

*A Humanist Ceremony
to Celebrate the Life of
Mary Alice Roberts*

2nd June 1930 - 22nd August 2019



*Conducted in the presence of her family and friends
on Friday 6th September 2019
at Huddersfield Crematorium*

*Service taken by
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Humanist Celebrant*

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Eulogy

Born to Annie and Jack Wilkinson in the attic above the Post Office in Fartown, Mary was an only child for the first sixteen years of her life, years which saw her attend Greenhead Grammar School and become best friends with Barbara. Her little sister Margaret's arrival was something of a surprise all round, by all accounts, but a welcome one.

Mary and Barbara had both finished school by that time, and gone to work at ICI, dye testing in the laboratory, a job which honed Mary's eye for colour to perfection. She and Barbara enjoyed each other's company at work and at play, and it was thanks to Barbara's then new beau, Leonard, that Mary was introduced to Norman, on a double date. The two couples went everywhere together, from the pictures to holidays in Blackpool, and after some years courting, Mary and Norman tied the knot, on 5th August 1950, at Christ Church, Woodhouse. Barbara and Leonard married the same year, and subsequently Mary and Barbara were each godmother to the other's children.

Mary and Norman's early married life was spent on Potter's poultry farm in Baldersby, near Ripon, where they welcomed Anne to the world. Being some distance from her own mother, Mary credited Mrs Potter with teaching her how to cook, and how to look after a baby. Both Mary and Norman were keen to provide their children with better educational opportunities than the local village school could provide, so they moved back to Lockwood, where Chris arrived in 1954.

Both Anne and Chris are going to share a few of their own memories of their mum with us.

Anne's Tribute

As a child my overriding memory is that Mum was always there. I took her for granted. And she was always busy, often in the kitchen.

She was a great baker, and regularly made a lovely caraway seed cake (I've got the recipe now), and fruity Christmas cake, better than any I've ever tasted, and scrumptious Christmas puddings. She always loved sweet things.

Even though she was very happy at home, Mum decided to go back to work as soon as Christopher went to school. She wanted some spare cash for the little extras and going back to work gave her that. It was a bit of a juggling act, walking us down to school, rushing for the bus to work, and then making sure she was back home by the time we got back from school. Eventually she worked for over 25 years in testing dyes and assessing colour matches for Colne Vale Dye and Chemical Co, and later for Croda.

I saw her in a completely new light, when I worked with her in the lab, over the summer holidays, when I was 16 or 17. She was an important person - not just my mum!

I could tell she was well-liked and got on with her bosses and work colleagues, including Christine, who has been a great pal ever since. I must thank Christine for all she has done for Mum, especially since Dad died.

That summer, in the lab, while we mixed up paper pulp or bits of leather, and swished them around in the dye being tested, she taught me two important lessons.

To do a good job and that sometimes you need to be firm. No way would she approve a batch of dye that didn't pass her test for colour matching. If it was a bit too blue, or a bit too much yellow it wasn't going out.

Although Mum obviously enjoyed the social side of working it was just a means to an end. She had absolutely no work ambitions of her own, but she certainly had them for her children, and later for her grandchildren.

My first insight into this was a bit scary. I overheard Mum chatting with a neighbour at the tender age of 5 or 6, and deciding then that I would be a teacher. So, it was no surprise that Mum and Dad encouraged me to go to university, way back in 1969, even though nobody they knew had done that before.

This encouragement was so important, setting me up for the rest of my life. But equally important was the fact that in the end, they let me go my own way in life, making my own mistakes and my decisions. 'You'll do your own thing,' she often said. And I did! Sorry Mum.

Later I'm sure Mum wondered about whether it had been such a good idea after all. It meant we moved away from Yorkshire and even from Humberside, down to Devon. She said recently that it had saddened her.

Inevitably she saw a lot less of Tom and Laura than she would have liked, for she was never happier than when she had all four grandchildren with her. She always followed every bit of their progress through school and was fiercely ambitious for all of them. She couldn't believe her luck to have lived long enough to see them all go to university, for three of them get married, and this year to have two great-grandchildren.

The time since Dad died hasn't been easy for Mum. But without Chris she'd have struggled much more. I simply can't thank him enough for all he's done.

In my very last conversation with Mum, she asked me whether Laura and Matt, and Tom and Katrina and Gus were all OK. 'That's the important thing,' she added emphatically. 'Yes,' I simply said - not knowing that would be the last time we'd speak. She knew her time was up and it was time to say farewell. We'll all look after each other Mum.

