

A celebration of life

Sylvia Joy Myson, 'Sylvie'

7 July 1934 - 14 September 2019

10am-11.am, 30 September 2019, Cambridge City Crematorium



a personal goodbye

Humanist
Ceremonies

Humanists UK is a registered charity no. 285987 and limited company no. 228781 in England and Wales. Humanists UK, 39 Moreland Street, London, EC1V8BB, 020 7324 3060

The Tribute

Sylvie was born in Cambridge on the 7th July 1934, into a history of large families, her mother was one of six and her father one of fourteen and she herself had three brothers who have predeceased her. Perhaps being the only girl it was inevitable that she grew up rather a tom-boy, she told of reading all her brothers comics.

Her father died when she was eleven and her mother had to go out to work full time, taking three different jobs, so Sylvie took on the mother role to her brothers; though she once swapped her younger brother for a dog as he had upset her. Their mother had to sort that one out when she came home from work.

She grew up at 34 Brooks Road in Cambridge and went to Coleridge School but she hated the green of the school uniform. She left school to work as a seamstress, paradoxically making school uniforms.

Sylvie met her future husband Terence Patrick, Terry, at a dance, though her family maintain that dancing was not exactly their forte, and they married in 1956. They lived in Cambridge, at first at number 8, Gold Street, in the Kite, demolished in the 1980's to build the Grafton Centre area. Then moved to number 4, The Homing when Sandra was six and Andrew was two, where they lived with their family for the rest of their lives.

Sylvie and Terry had five children, all born at home, Sandra, Andrew four years later, then Jenny, again four years later, then six years later Kevin and just the next year Sarahjayne. Kevin and Sarahjayne grew up like twins, even being called Topsy and Tim. When calling for her eldest two children they also become coupled together and it was 'Sandrew come here' when they were called to tea or perhaps suspected of mischief.

Her children always came first with Sylvie, she would never leave them with anyone else, they went everywhere with her and she made sure that they wanted for nothing. They were never short of clothes or games or crayons and such. The younger children were not allowed a chemistry set but that was understandable perhaps because 'Sandrew', given a set, despite their father's disapproval, had managed to create a mini explosion.

The girls remember Sylvie seeing a dress in the windows of Marks and Spencers, coming home and cutting a paper pattern out of newspaper and then running up a dress that looked just as good as the original. They often had matching clothes, Sandra and Jenny particularly remember pairs of red hot-pants, with which Sandra was not impressed, Sylvie loved red although her favourite colour was blue. Sarahjayne remembers matching skirts and waistcoats for her and Kevin.

Sylvie would embroider their clothes and knit too, character jumpers a plenty and toys too. At least six different Minion types for Kevin and some for his friends as well. The speedy clack-clack of her needles a very familiar sound. She made all the dolls clothes for the girls as well and Action Man clothes for the boys.

Sylvie came to Andrew's rescue when his favourite teddy bear Bouzal got creosote all over his body when he got into his dad's shed. As Andrew couldn't sleep without it, Sylvie cut off his head and made a new body out of yellow fur, knitted it a red collar then sewed its head back on. Unfortunately the new Bouzal now had a wonky ear, so Sylvie explained to

Andrew that if he folded down the ear at bedtime he would be able to sleep, which he did for many years.

However, Sylvie also maintained that it was fine to cut the children's hair with a pudding basin, not haircuts that they remember favourably but perhaps it was because she wasted no time on her own hair either. She was used to cut chunks out of it to make up paintbrushes for the children and would wash it with anything that came to hand, later leading to the nick-name 'woolly hair' from her great grandchildren.

There were always special treats for Christmas. Instead of Advent Calendars a tradition of 24 different parcels of treats hanging from the door on strings. The only problem was that the dogs could also reach these treats so the children seldom managed to get to them untouched.

There were plenty of Christmas presents but Sylvie's labelling was somewhat haphazard. She claimed to be able to identify them by feel but was sometimes ringing round on Christmas Day trying to track down the recipient of a particular present that had evidently gone astray to arrange for an appropriate exchange.

Sylvie was a good home cook in her younger days, though she never used a recipe or weighed anything out. She made lovely ginger cake and when she wasn't walking the children home from school for lunch, their lunchboxes were filled with home-made sausage rolls, cheese straws and ginger cake. Her scotch eggs were a speciality that Sarahjayne cooks now. There were always sausage rolls and mince pies at Christmas, last year Sylvie insisted that Sarahjayne cook them, but under her direct supervision.

