

Mary Gordon

25th June 1923 – 28th February 2019

Mary was born in 1923 – when construction started on the Sydney Harbour Bridge, the world's first domestic fridges and portable radios were being developed, George VI married the Queen Mother, and America gained the Yankee Stadium and the famous Hollywood sign. She was the fourth of seven children born to John and Ethel, and grew up in the north east of Manchester. Her father died when she was just seven years old, the delayed result of gas poisoning during the First World War. Left with a single mother to care for her, Mary grew up in poverty and remembered lining her shoes with cardboard to cover the holes in her sole, and eating her lunches by herself so that other girls couldn't see she only had bread and dripping, with no sandwich filling. It was a difficult life, but Mary was bright and a hard worker. By the age of fourteen she had left school and gained employment at a munitions factory. Mary met and fell in love with Wilfred Gordon, but their lives were torn apart when Wilfred was called up to serve in the Second World War. Mary was left to bring up their newborn son, Douglas, on her own until Wilfred could return to them, uniting their family in marriage.

Despite only having one son, Mary went on to have five grandchildren; Gary, Colin, Michelle, Wayne and Karl, and later thirteen great-grandchildren, and even lived to meet great-great grandchildren. Family meant everything to Mary, and she was quite the matriarch for an ever-expanding dynasty. She was adored by all of her grandchildren and did all she could for them, so it was quite a wrench for her when Wilfred, an experienced engraver, was offered a wonderful opportunity to work in New Jersey for a period in the mid-1960's.

Mary was an independent woman and never afraid to travel, so despite transatlantic flights still being relatively new and expensive, she flew home to the UK often. The grandkids, of course, benefitted from visiting their grandparents in the states. Disneyland had just opened, and they took trips to Niagara Falls. Mary taught the children to swim, and they remember the novelty of American colour TV.

Mary and Wilfred lived quite the high life in America, and it was a happy period of her life, filled with adventure and travel, like trips to the Bahamas with her friends. It was a stark contrast to her early years. But Mary never lost her hard work ethic. She had worked in the UK as a seamstress, just like her mother had, and would always bring work home to continue sewing at night – as well as making clothes for the family in her spare time. She continued to sew in the US, tailoring coats and jackets for Fifth Avenue. Whilst she could be frugal – even in later life you might find that she'd saved an empty margarine tub to reuse, or she would be sitting in near darkness to save electricity - but she was always generous when it came to helping others. Gary remembers when he was young and in hospital, gran would send money home to the family to buy extra food, and he would receive a dollar bill sent by air mail every week. She took her role as a grandmother very seriously, and all of the grandkids were thoroughly spoilt.

England remained home for Mary. Whilst Wilfred quickly picked up a US twang, Mary never lost her Lancashire accent, and, as a passionate tea-drinker, she would take boxes of English Breakfast tea back to the States whenever she could. So it was with some joy that she and Wilfred returned to Leyland, aboard the QE2 no less, and settled down in a bungalow close to their son Douglas and his family. Even after Wilfred died in 1996, Mary continued to travel about by train, never missing major family events like weddings and new babies. She would even travel to Australia many times to visit Michelle and her family. Christmas and Easter would often be spent with Gary and Susie here in Oswestry, and ten years ago, at the age of 86, Mary made the permanent move to Shropshire to live in her own annex.

As you will know, Mary remained as independent as ever. She learnt to Skype, with some assistance, so she could keep in touch with all of her growing family. However many new additions there were to remember, Mary knew them all. She had never been much of a socialite and was happy to go about her own routines, taking the bus into town with her high-tech mobile phone. She kept herself active and mobile, whether walking around the town or village, or wandering about the house waving her arms around doing her exercises, much to the amusement of Gary and Susie.

She would cook her own food, except for Sunday lunches which the three of them would share. They'd often meet up in the afternoons for a sherry and a chat, but only

before her favourite TV show, *Pointless*, started. Mary's other favourite programmes were *Strictly*, *Songs of Praise*, and *Downton Abbey* – purportedly the only show that could raise a laugh from her.

In their early years of marriage, Mary and Wilfred had an Alsatian named Major, and Mary loved dog-sitting whenever Gary and Susie were away, often spending warm days in the garden with them. Jet was a firm favourite. 'The old dog comes to the old woman,' Mary would say. They were a comfort to her when Alzheimer's set in over the last few years. Her health declined rapidly over the last ten months or so, and she required care at home. But she still remembered her family, helped by her vast collection of photographs, all with careful handwritten notes about people and places on the back. And she astutely recalled that she liked balloons but not cake, after one was presented to her for the ninety-fifth birthday. Mary spent the last few months of her life in Llysfield Nursing Home in Oswestry, where she received the loving care of all the staff – and even Jet was allowed to visit her. Mary slipped away quietly on the last day of February, after long life, well-lived.

You will all, no doubt, have endless memories of your own of this humble but remarkable person. Whilst I'm sure she would consider her life a modest one, she was in many ways a modern woman, ahead of her time. Nothing was beyond her, and whilst she was first and foremost a nurturer, she was also a strong, determined, independent woman. These traits and strengths of character have been passed on to future generations, and in this way her life and legacy continue into the future.