

Margaret's son David is now going to pay tribute to Margaret and her life

Mum was born Margaret Fife Perkins in East Dulwich, South East London in 1925, the third in a family of six children.

Shortly afterwards they moved to St Swithun's Road, in nearby Lewisham which was to become the Perkins family home for the next 50 years and a place of happy childhood memories for me when we visited on our summer holidays in the 60's and 70's

At age 11 Mum was awarded an academic scholarship to attend Lewisham Prendergast Grammar school but this was interrupted in 1940 by the war when the house was requisitioned by the authorities and the family split up. Mum was evacuated to Tonbridge in Kent to be billeted with a local family. Nonetheless she continued to do well with her studies and as far as her teachers were concerned was on course to attend university. Headstrong from an early age, she had other ideas and left school to train as a nurse at Guys Hospital in London telling her no-doubt exasperated parents that there was a war on and she was going to make her contribution. This she did when her hospital facility was relocated to Orpington in Kent caring for wounded servicemen returning from the front.

On a lighter note, Mum's sister Evie recounts how Mum as a teenager, aspiring to be a responsible adult, took her younger twin brothers, Bob and Jack, on a cycling trip into the Kent countryside. They stopped at a roadside café but unfortunately she hadn't budgeted for the voracious appetite of the twins and couldn't pay the bill. A few days later the embarrassed parents received a demand for payment in the post. I'm guessing the bikes were locked in the garden shed for a while after that.

After the war Mum changed career direction again abandoning the medical profession in favour of teaching. It was while teacher training in Norfolk that she met Dad who was training to become an engineer after leaving the RAF.

Mum and Dad were married at St Swithun's church in Lewisham in 1949.

They then moved to Shepley in Yorkshire where Lynn and Ann were born and some years later to Daventry in the Midlands, following Dad's work with BBC, where I was born. We then moved again, this time to settle in West Somerset where Mum made so many good friends over the years and found much pleasure pursuing her love and walking and gardening.

As children growing up in the Bennett household, we were given a good degree of freedom and were rarely under our parents' feet but it was pretty clear where the boundaries lay. Mum and Dad shared a strong sense of morality – an inclination to help those less

fortunate than ourselves – with an expectation that we should do likewise. They also believed strongly in education, and homework to my annoyance was not considered optional!

Having long-since dispatched my sisters to university and beyond, and got me to a point where she was satisfied I wouldn't be a threat to society, Mum went back into the world of employment after a gap of some 25 years. She started as a care assistant in a residential home for the elderly and obviously made a good impression as, within a period of 3 or 4 years, she was offered the position of assistant manager and then manager at Wyndham House in Minehead. She found her role at Wyndham very rewarding both professionally and personally, seeing the residents as individuals with interesting pasts and in many cases colourful, if at times challenging, presents. As her grown-up children, we weren't off the hook and on each Christmas Day were drafted in to serve the residents their turkey dinners – no excuses.

It was during this period that Mum decided to acquire another new skill - learning to drive. I don't think this came very naturally to her and being a passenger while she was learning had its scary moments including driving down the Avenue, Minehead's main drag, on the wrong side of the road and performing the mother of all hill starts after encountering a broken-down lorry on Porlock Hill. But as with so many things in her life, tenacity prevailed and she went on to master the worst that Exmoor's winter roads could throw at her.

She retired from full time work aged 63 up to which time she was still putting in 25-hour shifts and thereafter continued her involvement with social care providing training across the county. Looking for the next challenge, she then embarked on Open University course in Arts and Humanities, finally fulfilling her academic destiny with the award of her degree at the distinguished age of 67.

By now grandchildren were very much the focus of her attention and seeing them grow and develop was the greatest pleasure of her senior years. Being able to see family and in particular visit us in our homes meant the world to her.

As many of you are aware the last few years of her life were marked by significant health issues and a progressive loss of mobility. Understandably this was something she struggled to come to terms with. However her sense of optimism and determination never deserted her and it was by that sheer strength of will that she managed to get back into her own home last summer after an extended period in hospital and care, overcoming many setbacks. I sensed that those brief final months were among the most difficult in her life but also perhaps among the most precious.

She died peacefully in her sleep in the early hours of New Year's Eve. For that much we are truly thankful.

Margaret's daughter Ann is now going to talk about her mother's life in books.

I would like to say a few words about Mum's love of books and their importance in her life.

She was an avid reader and many of her friendships were based on a shared love of books which then grew into something more. When she moved from Summerland Avenue one of her biggest challenges was which books to get rid of, and she ended up keeping quite a few in her flat. Many of these were children's books including a good collection of Beano Annuals and Winnie the Pooh books which the grandchildren would pounce on eagerly.

