

A Tribute to LUCY BUCKLEY

6th February 1925 - 10th August 2015



Lucy Mannerings was born on Friday 6th February 1925, in Cranbrook, not far from the village of Goudhurst in the county of Kent. In those days Goudhurst was surrounded by fields of vegetables, hedgerows of blackberries and orchards of ripening apple and pear trees. In 1925 beer cost 5d a pint, penicillin hadn't been invented, the General Strike hadn't yet happened, Jack Hobbs was about to score his record 2000th test run for England, Sheffield United won the FA Cup and Winston Churchill was Chancellor of the Exchequer. In the same year, Tony Benn, Ernie Wise and Richard Burton were born.

Meanwhile Lucy's father Frank worked as a gardener and was a true 'Kentish man of the soil' whose own garden would have brimmed with peas, runner beans, cherries, plums and strawberries. Not for nothing was Kent known as the 'Garden of England'.

Then in late summer it was hop-picking time. During those warm summer months of the 1930s, young Lucy's world would have been transformed by the invasion of tens of thousands of women and children from the East End of London - the Hop-Pickers 'coming over here' on the hoppers specials from London Bridge, picking our prized hops, Kent's most important crops, to make our beer, British beer. I never saw any hop-pickers in action myself but as a child I do recall fields set out with tall poles all tied together with wires stretching from the soil up high into the air. By the end of summer these would have been covered in dense green vegetation. We had no idea about beer or its ingredients but my mother's hop-picking anecdotes created a wonderful image in our minds.

Lucy was a village girl from a hard working country family. She attended the nearby village school in Horsmonden. We never heard our mother talk about her schooling but she certainly developed very stylish handwriting and became an avid letter writer who in years to come would write prolifically to her mother, sister and brothers. Having said that, our mother was never a great communicator on the telephone - actually we never had one then. Academically, she may have not won many prizes but in matters practical she would have undoubtedly excelled.

At home our grandmother, always known as Zillah and to us as Little Nanny, cooked, baked and cleaned, while alongside her, Aunt Lucy knitted ferociously and perfectly without ever glancing at her needles. Every winter for several years, Angela, Antony and I were blessed with presents

retro-rustic knitwear from the needles of our great Aunt Lucy. Our grandfather, a man of very few words, would return from a day's toil on the land; slump in his fireside Windsor chair; beneath his moustache he would draw on the roll-up permanently stuck to his lip; slurp his sweet tea from the saucer and wait patiently for his dinner to arrive. Such was the picture of country life painted by our mother.

Our mother told us stories of how one day her brother Frank speared his foot with a pitch fork; brother Ron stood petrified as an adder curled itself around his wellington boot and father Frank poisoned the whole family with mushrooms he picked in the fields on his way home one evening after having a couple too many large ones at the Leicester Arms. And so for the rest of her life, Lucy had a morbid fear of snakes and edible fungi. As a consequence she never allowed us to play with poisonous reptiles or throw sharpened metal spikes at passers-by and for the next 75 years she cooked without ever using a single mushroom or allowing one in the house. In fact Lucy worried about quite a lot, about a lot of things and would have daily bouts of 'forty fits' over cars, motor bikes, electricity, water, air or anything really. 'Forty fits' was one of her favourite expressions.



From the cottage in Goudhurst, our grandfather sought work as a Farm Bailiff, and the family moved west about 20 miles to Doubleton Cottage in the village of Penshurst; with its majestic Elizabethan manor house, Penshurst Place set in acres of beautifully countryside. Doubleton was owned by a German Family, Herr and Frau Dinglebronner, whose countrymen coincidentally, a few years later launched the dreaded 'doodlebugs' which passed directly over the heads of the Mannerings family en route to the city of London during the early years of World War II. I will never forget our mother repeating her 'when-the-engine-stops' doodlebug story throughout my childhood.



Lucy's first job was as a young waitress in the Leicester Arms restaurant in Penshurst. One afternoon to her amazement, she found herself serving tea to Lady Clementine Churchill, wife of Winston and by all accounts they got on very well but were somewhat at odds over the issue of the Royal abdication. Our mother loved the Queen and the Queen Mother and in her later years would often visit Windsor and stand in the rain to catch a glimpse of the HRHs on their way to the races.

So apart from the Dinglebronners of Doubleton, our mother didn't have much time for the Germans. In fact when she was old enough in 1944 she joined up with the Auxiliary Territorial Army - known as the ATS, not to fight but to serve. And so without fear, the girl from the country flew across the channel in a Dakota and landed at an aerodrome somewhere

near the Hague in the Netherlands. From there she was eventually transported to Luneberg in Germany to commence work in the NAAFI, where she fed and watered the advancing British Army and had special responsibility for the duty free counter. Naturally she became very popular person in the NAAFI.

