

**A CELEBRATION OF THE LIFE OF**

# **Phyllis Dorothy Mansfield**

**15<sup>th</sup> April 1922 – 17<sup>th</sup> December 2018**



**Friday 11<sup>th</sup> January 2019  
SW Middlesex Crematorium**

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### **FAMILY TRIBUTE TO PHYLL**

Phyll was born Phyllis Dorothy Rice on the 15<sup>th</sup> April 1922 in North London, the second child of Alexander and Florence Rice. Her elder brother was named Alec and they were soon to be joined by baby sister, Iris.

Phyll went to Tollington Park Central School, where she was nicknamed Rice Pud and where, believe it or not, she dreamed of one day being called 'Mrs Mansfield' like her favourite teacher! That particular dream didn't come true right away... but it did in 1946, about which more later.

Phyll would often talk about her early years; leaning out of the upstairs window, calling down to her cousin and best pal, Margery Fuller, who went to the same school as Phyll and lived over Uncle Frank's shop round the corner - 'Fullers Famous for Furniture'; Phyll's Grandad who lived with them, together with his racing pigeons; Lucy the hen, who was won by Phyll's Mum at the pub bingo... "First prize - a chicken!" Only when the box was delivered to their house did they discover the chicken was alive! Lucy became the family pet and laid them many an egg; And Phyll's adored cat, Blackie. Phyll would remember her daily visits to the fishmonger on the way home from school to buy Blackie his penny whiting.

Phyll and Iris went to local tap and dance classes. Phyll always remembered she had to stand at the back of the class watching, as the family could only afford to pay for one, and that was Iris. But the dance teacher took pity on Phyll and invited her to join the classes for free. Phyll dreamt about going on the stage, but her dream evaporated when, aged 15, she began work as a filing clerk at Keith Blackman Solicitors. At her interview she was offered a salary of 17/6d a week. 'Oh no', she said 'my parents have kept me at school an extra year, it's £1 a week if you want me!'

During the war, the Rice family were bombed out, saved by sheltering under the dining room table. They were rehoused in Clifton Road in a grand Edwardian House, where Phyll's Mum and Dad lived until late in their lives, when they moved out of London to the Norfolk Broads.

It was during the war that Phyll went with her Dad (a WW1 veteran and lifelong pacifist thereafter) to hear Harry Pollitt speak in Finsbury Park. Phyll was moved

and thrilled by what she heard and joined up straight away to the Communist Party of Great Britain. Phyll was in the Hornsey branch where she later met and became 'Election Agent' for Geoffrey Mansfield, one of the young middle-class intellectuals (as Phyll saw it) recently demobbed from WW2 service in the Middle East. Phyll and Geoff became involved beyond Communist Party politics. Post war and its traumas, they were both seeking a new start, security and a family. They decided to marry and on 28 December 1946 they tied the knot at a Register Office. Rice Pud became... Mrs Mansfield!

Post war, Geoffrey was working for Lavells Ltd, his father's confectionary business. For their first home, Phyll and Geoff were offered a small flat over one of the Lavell's shops in Kingston upon Thames and it was here that their first daughter, Jennifer, was born in October 1947. Jenny was their pride and joy, a beautiful baby and an early talker. Phyll remembered Jenny singing nursery rhymes before she was one year old and accurately mimicking the over-ripe language of the fruit sellers in Kingston market... right under the 'bleedin' winder'!!

A lucky move brokered by Geoffrey's father took them to their next home in Valance Road, Muswell Hill and when their second daughter, Elizabeth, was born, Phyll passed the new baby to little Jenny to carry up the garden path into the house!

Phyll's part of the Phyll and Geoff partnership was to be housewife and mother. And Phyll took to these responsibilities with energy and commitment.

Phyll and Geoff had done much of their courting at 'Pentona' a riverside bungalow at Staines, bought by Geoffrey's father as a weekend retreat. They'd both fallen in love with the river and dreamed of living there one day.

They discovered 105 Thames Side in a dilapidated state but on a beautiful site that had been untouched by the dramatic floods of 1947. They bought it and moved there in the summer of 1958.

Now Phyll's work as 'homemaker' began in earnest. '105' became Phyll's lifelong project. She painted and plastered, made curtains and lampshades, planted out the garden and managed the care of her daughters, husband, and Sally the family dog, with energy and pride.

***Somewhere the sun is shining, Anon***  
**Read by Jenny**

The trees here look sad,  
And the grass a little dry,  
But when I look into the sky,  
I can feel your smile,  
I can hear your voice.

And I wonder what you're doing up there,  
Are you playing your piano?  
Curling your hair?  
Putting on the blue eyeshadow?  
You could even be watching me,  
I wouldn't know...

But I think of you..  
I wonder what you're doing.  
And I know you're having a good time.

Summer holidays and Christmases were spent at Bexhill on Sea, where Geoffrey's father and mother had retired. Their home on the promenade was just along the parade from Geoffrey's uncle and aunt. Phyll was in her element helping to organise picnics, rambles, sandcastles and outings for the gangs of cousins and second cousins who congregated for summer fun, or the De La Warr Pavilion Christmas panto.

And then Phyll and Geoff bought a river launch called Titicaca. The family would set off, the boat loaded with food and provisions, all carefully planned and prepared by Phyll, for many adventures up the Thames.

