

A celebration of life

Hazel Birkby Pennington

09 June 1928 – 02 November 2019

2:00 pm - 2:40 pm 28 November Chester Crematorium



a personal goodbye

Humanist
Ceremonies

Music - Que Sera Sera - Doris Day

Tribute - Hazel's Story

Hazel was born on the 9th of June 1928 in Richmond, Surrey, the youngest of six children born to parents Isabelle and Reginald. With 2 brothers and three sisters - all born within a 10 year period, the family home must have felt busy and "alive".

Hazel went to Trafalgar Junior School in nearby Twickenham and later Nella Secondary School where she did well - captain of the netball team and a prefect - also a very good swimmer. She was 11 when the second World War started and of course Twickenham and Richmond were targets for German bombing raids.

She remembered the weird sound of the doodlebugs. And she would remember the apple tree in the back garden and singing songs in the Anderson Shelter when the air raid siren sounded - waiting for the all clear.

Life was hard for nearly everyone - with rationing - there were often queues for the most basic items at shops. We are told now that we may have been healthier back then but Hazel remembered having to share an egg with her closest sister – Nancy, and just half a pint of milk each had to last a week.

She left school at fifteen and had a week's holiday in Cornwall with a friend - staying with her friend's Aunt.

Hazel's first job was at a kennels - she loved animals but the reality of working with them didn't quite match her expectations - she hadn't reckoned on all the cleaning up that she would have to do.

After just a few months she changed direction and found work with a company called "Sperry's" where she trained as a tracer - a skilled job requiring a lot of

patience - literally tracing complicated technical drawings using pens and inks. Of course there were no personal computers, scanners, copiers and printers back then.

She was artistic and musical - she taught herself to play the piano by ear and she had a beautiful singing voice. Hazel was able to get cheap tickets for the Albert Hall concerts by queuing for long periods at the venue - worth it - and saw several really good concerts. Hazel could also whistle well - she used to whistle famous tunes - as she grew older Elizabethan Serenade became a particular favourite.

Joining the WAAF at 19 and whilst serving met a young man by the name of Alec James Pennington. They had both joined a photographic course. They fell in love and on 11th June 1949 just a few days after Hazel was 21, they married at a local church in Twickenham - they both wore their RAF uniforms. They enjoyed a honeymoon on Hayling Island off the South Coast.

Life in the armed services meant postings. Hazel was pregnant when Alec was posted to Malta. Their first child Kevin Neil was born in 1950 but the R.A.F. then refused to give Alec leave to return and see his son. Tragically, Alec would never get to see his son as Kevin died when he was only five months old due to a problem with his intestine. Hazel would never really get over losing her son - it affected her very deeply.

Hazel did become pregnant again and in 1951 Hazel Ann was born. Naturally both parents were delighted.

Alec got posted to Germany and this time Hazel - indeed both Hazel's - went with him. He left the RAF when his daughter was about five years old conscious that his wife Hazel yearned for a more settled life.

On their return from Germany, in 1957 the three moved to the village of Purton near Swindon in Wiltshire - Hazel had long wanted to live in the countryside. She found work again as a tracer with several different companies and was often able to work

from home. Alec found work as a specialist industrial photographer - producing micro-graphs to show and check for metal fatigue for instance.

Hazel loved living remotely - she would spend time with her work and producing art - she was very talented. On her Vespa, she was able to scoot around the local area - picking up and delivering work - shopping - sometimes Hazel Ann was able to ride on the seat with her - great fun. Even in the notoriously hard winter of 1963 Hazel would be out and about on her scooter.

Hazel taught her daughter how to undertake lots of the work around the place - but when Hazel Ann came in tired from all her chores and asked what was for tea Mum would mockingly chastise her with "I'm not waiting on you hand, foot and finger" - Hazel would never be sure where the phrase came from or quite what it meant.

The family moved nearer to Malmesbury as Hazel Ann enrolled at Malmesbury Grammar School. They moved into a lovely bungalow set in around an acre of grounds. This more rural existence suited Hazel - 12 chickens became 50 - Hazel Ann was delighted too - there were numerous cats, a dog Brett and a tame Jackdaw! two pet mice (Dinner and Dessert) a hamster and several pigeons.

There would be occasional breaks when the family went camping near the river in Lechlade or in a B&B in Weston Super-Mare.

After eleven years in Wiltshire Alec had to find new work and this meant that in 1968 the family had to return to London. It was a huge change and took some getting used to.

Hazel took on the lease of a tobacconists/ come sweet shop and they lived in the two storey's above the shop. For many years Hazel hadn't had to interact with other people too often and this suited her. Here in London she was forced to interact a lot - and Hazel really struggled she just couldn't do small talk and the years of comparative isolation she had enjoyed also meant that she was out of the habit of dealing with people.

After a few years Hazel Ann - who was now eighteen, left home to live with friends - finding work whilst taking on a part-time degree.

When she was forty five Hazel suffered a nervous breakdown and was hospitalised for a couple of weeks. She was never quite the same again - she stopped doing her artwork. She had seemingly lost a lot of her confidence when Kevin died but now she became more insular - lost her spark. She really couldn't run the shop any longer.

Hazel wouldn't work again - she and Alec moved to the Ealing/Southall district - Hazel Ann got married and she and her Husband Keith briefly lived with them again before moving up to Newcastle Upon Tyne.

Alec was unhappy - Hazel was too and she had changed - he knew she didn't like living in London and so they moved up to Northumberland – near to Alston on the Northumberland Moors - about a forty minute drive from Newcastle. Close enough he hoped so that Hazel could see more of Hazel Ann and Keith. Alec stayed away a lot - he was still working in London.

