



*A funeral ceremony for*

# ***Mary Catherine Cole***

***9<sup>th</sup> May 1923 – 25<sup>th</sup> January 2019***

***Belmont Centre, Uckfield, TN22 1BP***

***15<sup>th</sup> September 2019, 11.30am***

***Followed by a Committal at Snatts Road  
Cemetery, Uckfield***

*Celebrant: Felicity Harvest, accredited by*



[felicity.harvest@humanistceremonies.org.uk](mailto:felicity.harvest@humanistceremonies.org.uk)

01892 783226    07708 933607

## The Tribute

Mary was born in London, on the Fulham Road, the only daughter of William and Mary McCarthy, on the 9<sup>th</sup> May 1923. Rosanne and Matthew know little about her early life, though they do know that she remained devoted to her father, and was heartbroken when he died in the early 50s. He was an ardent socialist, and strongly influenced the beliefs that she held all her life.

We know very little about her life, in fact, until war broke out. But at the beginning of the war she joined the Wrens, and was stationed at Chatham throughout – not a particularly happy time for a young woman who had hoped for a creative career, and without even the compensation of an exotic posting. Hopefully she drew on her love of literature and music to keep her entertained in those long nights on the north Kent coast.

But her exotic postings were to come. After the war, she worked at the BBC as an editor, which brought her into the creative circles she had been longing to join, and she met and married Lionel Cole, a documentary film maker, then working for the Shell Film Unit, part of that great strand of British documentary film making which was so important from the thirties to the sixties. Shell's film work was from the start designed to have a cumulative, but subtle, impact on the general public, and was often released into cinemas as well as screened non-theatrically. While many films, bearing titles like *Lubrication of the Petrol Engine*, covered technological themes directly related to Shell's industrial activity, others took a general interest documentary approach to their subjects, and others still had nothing at all to do with the company's many component elements. It was in this context that it set up its international branches, and Lionel worked first in South America, and then in Singapore.

So Mary, as a bride, travelled out to Venezuela with Lionel, and it was in Caracas that Matthew and Rosanne were born. During that time, she occasionally travelled to other parts of the Americas, including to New York and to Mexico, where Mary stayed with, what she told Matthew, was the “Tallest Man in the World”.

However, though it was in some ways a glamorous life, living in exotic places meeting the movers and shakers of the day, it was again not a creative time for Mary herself and could be frustrating , with Lionel often away for long periods and two children to look after. Mary moved to London with the children, settling in Hampstead Garden Suburb in 1963, with Lionel joining them after his work in South East Asia was complete.

The children remember Hampstead Garden Suburb as a great place to grow up, living round the corner from Harold Wilson and going for walks on the Heath with Michael Foot. They would be bundled into the car and taken to parties, put to bed upstairs, and then woken up to be put back in the car and taken home in the small hours – this of course predated the introduction of the drink driving laws!

Mary loved reading, and literature, and both Matthew and Rosanne were encouraged to read and enjoy a wide range of literature. Mary introduced both children to the delights of Narnia, Black Beauty, Wind in the Willows and later the works of Virginia Wolfe and Anthony Burgess, as well as poetry which she loved. As Rosanne will explain, this took on particular significance when she went to Henrietta Barnett school.

Rosanne.....

*Hello everyone...*

*Most of you knew her as Mary*

*To me she was always ‘Mum’*

*Like most mothers and daughters our relationship was often bumpy*

- *sometimes fractious*
- *sometimes wonderful*

*Mum was a constant presence in my life for 60 years.*

*She had a profound effect on me, passing on many of her values and always present in my thoughts and heart.*

*The last few years have been very hard and she fought with her usual spirit and determination. I took every step of her final journey with her through every up and down and I will miss her dreadfully.*

*Mum took on every challenge with utter determination.*

*Throughout my childhood she was uncompromising in her desire to help me succeed. I didn't always appreciate her strength of will but I realise now that many of my achievements are because of her.*

