

Ray Beresford

4th October 1933 – 1st June 2019

Ray was a Derbyshire lad, born in Long Eaton to Elsie and Albert Beresford. He was the youngest of three, his brother Eugene was five years older and his sister Madge, eighteen months older. It was tough for Elsie and Albert bringing up three children before and during the Second World War, with both parents working. But it was a happy family and there was much laughter in the Beresford household, especially as Ray's father Albert was a practical joker, a 'gift' which he passed on to Ray!

Madge remembers their childhood well, especially as she was often in charge of her younger brother. As children they were encouraged to be independent and find out about life in their own way. Ray quickly grew to being his 'own person', knowing what he wanted and what he didn't want.

If he got into a strop about something, he had a habit of going into the hallway of their home in Berkeley Avenue and taking one of the hats off of the coat pegs and proceeded to jump up and down on it! If anyone found their hat flattened they certainly knew they were in the doghouse with Ray! Once, like children do, Ray decided life was not fair and he was going to leave home. Much to the dismay of Madge, their parents helped Ray pack his bag and off he went. Madge had to be reassured by their mother and father that Ray would come back, because he would be hungry! And sure enough, it didn't take long for him to return, asking what there was to eat for his tea! Despite these little outbursts, Madge said Ray was a lovable and generous child.

When Ray was about three, Elsie and Albert took pity on a young child Johnny Walker, whose mother had died, and they gave Johnny a home for a few years. Ray was delighted as the two boys were of a similar age and they quickly became close, more like brothers than friends. Their friendship lasted for all of Johnny's life.

Fortunately, Ray's childhood was not particularly disrupted by the Second World War. He continued his schooling but decided he did not want to take his school exams, as he did not want to continue his education. Ray always said that he really wanted to become a cabinet maker, but this was not to be. His grandmother, Grandma Beresford, had a lot of influence in the young Ray's fate at that time, when she secured him an apprenticeship with a local electrician, Mr Sharp. This was a good trade to have, especially after the war years, but when Mr Sharp's business failed, once again Grandma Beresford came to the fore. She helped him get a job at the Royal Crown Derby factory which was near to her home. Ray lived with Grandma Beresford during the week, returning home at weekends until he got married and moved to West Hallam where he became a proud father to his two daughters Karen and Gail.

Ray's final job in Derbyshire was at the British Celanese factory, a subsidiary of Courtaulds. Karen and Gail remember their father bringing home reams of nylon fabric, which at the time was coming into fashion, and it came in useful on many occasions.

As a child Ray had been made to learn ballroom dancing, probably influenced by his Grandma Beresford! He enjoyed dancing and tried to teach Karen and Gail how to jive, but they never quite got it and left their Dad to be the dancing expert. He could even dance the Samba!

One year at the village carnival when Karen was Carnival Queen, Gail was sat on another float. Gail noticed a strangely clad woman wearing a wig and bright red lipstick, riding a bicycle and rattling a tin, collecting money. As the woman came alongside the float, Gail, to her shock horror, realised it was their Dad! He hadn't told them he was going to turn up,

dressed as a woman and looking a right sight!

In the early sixties Ray passed his driving test and became the proud owner of an ancient green AC car, which had a running board, big wheel arches and rather tattered cream leather seats. Karen and Gail remember the first time he took them out, just after he had passed his driving test. They were a bit alarmed at the way the car kept jumping forward, it wasn't a very smooth drive. Their Dad explained it was because he had put 'kangaroo petrol' into the tank! The girls loved going out and about in the car, particularly enjoying picnics at Woolaton Hall.

In the early seventies Ray decided to move to Gosport with Gail, to join his parents who had already moved down and to be near Karen, who was living with her Aunt Madge. Ray was successful in securing a position with the Department of Environment where he worked for nearly twenty years, gaining several promotions over the years. His work involved helping to maintain the many naval bases and married quarters in Gosport and surrounding areas. He enjoyed this work and got on well with his work colleagues who quickly learned that Ray was a practical joker!

Perhaps one of Ray's funniest pranks, was on one of his workmates at HMS Dolphin. His workmate had bought some eggs from another work colleague. Without anyone knowing, Ray took the eggs, boiled them and put all six hard-boiled eggs back into the egg box. When his workmate got home he could not understand why the eggs could not be cracked open for cooking. Ray was in big trouble the next day, but all his workmates loved the joke!

When Ray and Gail first moved to Gosport they lived with Ray's parents until 1976, when Ray moved to a flat on the tenth floor of Harbour Towers. It was here he made one of the most decisive moves of his life. Ray was sat in the foyer of the flats waiting for someone to come and buy his car, when he saw Heather passing through the foyer. There was something about her that caught his eye and he decided to talk to her. In that short time, he decided to ask Heather out for a drink. Even though his suggestion of meeting at 8 o'clock was a bit late in the evening for Heather as she was used to having quiet nights in, she accepted!

Within three months Ray and Heather were married, enjoying a quiet wedding on a wet, cold February day, but brightened by a rainbow that appeared as they came out of the ceremony. The couple had not planned to go on a honeymoon that day, so they went back to the flat. That evening turned out to be rather dramatic. A fire started in a neighbouring flat and everyone was supposed to get out of the flats, but Ray and Heather decided to stay put. Their evening was spent looking out of the window at all of the kerfuffle of the fire engines and people coming and going. When things had quietened down, they turned away from the window and to their horror, saw that their wedding cake and worse still, their brand-new cream carpet, were covered in soot! Ray and Heather eventually did have a short honeymoon, when they enjoyed a lovely long weekend in Lymington.