Food was cooked and supplied to all the children, their friends and later their work mates too. Should anybody extra happen to turn up at meal times, always 1pm on the dot for lunch and 5pm for tea, then an extra plate was found and the food shared, even if it meant taking a little off everyone else's plate.

Sylvie's 'ham, egg and chips' were famous, generally agreed as 'the best ever' Sylvie would cook them at any time of day for any of the children's friends but it has to be said that not all her meals were as successful and sometimes found their way from the children's plates into the dog under the table. Later Sylvie would exclaim, "*I don't know why the dog won't eat his dinner*".....but she did know.

There were always dogs, there was Bunty and Jane and then Shandy and Dougal when the children were growing up and later others were passed on to her from the family.

When Sarahjayne was six Sylvie took an evening job at Chivers in Histon and from a quarter to five until nine pm Terry was in charge of the children. Well sort of. As soon as Sylvie was out the door Sarahjayne, in league with Kevin, would embark upon cooking adventures, often with the chip pan, egg and chips being a favourite, with Kevin supplying the fried eggs and chips. On one occasion Sarahjayne decided to toss pancakes but one stuck to the ceiling and fell down just as her Dad stood underneath....

Not all of these adventures made it back to Mum but Sarahjayne made sure that anything that Dad did was reported back. She would leave little notes inside the clock about anything that Dad had done 'the wrong way' always beginning with "*Dear Mum tell Dad orf.....*"

Sylvie did indeed run a tight ship. She brooked no nonsense. If toys were quarrelled over they were cut in two, even balls have been known to be divided. The children would all get into trouble if Sylvie couldn't tell who had done whatever had earned her disapproval. *"When Mum said no it meant no"* and everyone knew it. If the children were upstairs but not in bed they would leap into to bed when they heard her footsteps on the stairs. Not that easy with bunks, but essential to reduce the telling off.

Sylvie would stand up for the children too though, like the time she staunchly maintained to Terry that the miniature horse in the garden was in fact a dog while Andrew who had brought it home tried desperately, if not entirely to successfully, to lead it away. And of course she was very ready to provide treats. When she was at Chivers, it being part of Cadburys, the staff shop on Thursdays was full of mis-shapes and seconds so the children would sit on the stairs in wait for their regular treats. I understand that the Curly Wurllys were the best.

Consideration for the neighbours was considered paramount, so no noisy games out front, and good manners were essential. Sylvie maintained this with her grandchildren too, who would often be met with *"Is there something you want to say"* when please and thank you had not been forthcoming.

Sylvie was perhaps a rather 'strait-laced lady'. Skirt hems were never above the knee and when Jenny took the opportunity of a school needlecraft lesson to take up the hem of her skirt, Sylvie was livid, proclaiming that Jenny couldn't walk around 'like a floosie'. But then Jenny was the 'rebellious one'. At fifteen she pinched her Mum's moped to go to the fair, went on the rides and then rode home again. Sylvie would say to Sandra *"When is she going to grow out of this?"* but Jenny says *"Mum loved a challenge"* and maintains that they thrived off each other.

Despite the arguments Sylvie didn't want any of her children to leave home, indeed often forbidding them to do so. Even when they did they still came home for tea or moved back in with their partners, always welcome. *"Dad would just put up another false wall and we were always welcome"*.

Terry died suddenly just three days after his seventy-first birthday which was very difficult for Sylvie and her children but of course all the family were there to help each other. Kevin was at home and Sylvie really appreciated that. He would take her out and about and he tried everything to introduce her to using a computer with all sorts of helpful instructions and pictures of buttons for her to follow but she didn't really take to computers. She would use a mobile phone, but somewhat erratically, her children having to leave messages because although it was turned on she couldn't hear them.

So we have a picture of Sylvie at home, a home filled with so much love and affection, a devoted Mum, and later a devoted grandmother and great grandmother too. She persuaded Sandra to return to work and looked after Carl from eighteen months old, as she wanted his full attention. Then she followed him to become a dinner lady at Priory Infants School and later Abbey Meadows. She looked after Carl until he left school and did the same for all her grandchildren. As a dinner lady she became known as the Pom-Pom lady, always happy to make pom-poms with the children or else just like her own grandchildren going through the school everyone would call her *'Grandma'*.

She continued to look after all her grandchildren while their mothers were working and just as with her children, their friends or any other child in need of 'looking after' were also to be found with her. She was always ready to help out other parents, the more the merrier was her outlook. She didn't want to see anyone go without and would knit gifts, make food and help out wherever she could.

Well known throughout the school and in all the local shops children were always saying hello to her and she was a popular dinner lady for eighteen years, retiring only when she was seventy-seven.