*One such achievement was my entry to the Poetry reading competition at School. Mum was **determined** that I would win!*

*We chose the poem together (mutual love of cats) and she coached me relentlessly for two weeks beforehand.*

*I am pleased to say that I won, and that was entirely due to Mum.*

*So, Mum, this is for you....*

*When the tea is brought at five o'clock,  
And all the neat curtains are drawn with care,  
The little black cat with bright green eyes  
Is suddenly purring there.*

*At first she pretends, having nothing to do,  
She has come in merely to blink by the grate,*

*But, though tea may be late or the milk may be sour,  
She is never late.*

*And presently her agate eyes  
Take a soft large milky haze,  
And her independent casual glance  
Becomes a stiff, hard gaze.*

*Then she stamps her claws or lifts her ears,  
Or twists her tail and begins to stir,  
Till suddenly all her lithe body becomes  
One breathing, trembling purr.*

*The children eat and wriggle and laugh;  
The two old ladies stroke their silk:  
But the cat is grown small and thin with desire,  
Transformed to a creeping lust for milk.*

*The white saucer like some full moon descends  
At last from the clouds of the table above;  
She sighs and dreams and thrills and glows,  
Transfigured with love.*

*She nestles over the shining rim,  
Buries her chin in the creamy sea;  
Her tail hangs loose; each drowsy paw  
Is doubled under each bending knee.*

*A long, dim ecstasy holds her life;  
Her world is an infinite shapeless white,  
Till her tongue has curled the last holy drop,  
Then she sinks back into the night,*

*Draws and dips her body to heap  
Her sleepy nerves in the great arm-chair,*

*Lies defeated and buried deep  
Three or four hours unconscious there.*

Thank you, Rosanne.

This choice of poem was not accidental, because Mary was a great animal lover. In Venezuela they had an escaped police dog, a German Shepherd called Pancho. They had a cat in Singapore – but she was a source of worry for Mary as she kept producing kittens before she could be spayed, and then back in England, Vixi, a much loved dachshund, whose health problems meant that she became tragically bald and overweight, and Rosanne was always slightly embarrassed when taking her for walks because of the stares she attracted.

Rosanne inherited this love of animals, learning to ride with some friends in Buckinghamshire, and then later joining a stables nearer home. Mary was always punctilious in driving Rosanne to all her classes, not just riding, but ballet, and swimming. Some years later, Matthew left home, living first in Amsterdam, and then in Kenya. Mary missed him greatly.

Though Mary's formal education had ended at the age of 16, she was incredibly well read, and also loved music, art and film. She studied piano and music for several years. Until the last few years of her life, she never lost her curiosity, her desire to learn, or the sense of idealism which informed her politics. Rosanne and Matthew told me that they were very relieved that by the time Brexit came along, she was no longer following world events – or she would have been very vocal about it indeed!

She and Lionel had a very active social life in the Hampstead years, and she was an extraordinary hostess and a fantastic cook. Her years in South America and Asia meant she had a wide repertoire of ideas which must have seemed very exotic in the England of the 60s and 70s. She even planned to write a recipe book for a while, and spent ages trying out dishes and writing out recipes, but she never followed through with

the idea. She did, however, teach Rosanne and Matthew how to cook, meaning that when Rosanne got to University, she was the only student who could cook lasagna and prepare a decent roast – a skill which made her very popular. She also taught Matthew to make Indian curries, Chinese stir fry and bouillabaisse fish stew

And Mary loved clothes. She was extremely good at putting an outfit together with style, and always until the last few years looked immaculate with her makeup, jewellery and her painted nails

Mary was a great lover of argument and debate. Lionel had been a member of the Communist Party in his youth, but over the years, he moved somewhat to the right. Mary on the other hand, stayed a Labour voter all her life, and many debates ensued. Her argumentative nature led her frequently into litigation, not always with very fruitful results. Though this litigious tendency did have its positive side – she became a volunteer for the Citizens Advice Bureau, where her knowledge of the rights and wrongs of neighbour disputes came in very useful.