Later that year, Ray and Heather bought their house in Queen's Crescent, which became their life-long home, full of warmth and laughter. Ray was always looking for ways to improve the house. With Heather's help they built an extension to the bungalow and added a conservatory. After he retired, in his late fifties, Ray was able to fulfil his ambition of trying his hand at being a cabinet maker. Buying all the best tools, he built a suite of bedroom furniture in mahogany. The furniture was beautifully crafted and finished off to the highest standards. So high, that he never let Heather use polish on them!

After Ray's retirement he had plenty of time to look after the house whilst Heather continued to work. He was very happy to help around the house and loved to cook. Ray had learned to cook when the children were small, and he was working shifts. After retirement Ray

expanded his repertoire, trying out new recipes especially curries, which he made from scratch with all the spices and herbs prepared authentically. Fortunately, he did not prepare kidneys in port wine too often, as although a favourite of his, along with stuffed hearts, black pudding and pressed tongue, the kidneys were not particularly enjoyed by others. Ray's beer brewing was more acceptable, but not for the feint-hearted and he became an expert in bread making, which meant he and Heather did not have to buy bread for many years.

Although Ray was not one for going out to the Civil Service social occasions or big parties, he loved to spend an evening with close friends. Naomi and Eric and Lillian and Gerald would be invited, or Ray and Heather would go to their houses and enjoy good food, drink and of course, a lot of laughter.

Over the years Ray and Heather enjoyed many holidays, often visiting Ray's friend Johnny Walker and his wife Anne, in Middlesborough. One year the four of them went to Spain for a holiday. But for Ray it was their holidays to Greece that were so special, a highlight he looked forward to every year. He and Heather would go as many times as possible, sometimes visiting more than once in a year. Ray loved the Greek sunlight, the Greek food and especially the warmth and generosity of the Greek people. Ray had a reputation of befriending Taverna owners, and as a consequence he and Heather would be offered complimentary drinks, all the better if it were gin and tonic, Ray's favourite tippie! One special holiday, Ray and Heather spent three wonderful weeks in the Seychelles, a memorable holiday they both talked about many times in later years.

When not on holiday, Ray was always pottering about the house and garden. He was an avid reader, a whizz at completing crossword puzzles and jigsaws, hated losing at Scrabble and although not particularly interested in sport, he joined a gym, went swimming, loved saunas and took up Tai-Chi for a while. Ray often listened to Radio 2, being one of Terry Wogan's 'TOGs', 'Terry's Old Geezers'. Ray particularly enjoyed Wogan reading the 'Janet and John' stories, laughing at the innuendos and at Wogan himself laughing as he struggled to read all the characters using his many voices.

In his retirement Ray had more time to visit Karen and her family who lived in Cornwall, and enjoyed having fun with his grandchildren Lorne and Lianne. When Gail's son Luke was born, living nearby, Ray and Heather were able to take a more active role as grandparents and again much fun and laughter was had by all. Ray was a fabulous grandpa, or Gramps or sometimes Grumps, as he was called. Ray would spend many hours watching Tom and Jerry or Wallace and Gromit with Luke. When he was staying at Karen's or Gail's, the grandchildren never let Ray and Heather have a lie-in. They always found their way into their grandparent's bedroom, larking about and normally getting tickled by Ray, until they couldn't take any more!

Of course, Ray was always up to his little tricks and practical jokes, which everyone enjoyed. When Karen and Gail were young he often would make an 'apple-pie' bed, leaving them in fits of laughter as they undid the knots of the bed linen and retrieved what he had stuffed inside. Sometimes Karen and Gail got their own back. For Ray's sixtieth birthday they had a photograph of him as a youngster made into a large 60-piece jigsaw. At the time the photograph was taken there was a duplicate photograph, which somehow had captured Ray showing some of his 'private parts'. Karen and Gail sent their Dad each piece of the jigsaw, one by one, leaving the last piece for his actual birthday. This last piece was either going to be the piece that revealed all, or the acceptable photograph that you see on the back page of the Order of Service leaflet!

When it was Karen's fortieth birthday unbeknown to Karen, Ray and Heather had gone down to Cornwall and were staying in a local B&B. When Karen woke up on the morning of her birthday, outside her house covering the grassy bank she saw a huge sheet, with 'Happy

40th Birthday Karen' written on it, surrounded by balloons blowing in the breeze. At first she thought one of the neighbours had put it there. It wasn't until Ray and Heather appeared in her kitchen with a birthday cake that she realised that of course, her Dad was responsible! Both Karen and Gail learnt that it was probably safer to go away for their next special birthday!

Sadly, in recent years Ray's health began to deteriorate and he was less able to enjoy life in the same way. Ray's close family and friends gave him much love and support and made his life as comfortable as possible, filling his days with things he enjoyed. His final couple of years were particularly difficult for Ray, but with Heather's love and care he was still able to raise a smile, and his sense of humour continued to shine through, giving much comfort to those around him.