

TRIBUTES TO MARY HANNAH URQUHART – ‘MAY’
18th May 1931 – 31st December 2018

May's life

May was born in Lockerbie in the lowlands of Scotland but spent her childhood and early adulthood in Dundee. She was the youngest of nine children and very spoilt by her brothers and sister. She had many fond memories of the house in Roseangle, which her mum ran as a lodging house. Her mum was a kind woman who took in all sorts of people and loved to entertain. Consequently May's childhood was peppered with unusual characters and fun, despite part of it being during the war. Also fortunately her father and brothers grew lots of vegetables and her mum was well connected to the black market, so she felt she wasn't as deprived as her school mates.

She loved school but always felt in the shadow of her older clever brother Lawrence who preceded her. She left school at 14 and as she had a creative flair. Her first job was as a window dresser at a department store in Dundee. It was for this job that she was sent on a lettering evening course where she met her future husband David Urquhart. It is not a secret that their marriage ended acrimoniously, but before that, there were good times. They moved to London, set up home and had their three children, Ann, Alison and Douglas.

As a couple they hosted and attended fancy dress dinner parties. These gave May the opportunity to dress up. May was always beautifully presented with stylish outfits, immaculate make-up, perfect hair and painted nails – apart from on a Sunday when she didn't get dressed at all. The family went on holidays, usually to Italy often with close friends, Shirley and Dennis, Alec, and others. Family was at the heart of May's life and she was the queen bee.

After her marriage to David ended, May resumed her career in retail at Dickens & Jones and then became the manager of the Eastex concession in Owen and Owen in Richmond until it closed. Her colleagues became her friends: Marjorie, Margaret, Chrissie and Alec, amongst others. She was an extremely successful saleswoman and quite often bumped into past customers who remembered her selling them a coat.

In 1990 she got a job at the newly opened John Lewis in Kingston where she was widely respected as a very experienced saleswoman. She retired at 65 and spent the next 20 years socialising with her many friends.

In 1999, she moved to Teddington to her small house with a garden that she particularly loved, especially as it had central heating. Her neighbours soon became friends particularly Maggie next door.

In later years when life became a little more difficult due to mobility and she needed support she befriended many of her carers particularly Mandy and Mandy.

In the last year or so she lived in Hampton Care where she had a great friend, John.

Leaving three children, four grandchildren and three great grandchildren, she died very quickly and peacefully on New Year's Eve.

A Tribute to May - Mike Eberle (Son-in-law)

"Turkish Soldiers!" That was the topic of conversation at that Sunday family lunch early in 1978. It was my first opportunity to meet May, as well as Douglas and Alison. "Turkish Soldiers", pronounced with her impressive brogue, at that particular moment in time, had May so fixated that she kept mentioning them to see what my reaction would be. It was a first test of my character, using a controversial subject, LOTS of innuendo as in "Nudge-nudge, wink-wink", shock value and, as I was to learn, typical of May. It certainly made a lasting impression on me, and that was probably typical of all the people that she met. When you first met her, May would test you with something to see if and how you would respond, which would allow her to sum you up right away. As an example, later on when she met Carrie, after just a short conversation May immediately and forever gave her the nickname of "Tutti Frutti". Somehow it seemed appropriate, endearing, and certainly tongue-in-cheek. Also apparently, unknown to us until that time, May was fluent in Italian but with a broad Scottish accent.

Maybe we had some of May's famous malt loaf that first afternoon. I don't believe we had fish pie that time, but certainly many times later, and again this past Sunday in California as a special tribute, thank you Carrie.

May was my Mother-in-law, with all the trappings. Being with her was nothing like being with my family and it took a while to become comfortable around her, to reconcile all of the pieces of her character because she was unique. It was a real eye-opener for me. She became very much like a mother, but so completely different to my own mum. I learned a lot from May and I'm so very thankful. I'm also very thankful for all those "little jobs" she had lined up for me when I would visit. This usually involved trips to the DIY store or the garden centre to find the solutions to those pressing problems: A little paint here, hanging something there, tending to the bushes, you name it. I had a very soft spot for May. I was more than willing to help and that was also a special time

to bond. May was always very thankful for help. She was good company too, a good sport, a bit of a rule breaker and we enjoyed her irreverent sharp wit, especially after a gin and tonic at the pub. It's so hard to lose such a colorful and caring person, but I think we all know that she would not want us to be sad today. So let's do our best.

May could relate to anybody from any calling in life. She was engaging and would take an interest in you. She was very accepting of all people, open minded to a degree that was years ahead of society and we can perhaps only now appreciate it. The more unique you were, the more she liked you and would want to spend time with you. Then she would tell us about all of you. So, even if we haven't met you before, we probably know something about you through her stories.

May was a good story teller. She knew how to deliver a punch line, how to have a good laugh. Whatever the situation, she made you feel like you were there at the time. Whether it was about a poignant moment in her childhood, or the person she met on the bus the other day, it was always interesting and peppered with her opinion which she freely gave, whether you were ready or not. But as they say, "don't shoot the messenger", because she was usually spot on.