She also became a yoga teacher in Adult Education, running weekly classes at the local institute.

After Shell, Lionel ran his own production company, but gradually the work dried up. He then worked for British Transport Films, but was forced to take early retirement at 64 and they decided to leave London in 1986. Eventually, after a long period of searching and disagreement, they bought a house in Uckfield, which had a huge garden, and where Mary, always a keen gardener, could plant everything she wanted, and make it perfect. She was not particularly happy with Uckfield as a place to live, but she did love that garden!

When they moved to Uckfield they decided not to have a pet, but they loved Rosanne and Kevin's cats. So, whenever they went on holiday they took them down to stay with Granny and Granddad and they were

spoiled rotten. Mary would prepare elaborate hand cooked meals for them (none of your tinned rubbish!) and they were allowed to wander far and wide. Whenever time came to pick them up to take them home they would vanish and it could take hours to track them down. They loved their holidays in Uckfield.

She always talked to small children when she saw them and she adored her grandchildren. They stayed at Uckfield many times when they were growing up and it was clear that Mary savoured her time with them. Earlier you heard the chatter from the playgroup next door – she would have enjoyed that.

Mary, as you know, could be occasionally critical, and negative. But her friends also remember her as glamorous, charismatic and charming, and over the years she and Lionel made many friends, some of them household names, or the parents of famous names – Emily recently rang up Matthew at 2am, so he could confirm to a new friend of hers that, not only did he know Nick Mason, from Pink Floyd, but that she was named after *See Emily Play*. She was in, in short a woman of charisma and style

Matthew will now read you a poem about style, and cats.

*“Bustopher Jones”, by T.S Elliot*

*Bustopher Jones is not skin and bones--  
In fact, he's remarkably fat.  
He doesn't haunt pubs--he has eight or nine clubs,  
For he's the St. James's Street Cat!  
He's the Cat we all greet as he walks down the street  
In his coat of fastidious black:  
No commonplace mousers have such well-cut trousers  
Or such an impeccable back.  
In the whole of St. James's the smartest of names is  
The name of this Brummell of Cats;*



*And we're all of us proud to be nodded or bowed to  
By Bustopher Jones in white spats!*

*For a similar reason, when game is in season  
He is found, not at Fox's, but Blimpy's;  
He is frequently seen at the gay Stage and Screen  
Which is famous for winkles and shrimps.  
In the season of venison he gives his ben'son  
To the Pothunter's succulent bones;  
And just before noon's not a moment too soon  
To drop in for a drink at the Drones.  
When he's seen in a hurry there's probably curry  
At the Siamese--or at the Glutton;  
If he looks full of gloom then he's lunched at the Tomb  
On cabbage, rice pudding and mutton.*

*So, much in this way, passes Bustopher's day-  
At one club or another he's found.  
It can be no surprise that under our eyes  
He has grown unmistakably round.  
He's a twenty-five pounder, or I am a bounder,  
And he's putting on weight every day:  
But he's so well preserved because he's observed  
All his life a routine, so he'll say.  
Or, to put it in rhyme: "I shall last out my time"  
Is the word of this stoutest of Cats.  
It must and it shall be Spring in Pall Mall  
While Bustopher Jones wears white spats!*

After about 20 years in Uckfield, first Lionel, and then later Mary, developed Alzheimer's. Mary moved into Woking Homes, to be nearer to Rosanne, not long before Lionel died in 2012 and her health and grasp of the world around her gradually deteriorated, though it won't surprise anyone to know that she had a strong heart, which kept her going longer than anyone would have expected. Her end, though, came suddenly.

We often think of death as a cruel enemy, 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, blowing out the light, and settling us into a last sleep, free from pain and weariness.

And I hope it was so for Mary.