

URSULA HENRIETTE BARBARA RHODES DOB 26-10-1923- DOD 08-08-2011

It has been my privilege to learn from Judith something of Ursula's life and the kind of person she was. From her I gained the impression of a bright, strong, determined and forthright woman who was a fighter with strong opinions. She loved to have fun but was quite serious in her approach to life and open with her emotions; you knew what she thought and she didn't usually change her mind. She was often kind, generous and thoughtful but had an acerbic side to her character which would come out on occasion!

Ursula was a loving wife and mother and very proud of the achievements of her family; she cared deeply about them and they were very important to her. They too are proud of Ursula's life and achievements and loved and respected her.

Ursula was born in Ludwigshafen-Am-Rhein, a small river port in Germany, to Gertrud and Heinrich Michel. She had a settled and happy childhood with her younger sister Lilli. Her father was a civil servant and her mother came from Berlin and had sung with the Berlin Opera Chorus and so they would go on holiday to Berlin to see her mother's family. Another favourite holiday place was the Black Forest where they would go walking and there was also regular swimming in the River Rhein.

Ursula's life was rudely interrupted by the policies of the German Government in the mid-thirties and her family feared for their safety as the net tightened against Jewish people like Heinrich and their families.

Ursula was nearly sixteen years old when she was forced to leave school prematurely and came to England as a refugee in 1939, her safe passage organised by the Society of Friends.

She arrived at the Potteries and attended the Orme Girls' School in Newcastle under Lyme where she was sponsored by the pupils and parents and she went to live with the Hawthorne Family in the area and became part of that family, who adopted her as their own. Her adopted mother Phyllis was a remarkable woman who Ursula called 'Auntie' and she also became a much-loved sister to Philip and Stephanie. Philip is now going to share with us his memories of Ursula.

Tribute: Philip Hawthorne

As Philip has told us, Ursula settled into her new life and did very well at school gaining her School Certificate and she did a Secretarial Course at Burslem School of Commerce and went to work at Hanley Town Hall as a secretary.

Ursula became naturalised as English and was very proud of her adopted country.

On March 14th 1944 Ursula attended an inaugural meeting to prepare for a 'National Youth Conference', to be held in Stoke-on-Trent, later that year. Harold Rhodes attended the meeting too; he had arrived in the area earlier that year as a Bevin Boy. They were both active in the Labour Party and became friends, started courting and were married in 1946 and were to be in a long and happy partnership for over sixty-four years.

They moved to Leeds where Harold went to study and Ursula secured a post in administration at Beckett Park. Whilst in Leeds, they visited Harrogate on more than one occasion, little dreaming that in time it would be the site of their retirement home.

When they returned to North Staffordshire with Harold's work, Ursula became secretary to a Medical Consultant and later secretary to a Group Medical Practice.

She enjoyed her work but was happy to leave, following the birth of their only daughter, Judith, in 1953. From then on Ursula took on the traditional role of mother, housewife and support for her husband as he pursued his career in mining.

The family moved to Stafford, Ashby-de-la-Zouch and finally London and Ursula provided enormous stability and understanding, particularly on those occasions when Harold had protracted periods of work overseas.

Judith remembers her mother as very caring and affectionate but quite strict. She was a very good cook and enjoyed sewing and knitting. Ursula was a very accomplished needlewoman and produced fine plain sewing and embroidery and also made most of their clothes. She cooked very well too and sometimes added a bit of her German influence to recipes for example her potato pancakes.

Judith remembers how her mother loved to read in the evenings and she was a particularly avid reader of Crime Fiction a taste passed on to her by her adopted mother 'Auntie'. Ursula was also a keen user of the local libraries and she would take Judith regularly and they would sit in the park together reading after going to borrow their books.

These years were a very happy and settled time for Ursula and although tragically her mother, father and sister had perished during the War she and Harold visited her remaining aunts and grandmother in Berlin in 1951 and again in 1961 when Judith went with them. Her relatives also visited Ursula in the family home in England on three occasions and Ursula enjoyed these visits.

Later, in the 1980s, she and Judith went walking in the Black Forest which reminded Ursula of the happy times she had spent there as a child and coincidentally they met a family whilst they were there, with whom Ursula's German family used to stay when they went walking. This renewed friendship was kept up until the end of their lives.

Ursula loved gardening and kept beautiful house plants and was proud of her house and garden. She loved home-making but also had other interests. In the Potteries she belonged to an Anglo-German Club and in Leicestershire belonged to the Business and Professional Women's Guild.

When Harold was transferred to London and they moved to Hendon she sometimes went away with him on business trips which she enjoyed. She enjoyed their walking holidays in Mainland Spain, Mallorca and as has been mentioned the Black Forest and she also developed an interest in antiques, primarily pottery and porcelain.

In 1987 on Harold's retirement they moved to Pannal in Harrogate to be closer to Judith and Ursula was happy to continue to build up her collections and she also developed more of an interest in walking and took long afternoon walks locally, sometimes on her own sometimes with a friend.

Ursula continued to read avidly and had always loved to listen to Classical Music on Radio 3 or Classic F M. She also participated in the activities of Pannal Wives and having been to a Conversational German Group ended up holding small informal group meetings in their home. She and Harold also kept up their active membership of the Labour Party.

Ursula and Harold celebrated their Diamond Wedding Anniversary in July 2006, with a few friends and family at their home in Walton Park.

As Ursula's health became frailer she still enjoyed her reading and her music but found it harder to cope with her life with equanimity, however she appreciated their neighbours who were always kind, supportive and helpful and Harold remained positive and encouraging.

Over recent years there have been projects linked to people who died or were forced to flee from Germany and go into exile in the 1930s and 1940s. One was an Art Project where artists have been laying metal blocks outside the houses and apartments of victims. In 2010 the school which Ursula used to attend began a project for their sixteen year old pupils and for part of their project they researched Ursula's history and produced a collage of her life. In May those pupils attended the laying of stones for Ursula and Lilli and their parents outside their home . These events struck a chord with Ursula and she took an interest in

the way her history has been used to educate children and how the lives of herself, her mother, father and sister have been commemorated.

Harold died in October last year and Ursula found it difficult to cope after his death. She was taken into hospital on February 15th and at the end of March transferred to The Crest.

She was contented there with the marvellous staff supporting her but her health continued to decline and she went into Harrogate District Hospital recently and was there for five days before she died peacefully.