She hadn't been working there long when one evening a company of rowdy, thirsty and battle-weary soldiers from the 2nd Division of the Wiltshire Regiment arrived at the NAAFI and marched all over her nice clean floor in their muddy boots presumably in search of some duty free. What can I get for you gentlemen? Oh hello there, Sergeant Tommy Buckley.

Lucy and Tommy were married on 23rd June 1948 at St Mary's Church in Slough. In their wedding photographs they looked so young, so smart, so happy and so in love. The Mannerings and Buckley families meet for the first time and had by all accounts had a proper knees-up in the rooms above the Reindeer Inn on Slough High Street. One of my most prized possessions is the bar bill from their reception.



From that day on Lucy worked tirelessly as a home-maker, cook, cleaner and above all mother. In her spare time she took a number of semi skilled jobs involving cleaning things, packing things, machining things, soldering things and putting things in other things. I must admit at the time we never showed too much interest as to the finer points of these work roles, but I do remember the day that Faberge shareholder Roger Moore, who starred as 007 in 'The Man with the Golden Gun' as well as many other Bond classics, turned up at the Faberge factory in Colnbrook and temporarily interrupted progress on the Brut production line where Lucy packed and sent overseas.



So back to those early days in the prefab at 17 Maryside, Langley. Angela was the first born, then I came along 4 years later and Antony arrived 9 years after me. From the prefab we moved up market to 128 Trelawney Ave for a long stretch of 33 years.

Thanks to our mother, we were without question the cleanest children in Slough. We all wore white ankle socks under our polished Clarks sandals until we were about 8 and our pants were always ironed to perfection. I won the smartest Life-Boy (commendation for the shiniest brass badge and whitest lanyard) so often they eventually gave me the cup to keep and bought a new one. My father cleaned the radiator grill of his Vauxhall Victor with a tooth brush and then joined Lucy in the kitchen for the weekly tooth-brushing of the brass ornaments. While this was going on our mother would also be cooking Sunday lunch and preparing the epic Sunday tea -

which I think were amongst her finest culinary moments in the kitchen. Prior to that she would have been up and busy at 6.30 vacuuming the bedrooms - no matter that we were still asleep. Our parents' weekend work schedule was incredible and I get worn out just thinking about it!



Her grand children have similar memories of ridiculously early nights, clothes forensically washed and ironed ready for the next morning and an obsession with Walkman ear phone health and safety and the risk of brain damage caused by listening to Take That in bed with the light off.

From Slough, Tommy and Lucy retired and moved to Shepton Mallet in 1988, where they shared countless happy times with siblings, Dick, Lilie, Maureen, Dickie, Ann and Charlie who also moved to the west country at the same time. Retired they were in one sense but the housework continued and they still

maintained their obsession for neatness, order and high standards even in the shed department where the fitted carpet was a stylish addition.

Our mother and father were a couple of contrasting personalities. At the core of their relationship was a love and pride in their home, its tidiness, its order and its cleanliness. They had a work ethic that we her children have never come anywhere close to emulating. Although in the last few years we have all taken to organising things in boxes; labelling them and finishing the day by sweeping up some leaves. We also now get through several litres of bleach each month and we are growing ever-fond of beige.

Our father was an East End boy at heart who was popular, sporty, in control, a bit loud and no matter wherever you were he would know somebody or at least somebody who knew somebody who served in the army and once occupied the next trench somewhere in Germany.

In contrast I think our mother remained a country girl at heart who found all social situations rather difficult to deal with unless it involved shopping in Marks and Spencers where she felt comfortable. Unusually she would prefer every time to tackle a pile of ironing than to chat; if the ironing basket was empty, she would choose to do the washing up as opposed to sitting at the table talking after dinner nonsense over a glass or two of red. Her absolute insistence to 'have a sandwich' was the ultimate solution to everything. Often it was easier and quicker to just have the sandwich rather than refuse. Unlike our father, our mother had very few friends and acquaintances other than one or two factory co-workers and of course her family. She would always prefer to stay in rather than go out. However to be fair she dedicated herself to what she did best. So despite these comic words, she was loved and respected for that and without her we wouldn't be here today, nor would our children



or their children. So it's been a job well done indeed. I think she would have liked to hear that.

Sadly in the end her health deteriorated; the energy she once had failed her, and so in effect she could no longer do the housework. Her dementia was the cruellest way to end a busy life of physical activity and it went on for far too long despite receiving first class care. With virtually all her capacity gone, there was nothing else for her to do and nothing more to say.

Worst of all in the end we never knew how she felt or what she thought. We never knew if she was recalling those childhood days spent with the hop-pickers in Kent, or her serving duty free cigarettes to the men in the NAAFI, or thinking about what her children and grand children were getting up to, or doing the virtual ironing of underwear and towels or just remembering relaxing for five minutes on the patio in Shepton Mallet together with her Tommy, in the sunshine when everything was good.