She believed very strongly in the power of reading and literacy, and all her grandchildren and a few others were showered with books when they were young. She also enjoyed reading what they were reading as they grew up, especially if it was about history or philosophy. Her Open University degree gave her a huge opportunity to explore new subjects and she developed her interest in music, art and religion. In those pre-internet days books were the means of doing all this and she was always surrounded by piles of them.

She would always pick my brains about new books, and we had many conversations about what each of us were reading, what my book club was doing, and so on. Even now I read book reviews and think – must tell Mum about this - before it hits me that she is no longer here. Her favourite book was by Hilary Mantel – a Place of Greater Safety about the French Revolution. It is one of my favourites too so I like to think that even though she has now gone we still have that connection.

As she grew older she returned to many of her old favourites such as Anthony Powell's Dance to the Music of Time and Mrs Palfrey at the Claremont. She would take these into hospital with her as a source of comfort though they rarely got opened.

To finish, a quote from No Matter What by Debbie Gliori. It is a lovely picture book which teaches children - even grown-up ones - a powerful message about love and loss. When someone dies, they no longer remain with us in this world. But death does not take away the memories we shared with them, nor the love they felt for us.

*"Does love wear out" said Small, "does it break or bend? Can you fix it, stick it, does it mend?"*

*"Oh help," said Large "I'm not that clever. I just know I'll love you forever".*

*Small said: "But what about when you're dead and gone - would you love me then, does love go on?"*

*Large held Small snug as they looked out at the night, at the moon in the dark and the stars shining bright.*

*"Small, look at the stars – how they shine and glow. Yet some of those stars died a long time ago. Still they shine in the evening skies... love, like starlight, never dies".*

Thank you.

We are now going to hear some memories from Margaret's grandchildren

### **Memories from grandchildren**

- Lots of holidays in Minehead that all seem to blur together. Going to the beach, losing what seemed like lots of money on the 2p machines, painting pebbles in the back garden, watching Mr Bean, flying those DIY foamy planes, writing a letter on her Word processor to the DIY plane company after it fell apart, eating Muesli... all seem to happen on the same holiday!
- Seeing Peerage Court for the first time when helping Grandma move there, and being constantly lost when walking round due to the confusing way in which the lifts and corridors didn't seem to match up...
- Granma was always happy to tidy up after me: on a cold and wet holiday in a caravan at Blue Anchor Grandma spent time carefully mending the curtains after I managed to destroy them. Going mountain biking with Dad when it was very wet and muddy, and coming back to making a mess in her bathroom, dropping a bottle of salad dressing on her carpet after trying to carry it by the lid – she never complained
- Being very well fed! All the cliches about Grandmothers feeding their grandchildren very well apply here in spades
- And Scrabble! She was so good at knowing all those little words that no one ever uses in everyday speech, to the point where to this day we use "would Grandma allow it" as a rule in word-games
- **Happy** – All of my memories of visiting Granma, mainly in Minehead, are happy ones – from summer holidays at the beach, or going on the steam railway, to a Christmas that I can remember

there. We would be playing games, or watching films, Mr Bean I remember strongly, but the focus was always on us as the children, which made it a special time.

- **Proud** – She was very strong willed, and strong in her opinions, which is very important, I think. I also think she was very proud of her children, and I hope, proud of her grandchildren.
- **Kind** – She was always so kind, whenever we would break something or cause a mess, she wouldn't shout – I think she left that to our parents – we would just clean it up and move on – and she would write us letters in Christmas cards, and always take an interest in what we were doing, even what seemed so trivial to us. She was unwaveringly, unfalteringly kind

I have very fond memories of my grandma and I'd like to share a few of them with you from the time I was growing up.

As I small child I remember visiting grandma in her house in Summerland Avenue. Every time we visited her, at my request, she took me to Bastins, a shop in the town selling everything for under a pound. Grandma and I would go round the shop finding presents for everybody in the family, which we then took home and wrapped up together. With my difficulty making decisions poor grandma had to wait very patiently as I discussed the pros and cons of each item and yet she always took me back there every time I visited her. She even reassured me when we were on the phone once that, despite the fact there had been flooding in Minehead, Bastins had not been affected because it was on a hill.

I remember talking to Grandma a lot on the phone when I was growing up. She was always there for a chat or to help me out. I remember ringing her to ask for some help with a GCSE English essay on Hamlet, and I was amazed that she could recite practically all the play from memory.

I remember ringing her from the airport just before I boarded the plane to East Africa for two months. I told her how nervous I was. She said that at night just before going to bed she would look at the moon and think of me and I could look at it and think of her at the same time. It didn't quite work out because of the time difference but I remember it as such a kind and reassuring thought.

I feel very lucky to have had such a generous, kind and caring grandma and I will miss her a lot.