Just as she had taken her children everywhere, one of them would take her on holiday every year. As a result she became a very well travelled woman holidaying in Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco, Barbados, Jamaica, Greece, Disneyland Paris and Malta and Turkey, and many more. Sylvie loved the sunshine and being with her family.

She wouldn't tell Terry she was going away until the night before but would leave him a freezer full of dinners for her time away. Terry would then ring his daughters, just to check that the mobile was still working while Sylvie wasn't using it.

Sylvie always lived life at a run, she never sat down. There was always something to do, someone to help.

She never sat and had any meals with the children, she would do the ironing, airing it above their heads on a washing line over the dining table while they ate and then whisk the plates away as soon as possible, sometimes before they'd completely finished eating. On the day that she locked herself out and borrowed a ladder from next door for Sandra to climb in through a bedroom window, she whisked the ladder away to return it before Sandra had managed to get both feet over the window sill! She just said "Hang on, don't look down", she was always in a rush.

She approached driving in a rush too. She wouldn't take her foot off the clutch, revving the engine as she took off in whatever gear she happened to be in. At roundabouts she always deemed that she had right of way, claiming that the other startled drivers were *"Stupid, they can see me!"*. She also had a tendency to reverse into things, saying *"I don't know how that happened"* about consequent damage and *"Andrew will sort it out and get me another car"*.

Carry on regardless was her attitude and she didn't let her age get in the way either, in 2016 she was speedboating in Egypt and riding a horse but her later years were dogged by ill health. She fought off kidney cancer in 2016 and a stomach bleed in 2017 but by then she was losing her voice due to Motor Neurone Disease. Earlier this year she fought through sepsis and a broken hip but she wouldn't stay in hospital. One of her children would always stay overnight with her but she was soon demanding to come home even if it was only the first day after her hip replacement.

Being at home was so important to her but it was difficult when she became mute. She would write her children's names on paper to connect with them but often screwed up messages impatiently before they could be read. Her family provided round the clock care, for the last eighteen months Andrew and Mandy moved in to be there at night to comfort her. A demanding watch for them both, especially in the last months but her family ensured that she was never alone, never lonely and always in touch with all the grandchildren and great grandchildren who loved her dearly.

Sylvie carried on, she walked with her frame into the doctors surgery three days after her hip replacement in June and was still walking in August but her condition was deteriorating rapidly. She was helped to get up and dress everyday and it was not until a week before she died that she wanted to go to bed.

After a very full and busy life she died at home exactly as she had wanted to, surrounded by her family, a promise that her children delivered on.

This is poem for Sylvie, adapted from *Footprints*, whose authorship is uncertain.

*One night a woman dreamed a dream.
As she was walking along the beach,
Across the dark sky flashed scenes from her life.
For each scene, she noticed many sets of footprints in the sand,
One belonging to her and the others to her loving family.*

*After the last scene of her life flashed before her,
She looked back at the footprints in the sand.
And noticed that at many times along the path of her life,
especially at the very lowest and saddest times,
there was only one set of footprints.*

*This really troubled her, so she asked about it.
"I thought that my loved ones would walk with me all the way.
But I noticed that during the saddest and most troublesome times of my life,
there was only one set of footprints.
I don't understand why, when I needed you the most, you would leave me."*

*"Our precious one, we love you and would never leave you,
Never, ever, during your trials and testings.
When you saw only one set of footprints,
It was then that we carried you."*

We now have a personal tribute from Carl Thurlbourne.

To My Nan

Nan was a woman of extreme strength with courage and so much love, she was beautiful, soft and she is now finally at rest.

Nan was special to everyone she was a daughter, a wife, a mother, grandmother and great grandmother to all of us, and one of a kind.

On September 14th 2019 we lost our leader of our family, such a great painful loss.

I have so many memories of Nan and so much has already been said today, so I need to re think a bit and apologies if I have a little wobble. I remember Nan making alterations to Jade's boyfriends trousers so that he could go to an interview and she made one leg so very much shorter than the other, and her comments were, "They will be ok".

And I remember her making my dinner different to Kevin's with Kev asking why haven't I got the same, and I remember my mum asking my Nan to watch over me 24/7 when I went to school so that mum could go back to work, and to this day now, my mum still thinks she can watch over me, although my daughter Summer has taken over that now and relieved me.

My memories are full of joy and then sadness when Nan became ill.

Saying goodbye is part of our everyday life, it feels so final, so I think about all the precious moments we shared together and that we can no longer have.

I can't say goodbye to you Nan so I want to leave this how you always said good night to me as a child, "Good night my little cherub sleep tight".

Nan I will always love you.