Phyll and Geoff had left the Communist Party in 1956 over the invasion of Hungary and thereafter became Labour Party supporters and activists. 105 Thames Side became the Spelthorne Labour Party 'hub'. The monthly branch meetings were held there, along with fundraising events. Phyll was 'Secretary' and Geoff was treasurer. Their activism fell off during the Blair years of

government, but recently Phyll has been delighted by the surprise of Jeremy Corbyn making it to be Party Leader... his socialist politics chiming with Phyll's own.

Phyll had always had a special place in her heart for Fidel Castro and Cuba. She was a member of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign and when she and Geoff finally made it to Cuba on holiday with Liz, Steve and Sarah in the late 1990's, it was a dream come true. Phyll returned to Cuba with Liz in spring 2013 for a 3 week trip. Phyll was wheelchair bound, a challenge in the streets of Havana! But Phyll was on Cloud 9 to be in Revolution Square on May Day and to be part of the May Day Parade, Cuban style! Music was everywhere in Cuba and Phyll particularly loved this song celebrating Che Guevara.

### **MUSIC**

#### ***Hasta Siempre Commandante – Los Calchikas***

In 1961 Phyll learnt to drive and Geoff bought her a red mini minor as a birthday surprise, complete with red ribbon! This was the start of a new chapter for Phyll, who loved driving and the independence it gave her. She soon began volunteering for the WRVS in the 'Meals on Wheels' team. Phyll took her voluntary job very seriously and enjoyed giving care and attention to the elderly people she visited for over seven years of unstinting service.

When Geoff was away on business, Phyll would drive up to Norfolk to see her Mum and Dad or over to Tewin Wood to see her sister Iris. She loved these trips away.

Family was always very important to Phyll. She remembered everyone's birthdays and loved to organise family gatherings at 105. She would work so hard to make the garden look lovely and have the house 'spruced up' for these occasions.

Phyll loved her garden, especially her rose bed along the front. She'd prune and weed and feed those roses, chatting to passers-by and striking up many local friendships. Everybody knew Phyll!

In 1988, Phyll and Geoff were joined at 105 by Liz, Steve and Sarah (aged 8), who had moved down from Leeds. The plan was to build on to 105 and turn it into

separate but connected flats. Phyll oversaw the works with hawk eyes. She spotted a fundamental error in the placing of the new build footings and had the builders do it all again before it was too late!

Phyll and Geoff delighted in their two granddaughters, Sarah and Becky. By the time Becky was born, Phyll and Geoff had traded their boating days for caravanning. They would head off for Salcombe, where Jenny and her husband Peter were running the Charborough House Hotel and take Becky off for little holidays at a nearby caravan site. They would have holidays with Sarah, too, and her friends Chloe and Daniel. Phyll loved to be around children. She was fun and inventive in her play but always very firm about boundaries!

Phyll and Geoff began to take their caravan to Spain and discovered a campsite at La Cala, near Benidorm, which they loved and returned to, annually, for nearly two decades. Phyll took Spanish classes and became quite fluent. She always had Spanish Grammar and Conversation books next to her bed.

When towing the caravan became too much, Phyll and Geoff rented a flat on the seafront at La Cala and would spend most of the winter there, only coming home for Christmas. They joined the 'Labour International' group at Javea and made many like-minded friends, who Phyll continued to be in touch with right up until a couple of years ago, when travelling to Spain became too much for her.

Phyll and Geoff's marriage had its ups and downs but they rode out the storms together and in their later years came to be great friends, with so much in common; their politics, their family and friends, their hobbies and their beloved 105 Thames Side.

Phyll was a complicated person, at once assertive and insecure... bossy but then wobbly with it! She had enormous generosity and would do anything for anyone, especially in a practical way. She was a great organiser and had formidable energy... Phyll could never sit still for 5 minutes. She was passionate in her beliefs and in her love of music and ballet. She had a wonderful, open smile and beautiful blue twinkly eyes. She loved to 'Ass about' as she put it and she loved to flirt with a handsome waiter!

Phyll spent the very last part of her life at Moor House Residential home, a place she discovered herself. She took great delight in viewing and feeding the birds at

her window, and she enjoyed weekly visits from her little, great granddaughter, Erin, whom she adored. 'Where's my baby gone?!' she'd say, covering her eyes and they'd grin and chuckle together.

Phyll loved the staff at Moor House and for as long as she was able would be busy collecting up cups and saucers, doing everything she could to help out. She wouldn't be waited on if she could help it. That was Phyll! A great person; a good hard-working comrade, a generous, loving Mum, grandmother and finally great grandmother. She brightened up many people's lives with her warmth and ready smile, her passion and her humanity. And many people will miss her.

***Dream Big, Anon***

**Read by Liz**

*Dream Big* is a little poem that Phyll spotted framed on the wall in a cafe in Seneccey le Grand, while visiting Jenny in France. It rang so many bells with her and she would often quote it, routinely sending it out to friends and family inside a card or letter. Here it is now - advice for life from dear, irreplaceable Phyllis.

Dream Big.  
Say Please and Thank You  
Try your Best  
Be Grateful  
Choose to be Happy  
SMILE  
Hug Often  
Offer to Help  
Sing, Laugh, Dance  
Remember you are Loved...