Chris's Tribute

So, who was Mary Alice Roberts? No doubt you all have your own thoughts and memories, but, to me she was quite simply my mum and I am going to miss not having her around.

Although I was, and am, always referred to as Chris with my friends, to the family and those who knew Mum well I am, and think I always will be, known as Christopher.

I don't think love was a word which Mum found easy to say (she wasn't a touchy-feely person) but she was always there to support and help me personally and I know she very much loved her grandchildren and, had she lived longer, I am sure she would have shown the same love for her great-grandchildren.

One of my oddest memories of Mum is that of an illness which, as a child, I shared with her. It was a family holiday to the Isle of Man, when the both of us were violently sick on the boat when we hadn't even left the Liverpool Docks (mind you, I suspect that the chocolate swiss roll we had eaten beforehand didn't help much!).

Over my childhood years, I must have caused Mum (and Dad) lots of worry and upset. To say I was accident prone would be an understatement! Splitting my eyebrow open on an airborne tin can, flying over the handlebars of my fixed gear bicycle when trying to make it free-wheel down Thornfield Road, setting fire to the banking near our home and trapping my hand under a cast iron urn one Mischief Night all stand out in my memory (not good when your dad is the local bobby). Luckily Mum was always on hand to nurse me through the many injuries.

We enjoyed lots of holidays together and I particularly recollect happy times in Scotland with Uncle Eli, Auntie Alexa and their growing family. I remember Mum packing Anne and I off to Scotland on our own as children (I think I was only 11 or 12 at the time). I hate to think about how much she must have worried during the hours until we arrived safely in Oban.

I remember that we cried together when reading my eleven plus results, thinking I had failed, only to subsequently realise I had read the result incorrectly! I'm sorry that I never worked hard enough at school, to achieve better results for you Mum. Hopefully Francesca and James have made up for me?

As a policeman, Dad worked lots of shifts, so it normally fell on Mum to keep the peace at home. Many are the times she would chase me round the house to (in her words) "fetch me a clout" for being cheeky or doing something wrong.

Simply feeling unwell on a school day was never accepted. You had to be really ill, or it was a case of, "Get off to school, you'll be OK".

Although I don't think she ever liked hospitals, Mum was always with me on my somewhat frequent visits to hospital following having been knocked off my bicycle by a beer wagon, being hit on the elbow by a milk truck, having my ankle broken playing football and planting my nice new VW Beetle head-on into a tree.

I will always remember when my broken elbow was being diagnosed at the hospital. Mum was sat alongside me one minute and laid out on the floor the next, having fainted as the loose piece of bone was clicking in my elbow.

I believe that care and concern for our immediate family was always important to Mum. No more for me personally than when she accepted me (and my dog) back into the family home when we had nowhere to go. Thanks Mum, for keeping us off the park benches. Hopefully that importance of the family has been instilled in all of us.

I think I must also thank (or possibly blame) Mum for making me the annoyingly honest person that I am. She always taught me to tell the truth and say what I was thinking, no matter what, so I know I have (and no doubt will continue to) upset many a person with my honesty, for which I can only apologise.

Mum was a very proud grandma and readily gave up her job in 1988, following the birth of Francesca, when Andrea was ready to go back to work. Babysitting duties were shared between Mum and Andrea's parents. I remember her coming over when Andrea was ready to give birth to James and becoming very agitated with me when Andrea's waters broke at home. "For goodness sake, will you get her off to hospital," was the cry (hmm, possibly not in such polite terms)!

I sincerely hope that over these latter years, since I decided to retire, I have been able to repay at least some of the help and support my Mum (and Dad) have given me throughout my life.

I know you kept telling me you were buggered and worn out, Mum, and that you just wanted to go but, I do miss you.

Mary did find it difficult after Norman died two years ago; they were such a huge support to each other throughout their marriage, enjoying their holiday adventures and their time at home with friends, and she never really recovered from losing him. She was a very independent lady, though, and managed in her own home for as long as she could, with the support of those around her. When she did need more comprehensive care, she moved into Sycamore Park Care Home, and the staff there were brilliant; they did their very best for her, and Anne and Chris are very grateful for their efforts.

Mary passed away on 22nd August, leaving behind a lifetime of memories, times spent and smiles shared with you all.