

A celebration of life

Lilian Riley

24th January 1949 – 4th October 2019

1.15-2pm, Wednesday 16th October 2019, Hastings
Crematorium

Humanist
Ceremonies

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The Tribute

Lilian was born in Liverpool in 1929, the eldest of four children. She was followed by sisters Joan and Violet Elizabeth (Auntie Bet) and in 1938 by Syd. Her childhood can't have been easy, in a northern city hit by depression, and with a father, by trade a shipwright, who suffered the long term effects of being gassed in the first world war, and was frequently "on the sick".

In 1939, the sisters were evacuated to the Welsh borders, to Llanfair Waterdine, and lived with a Mrs Cadwallader. The two younger sisters remembered this time as blissfully happy, but Lilian, the eldest, felt responsible for the others and took on a maternal role, protecting Joan and Bet when they were challenged by local children. In later years the sisters cycled back there together for pleasure. A photo of Lilian from that time is in your order of ceremony. Later still, she and Clive went back for a visit, and the house they stayed in was owned by someone Lilian had been at school with.

At the end of the war she was in the Land Army, which she loved, and then she worked for Vernons in Liverpool. And it was in Liverpool that she met John Robinson, with whom she had a long relationship, and who was the father of her son Clive. She and John finally married in 1960, though they parted in 1964. It was to be with John that she first moved to the South East.

Lilian loved children. John's daughter Pat from his first marriage was almost a grown-up by the time she and Lilian got to know each other – Pat was married soon after they met, and had children of her own, who Lilian happily looked after and knitted for. Lilian began to foster, and in 1961 adopted Ade. When the marriage broke down, Lilian moved back to the North West with Clive and Ade, first to Neston, and then to Wallasey to be near Clive's school

Ade has such positive memories of his childhood with Lilian. Despite

struggling financially, she always made sure the children had a good time, and it was only years later that Ade realized that it wasn't Father Christmas who supplied their presents, but Lilian struggling to give them those treats. He has particularly fond memories of a Donald Duck toy. Now when he works for Disney, and has a Donald Duck on his lanyard, it always makes him think of his mum. He loved soup, and was happy that they ate it a lot. Only later did he realise it was because it was a cheap option. Anything could be turned into a plaything – Lesley still has photos of her and Ade in laundry baskets in the back yard.

He remembers her as resolute – if she said no, she meant no. And she was resolute in the way she faced the world too. Just as she had protected her younger sisters when she was ten, she now helped Ade not to feel different, as a black boy with a white Mum. Later she offered the same support to Clive when he came out as gay and found he was HIV positive.

Life as a single mum with two kids was not easy in the 60s, and in 1969 she reluctantly decided that Ade would be better off with his birth family in Nigeria. He thought he was just going on holiday, but he never came back. They lost touch for many years, but with the advent of Google, Clive did some detective work and found Ade, by now a living in LA, and he, and his family, came back into her life. When they met in 2003, for the first time in 36 years, Ade felt as if “not a beat had gone by”, and that they could pick up exactly where they left off. He was particularly moved by the fact she had all the birthday cards which she had written, but had never been able to send, since he was nine. And he found that he had mannerisms which he'd picked up from her, all those years ago.

Even with only one child to support, life wasn't easy, and Clive remembers her going without a winter coat one year so he could go on a French exchange trip. But it was during this time that she found her perfect job, as a residential housemother in children's homes.

Clive headed off to London to university in 1976, to study French, as it happens, so Lilian's sacrifice for that French exchange paid off. In those years, Lesley was a frequent weekend visitor in Wallesey, keeping

“Auntie Lil” company, and getting lots of support from her. Lesley was at a posh school, and often felt intimidated by her fellow pupils. Lilian helped her, not only with good advice, but with practical things like making her an apron to wear for domestic science, and a long skirt for a party. Lesley loved the fact that Auntie Lil was just a bit unconventional, and the next thing she did was unconventional for that time too. She signed up with a dating agency, and met Frank Riley. They hugely enjoyed each other’s company, and married, with Clive as best man, in March 1983.

