's partner Brian was once privileged to see a bottle, but not to sample the contents.

Laurie and Eileen enjoyed travelling and shared an interest in archaeology. As well as local archaeology their passion took them on several trips to Egypt and the River Nile. They also enjoyed cruising, travelling to the Mediterranean from Dubrovnik, the Norwegian Fjords and the Caribbean. They both loved Switzerland where they holidayed several times, staying at Grindelwald near the Jungfrau.

Laurie died in 2004 and was buried in Ash Priors churchyard. Eileen stayed on at Trotts, walking her dog Minnie, tending her garden and continuing to do the Telegraph Crossword. Although her neighbours were very supportive she didn't find it easy being on her own and missed the companionship of marriage. In her early 80s she went on a holiday to the Galapagos, but found it hard work because of the uneven terrain.

Eileen became a very early riser. Anyone staying with her would be woken with a cup of tea at 6.30 and a query as to why *they* hadn't got up to bring *her* tea whilst she was still in bed.

Gradually Eileen found it increasingly difficult to live on her own, even with the support of her family, neighbours and carers. She fought against moving to Dunkirk House but eventually acknowledged that it was necessary. She moved in in June 2013 where she continued to enjoy music. In 2015 she broke her hip and never really recovered from this. She died, peacefully in her sleep, on January 10th.

Eileen believed that she'd had a good life and that life had been good to her. She was intelligent, dependable and thoughtful. She could also be stubborn and plain spoken with an unshakeable belief in her own infallibility. She made a number of close friendships which lasted a lifetime and was a much loved member of her family. She was often at

the centre of whatever gathering she was part of with her cheeky nature and her quick wit. Eileen was a positive and practical person who made the most of her life and who took care of the people who mattered to her. This is how she will be remembered.