It was hard for us, her daughter Ann and her grandchildren Victoria and Rachel, to be 6,000 miles away in California. But we made the best of it. She did come to visit multiple times when the journey was tolerable for her. May got to attend some important family events in California such as christenings, high school graduation, and others. We also plotted and pulled off a surprise visit for Ann's 40th birthday party where she arrived in a limo. She visited Disneyland, Hollywood, the beach, Lake Tahoe and many more places. She charmed our friends and seemed to enjoy the life. Even though we were miles apart, May was dearly loved by her American grandchildren. She made a great impression and had a huge influence on them, which will last forever. They would have loved to have been here today. They loved her, we loved her, I loved her and we will all miss her. We are all so much better off for having had her in our lives. Thank you for sharing her with us. It has been an honour to help pay tribute today. Thank you so much.

But finally, there's one more thing. Getting back to those Turkish Soldiers, let me leave you with this. In typical May fashion she moved on, never having actually met any Turkish Soldiers. Later on she turned her fixation to a number of celebrities, as you will learn later. Now, not to spoil the fun, but she did actually get to see one of them on a trip to America. However, I believe that once she had "been there, done that" she moved on again to another one

and, as I understand, he may just have been the last great unrequited love in her life. To be continued....

Bill Urquhart (Grandson)

When Holly and I were children, we were once inspired to promote May to a very special and much sought after title, at least as far as grandparents are concerned. Grandma became Grandmama.

As you all knew May, you probably realise that this is the sort of thing that she would love - and she definitely did. While we were the ones to light-heartedly prompt this renaming, May was the one that would end up enforcing it. In fact, think she would go on to sign off as Grandma-ma on every single card she sent us thereafter.

Much like May, the title of 'Grandma-ma' was funny, unique and full of grandeur. It was sweet, and proper, but also utterly ridiculous. I think it suited her perfectly.

This is a short poem that I've written, called *Grandma-ma*.

Grandma-ma, by Bill Urquhart

She was certainly opinionated.
Chinese she loved, but curry she hated.
And she had no filter, which was quite a curse
But her humour was top notch when she got perverse.

"Have you had a haircut?" she would enquire,
Just as she had asked EVERY visit prior.
"I don't think so" I'd state, "not for a while"
"Oh", she'd say, "It must be differently styled".

She'd wander through John Lewis in July,
With a clear plan and a very keen eye,
To find some gifts for her family members,
But give them to us in late December.

Cards that she sent me were signed Grandma-ma,
And reading that bit or "Dear Bill" was not hard.
Everything else could have been hieroglyphics,
I could get the gist, but rarely specifics.

She once made great efforts to deck the halls,
And covered her floor in white polystyrene balls.

Lit dozens of candles, and spread them around.
It could have easily burned her house to the ground.

When babysitting us, she'd wait until,
Mum and Dad had gone, and then she'd say "Bill,
Would you go and look in my handbag please?"
And in it would be some sweets, guaranteed.

On New Year's Eve she went out with a bang,
A firework sent skyward before Big Ben rang.
And she'll be remembered by you and by me,
Whenever we sip on a warm cup of tea.

Ann Bayliff, Alison Urquhart, Douglas Urquhart
Read by Alison Urquhart (Daughter)

Our Mum was generous, kind, fun, superstitious, stubborn, inappropriate, embarrassing, liberal, elegant and blunt. Mum loved lemon tea, babysitting, cats, Frank Sinatra, shopping, presents, chatting, holidays, food, ironing, sewing, gardening and most importantly George Clooney. She would often joke about turning on the lights for George's helicopter but sadly he never came.

Generous to a fault, as kids, Christmases were spent with presents piled up never wrapped (some found six months later) with prices still on, but always what we wanted.

She wasn't an adventurous cook but Dad said she made the best pastry in the world (the secret ingredient was sugar). One day she decided to make Sweet Magic pudding. This wasn't a success as we remember being forced to remain sitting until it was finished. To this day we think it was hours!

Her liberal nature meant that all our partners were welcome to stay overnight from a young age unlike most people of her era. Sex was never a taboo subject and often inappropriate questions were asked!

She was addicted to lemon tea, which she trained everyone who came into her world, to make. Recipe: Teabag shown hot water for approximately three seconds, until pale colouration achieved, remove bag immediately, insert large slice of lemon = perfect tea. She always carried a small bag of sliced lemon in case the particular establishment she was frequenting were unable to meet her exacting tea standards.

Mum said “she couldn’t run for toffee” but would lovingly cart our bikes up to the school gates so we could ride home, and it was hysterical to watch her run in the school egg and spoon race!

She loved shops and shopping particularly things from charity shops. Nothing was ever given away but hoarded in her house. Not a spare inch of shelf space to be seen.

Unlike most people Mum loved ironing. After the birth of Holly she insisted on attacking a pile of ironing with relish. This was the first and last time Doug had his pants ironed.

She often talked about rationing during the war and not having sugar. This was always a great excuse for her habit of over indulging in sweet things. For visitors it was mandatory for her to set the dining table with the best china adorned with crisps, cake and chocolate biscuits. If you said you were popping round for a cup of tea you had to be prepared for a full-blown afternoon tea laid out. She didn’t believe in throwing any food away and we often found items in the cupboards which we didn’t dare check the date of.

Mum always insisted on having her handbag close. Even when she was taken to the dining room in the care home it was clutched to her chest or hanging off the back of the wheelchair. In fact one of her last words was “handbag”.