Clive will now talk to us about his Mum.

Mum and I have had a lot of giggles over the years but one event sticks out and made us laugh over and over again.

When I was 18 and had just finished my A Levels and having applied to work in a French Colonie de Vacances I received a misdirected letter with an offer of a job. But I had to be in Paris 2 days later!

So I ran around like a blue arsed fly trying to sort things out. I must have been seriously aggravating. There I was in the living room trying to pack, mum sitting calmly fuming.

*Eventually I don’t know what I said but it must have been complaining about my clothes and we were getting increasingly heated. Something must have snapped because mum stood up and said (as an unintentional Mrs Malaprop) **‘Blooming Heck Clive (she never swore!)** you’re not going to the Antipodes! For a moment there was silence and then we both bent over in hysterics!*

It was a memory that made us laugh every time we mentioned it for years, in fact I think it came up again only a few weeks ago.

And now I’d like to read a poem, which I think really reflects the way Mum saw things. It’s written by Christina Rossetti, who also wrote Mum’s favourite Hymn, “In the Bleak Midwinter”.

Remember

By Christina Rossetti

*Remember me when I am gone away,
Gone far away into the silent land;
When you can no more hold me by the hand,
Nor I half turn to go yet turning stay.
Remember me when no more day by day
You tell me of our future that you plann'd:
Only remember me; you understand
It will be late to counsel then or pray.
Yet if you should forget me for a while
And afterwards remember, do not grieve:
For if the darkness and corruption leave
A vestige of the thoughts that once I had,
Better by far you should forget and smile
Than that you should remember and be sad.*

Thank you, Clive

Lilian and Frank had a very happy life together, and Lilian had all sorts of new opportunities, particularly to travel. She loved Sorrento and the Amalfi Coast. They lived in Moreton, where they welcomed all their family. And there was the garden. Lilian always loved flowers. The sunflowers you can see here today are a tribute to that. Later on in Hastings she would buy far more geraniums than she could possibly fit in her little front garden, because she loved them so much.

She knitted non stop – all the children and grandchildren in her extended family were lovingly clothed in Lilian's creations, at first hand-knit, then produced on her knitting machine. And the children at the homes she worked for benefited too.

Among the visitors in these years in the North West were Pat, John's daughter, and her family. She has fond memories of these tips,

including being taken to a Berni Inn and having her first Irish Coffee (all the height of sophistication in those days), visiting Chester Zoo, going to New Brighton on the train and walking along the beach, and shopping in George Henry Lees.

Once, Lilian took Pat's daughter Carla, and Joan's daughter Lesley on a horse caravanning holiday. It was great fun, even though it did rain every day, and Carla has particularly strong memories of the morning when Lilian went to get the horse, appropriately named Splash, and got kicked on the bottom, ending up with a large, horseshoe-shaped bruise. Lesley also remembers the trip for one of those important life lessons which Lilian, her aunt and godmother, gave her. The girls met some others, and wanting to keep in touch, Carla gave them her address. Lesley didn't. When Lilian asked her why not, Lesley said no-one had asked her. Lilian replied "If you wait for someone to ask you, nothing will ever happen – just go for it".

Lilian continued to work with children until her arthritis, a problem for many years, forced her to take early retirement. Frank died in 2003. Lilian was devastated. She decided to move to Hastings, to be nearer to Clive, and to Pat and her family.

Pat helped her to house hunt, and supported her once she was here. She persuaded her to go to the dentist, something Lilian hated, to get a new plate. However, no sooner had she got it, than she dropped it down the plug-hole, and the whole process needed to start all over again.