Sadly, Alec and Hazel divorced in 1977 leaving Hazel on her own. Hazel moved to a flat in Sunniside, Newcastle Upon Tyne near where her daughter and husband lived.

In 1978 Hazel's first grandchild arrived - Louise - then in 1980 Neil (bearing Kevin's second name). Hazel loved them dearly - she saw a lot of Louise in particular, until Keith's work with the Inland Revenue meant that the family had to move away - settling in Mickle Trafford near Chester in 1980.

They tried to visit Hazel at least once a month though it was a long drive.

Hazel developed Asthma - and in 1989 suffered such a severe attack that she had to go into hospital for a while.

Arrangements were made for Hazel to move nearer to her daughter and her family.

Hazel moved to Newton in Chester to Cornwall House near the fire-station. Hazel enjoyed this - she regained some independence being able to shop and walk to Grosvenor Park. She made a friend too - most unusual for Hazel - Tommy - they used to sit and watch television together. Sadly he died after just a couple of years of friendship with Hazel.

And she was able to mind her grandchildren and often had Louise and Neil with her.

Thirteen years ago Hazel received news that she was now a Great Grandmother as George was born in 2006. Three years later twins Molly and Lucy arrived, followed by Sophie, Emily and nineteen months ago, Oliver. She loved all the children in her life.

In 2007 Hazel suffered a stroke, and lost some functionality in her left hand - although this improved. It did leave her with a slight slur in her speech. She relied more on her daughter Hazel Ann though she could still get out for walk.

She was content and filled her days reading - she liked literature - the likes of J.B. Priestley, Somerset Maugham, Neville Shute . Hazel once took round a copy of 50 Shades of Grey - it was a cheap book in a special offer bundle from the supermarket. Hazel read it but she didn't like it all - "all about shagging" she exclaimed. She also enjoyed television - though she was particular about what she would watch.

As age crept on Hazel's muscle strength grew less, she lost some of her hearing and developed cataracts and had a couple of falls.

She used to visit Park Medical Centre in Hoole and was particularly fond of Sister Jacqui who worked there. Jacqui found her a flat at The Windings in Helsby where in her final years she received excellent care - the staff really going above and beyond for Hazel.

On the 2nd November Hazel died peacefully- officially there was no obvious cause - Hazel died of old age.

And now Hazel's daughter, Hazel Ann is going to share some words.

Eulogy for Mum

from her daughter Hazel Ann

I looked after my Mum from 1989, when we moved her to Chester from Newcastle upon Tyne, after she had suffered a bad asthma attack, and then in greater depth after her stroke in 2007. My Mum was kind, loving, funny, stubborn and stoic. Her life wasn't easy, but she took pleasure in the small things it had to offer – a cup of tea, a piece of cake, a good book or a cuddle with a grandchild.

Her lifelong love was for animals – dogs, cats, small rodents, birds, and particularly her 50 chickens when we lived in the country in Wiltshire – she was in her element. We were once given two of them as day old chicks, which she raised by hand, and they followed her about, and when she sat down, they settled onto her jumper and watched TV with her. One winter, we realised a family of mice had taken up residence in the house. Most people would call Rentokil or put traps down, but my Mum put some bread crusts on the floor in the lounge, and then made my Dad and I kneel down behind the sofa so we could watch the baby mice feeding on the bread. Luckily, they left of their own accord shortly afterwards – possibly they were not too keen on sharing a home with the cat.

My Mum was very musical and loved to sing – she knew all the songs from the big Hollywood musicals of the 1940's (which is why I am word perfect in many of them). She liked Doris Day, Fred Astaire, and Bing Crosby and would sing whilst doing the housework. She loved the Sound of Music when it came out, and took me to see it three times – no video or catch up in those days.

She was very protective of me as a child and made many sacrifices to give me all I needed – she was particularly proud when I passed the 11+ to attend the local grammar school. They sent a long list of the uniform requirements, which could only be bought at great expense from one specialist outfitter, but she was determined to buy it all, down to the last pair of navy blue knickers. Included in this list was a brown leather purse on a long strap to be worn over your body. Despite my protests, my Mum insisted I had to wear it, but on my first day, I was the only person in my form wearing one – it was not a good start.

My Mum loved her grandchildren, Louise and Neil. They called her Nanny Puss-puss after her white cat (their other Nanny was Nanny Sykie (after her Yorkshire terrier)). When she had them to stay with her (and I only found this out recently), she would buy them comics and then let them snuggle up in her bed, eating Jaffa cakes. She would make them anything they wanted to eat – pickled onion sandwiches were evidently a speciality, and she always had

chocolate fondant mice for them. Louise thought they came from Nan's special sweet shop, and was quite devastated when she discovered they came from Thorntons.

My Mum was content living here in Chester, and her outlook on life, (particularly after her stroke), was that each day was a bonus. She loved the flat in the Windings, it was warm and sunny, and in the last year or two, she more or less took to her bed. Her 90th birthday last year was a highlight, with all the family visiting, especially when Neil brought her latest great grandchild, Oliver, to see her, who was only a few weeks old. She built up a good relationship with her carers, who were wonderful, although I could not convince her that her alarm pendant was only for emergencies – she used to press it if she wanted a drink of water or if she had finished with her tray. I kept explaining it wasn't room service, but she ignored me to the end.

I've tried to follow her ethos in life – be kind, be useful, be grateful, and don't moan. She was a lovely person, and we will all miss her.



Music: Elizabethan Serenade by Ronald Binge.

Music: My Favourite Things - Julie Andrews

