

Pat Kendall: Tribute

Pat was born on 19 October 1934 and was brought up in Russia Lane, Bethnal Green in the East End of London. Her parents were Joe – a fish porter at Billingsgate fish market – and Liz; and Pat was one six children. Her surviving sisters are Betty and Maureen, but she also had sisters Joycie and Jeanie and a brother, Joey.

It was a different age then, and it can't have been easy for Pat's parents bringing up the family. But we do know that the family was well provided for – Pat's dad would often trade a bit of fish for a cut of meat, and the family always ate well. And Pat loved her parents and often spoke about how fond of them she was - and she was especially proud of her hard working dad.

So Pat had good memories about her childhood and her family life, even though times were rather different then. We should remember, too, that Pat's early years were lived through the Second World War. The announcement that Britain was at war was made on 3 September 1939 – just a few weeks short of Pat's fifth birthday. These must have been very tough times for the family – especially during the blitz, which would have been quite an ordeal in the East End.

Indeed, Pat could well remember the bombing raids where shelter was often taken in the tube stations. And a poignant memory of her's was the Bethnal Green Tube disaster in 1943, in which 173 people perished. Whilst we do not wish to dwell on this, Pat would have been nine years old then and she lost friends in that disaster – and it is a mark of her compassion and humanity that these people remained in her thoughts.

No doubt Pat's education would have been disrupted by the war and she was, for a short while, evacuated to Kings Lynn. But she missed her East End home, and soon returned.

Pat attended St Johns School, Peelgrove, and after leaving aged 15 she worked as a machinist. As a teenager she was still in Bethnal Green, although the family had by then moved to Hector House on Old Bethnal Green Road. She had a number of part time jobs, one of which was working alongside her younger sister Maureen and her brother-in-law Ronnie in a job involving welding tax disc holders and fixing the leather decorations that went on shoes. All of Pat's children had Saturday jobs, or holiday jobs, there too – and from what we can gather, sometimes more gossip than work went on.

There was a young electrician called Alan, who knew Pat's sister Joycie, and through that acquaintance the two met. Romance and love blossomed and Pat and Alan married – fittingly at Bethnal Green Town Hall – in 1955. There was a big party after the wedding – with a piano player and much celebration – and they went on to enjoy 59 years of marriage. This is something to be cherished.

As with many young couples then, Pat and Alan lived in rented accommodation but in 1962 they moved to the Hadrian Estate, still in Bethnal Green. Their three children came along: first Tony, then Carol and then Jackie to complete the family. The children have particularly happy memories of this time, enjoying family life and playing on the estate. And Pat and Alan made good friends with nearby neighbours – Betty and her husband Brian, who remained lifelong friends.

Pat took much enjoyment from life - from the simple pleasures of a nice cup of tea, or nice bath, to enjoying shopping; and she liked to watch soap operas on television. But that said, she was much more a “doer” than a “sitter”.

Pat kept an immaculate home and was, quite rightly, house-proud. She and Alan made a good team, working together doing the painting and decorating. A bit later on though, it was occasionally not unheard of for Pat to do a bit of “spur of the moment” painting and Alan may well go out in the morning only to come home to find a different colour paint on the walls in the evening!

Pat was a great problem solver and was always there to offer good advice to friends and family. She was a bit like a grown up Girl Guide – well able to fix things and always well organised. In fact, Alan said to me that without her he would never have had any de-icer in the car!

As far as the car is concerned, it is perhaps worth mentioning that Pat never drove herself – save for one single occasion when she had a driving lesson round a school playground. We are not entirely sure what happened there – but I’m told this was never to be repeated.

I said before that Pat was a machinist by trade – and sewing was something that she had a real talent for. In fact, she kept up with her sewing throughout her life. She was imaginative and creative, and was known for being able to turn a size 12 into a size six, and she was well up on all the latest fashions. And she was herself a very elegant lady, taking pride in her appearance.

Pat enjoyed various holidays – Cornwall when she was younger, and later on Malta and Spain, where she spent many a happy time at her late brother Joey's place in Fuengirola.

Perhaps though the abiding memory of Pat is as a great family woman – known above all for the unconditional love she gave to those closest to her.

In her later years Pat became ill with bowel cancer – but such was her spirit and strength that after fighting this for three years she was given the all clear. It did not beat her; there is then perhaps a certain irony that having beaten cancer, Pat finally succumbed to pneumonia. She was taken ill last December and after a few weeks in the Royal London Hospital, Whitechapel, she died peacefully on 6 January 2014.