Now Ade had come back into her life, Lilian was determined to get to know him and his family, and she went several times to LA to visit them. The kids called her grandma, and Ade's wife Lisa regarded her as her best friend. She loved Palm Springs, and Santa Barbara, and the various Hollywood studios, and most of all she loved getting to know all his friends, who she thanked publicly, in their church, for their love for her son. She stayed in what they called "the cottage" in their garden, and the children would bring her a cup of tea each morning, made in the English way. She loved to try American food – though when she had her

first burrito she ate it with a knife and fork and added mustard

Being in Hastings meant that Clive could visit her often, and in addition to his regular visits, they spent their Christmases together – at first at his home in London, and later in Hastings when she could no longer manage his stairs. For a non-believer, Lilian was surprisingly addicted to Christmas decorations!

And there was always a cat, right up to the end: Bella, Fuzz, Milo and finally Elsa kept her company and loved to snuggle up to her as she read. She was a constant reader, and, having left school without any qualifications, in later life she took an English Literature O level, just to prove she could do it. If she had a box of chocolates beside her too, she was in heaven.

Gradually age and arthritis began to restrict what she could do, and the balance began to shift, with Clive playing a big part in caring for and supporting her, just as she had always done for him.

She loved her house in Grove Road, and was determined to stay there. She fiercely contested suggestions she should move, and equally fiercely contested all Clive's ideas of making life easier for her – stair lift, grab rails and so on. Through a determination which matched hers, though, he managed gradually to introduce them. None the less, she was growing less mobile, and a trip out with Clive in March, rounded off with fish and chips, was the last time she managed to get out.

She was very ill in 2018, and spent 6 weeks in the Conquest, after which an increasing number of carers came in to help her. Though she hated the idea, she found that she really liked many of them, and enjoyed the company, and she continued to manage, with their help, until just three weeks before she died.

Ade was in Paris working, so he was able to get over to see her in hospital. She was quite confused, and the first thing she said was "Oh, you look like my son". He replied that it was her son, and suddenly she was chatting to him as if everything was completely OK.

Clive was with her to the end.

We often think of death as a cruel enemy, taking away those we love, but for those who are suffering or who have reached the end of their endurance, it can come as a quiet friend, closing the curtains, switching off the light, and settling us into a last sleep, free from pain and weariness.

I hope it was so for Lilian

Reflection

And now, some time for reflection, during which we're going to hear *Mfanwy*, a song which recalls Lilian's time in Wales, which was also played at Frank's funeral.

Music: Mfanwy, Treorchy Male Voice Choir

Committal

I will now say goodbye to Lilian's body on your behalf. Please stand if you are able.

*Lilian, we feel privileged that you lived.
We grieve that you are no longer with us,
but we know that you will live on in the hearts,
lives and memories of those who knew and loved you.
We remember with gratitude, your character and all your qualities,
Your determination, your kindness, the care you gave us,
And the good times we had in your company.
And now with love we leave you in peace.
And with respect we bid you farewell.*

Closing Words

Please sit.

As we end our ceremony today I hope you have gained some comfort from being here together. As you return to your work, your homes and the routines of your daily lives remember how you felt sharing these moments. Take away with you your own memories of Lilian and her place in your lives. In our relationships and friendships; in the work of our hands and minds; and by our example, some essence of us remains. So Lilian will always be part of your lives; and in remembering her you will be paying her the greatest tribute.

Clive would like to thank you all for coming, and to thank the Macdonald ward at the Conquest where the staff were so good to Lilian – and to him – in the six weeks she spent there last year, and in her final three-week stay. He would also like to thank her carers, particularly Stephanie Gravitt and Eunice from Nurse Plus.

In our short time together, we've heard stories of Lilian's life, but you must have many more, so you are all now invited to the East Hastings Sea Angling Club on the Stade, to share those memories.

If you wish to give donations in her memory, please make them to the NSPCC, Lilian's favourite charity. Details are on the back of your order of ceremony.

We will leave to the sound of Dean Martin, singing "That's Amore". Like the other music you've heard, one of Lilian's favourites, and a reminder of the happy times she spent in Italy.

Take care of yourselves, and of each other.

Music: That's Amore, Dean Martin