

A celebration of life

Phyllis Parry

17 August 1926 – 31 March 2020

2.45pm – 3.15pm, Tuesday 21 April 2020, Crownhill Crematorium

a personal goodbye

Humanist
Ceremonies

Phyllis Parry was born on the seventeenth of August, 1926, the only child of Percy and Florence Diamond. When Phyllis was around two, her family moved from Leeds to London where she lived for most of her life. Growing up, she lived with her mum and three maiden aunts, all telling her what to do. It must have been quite claustrophobic! She told stories of when she bought any new clothes, they had to meet the approval of each of them. As a child she loved reading and she used to try and read in bed with a torch under the covers until one of the aunts would invariably come and switch it off.

She was a pupil at Camden School for Girls and during the war the whole school was evacuated to Lincolnshire. She and another girl went to live on a farm in Grantham, an experience she found very liberating and which she spoke about with lots of affection. As an only child growing up surrounded by women it was refreshing for her to be in a large family with sons and daughters. She very much enjoyed the country life, particularly the readily available fresh food during rationing. Phyllis kept in touch with her wartime family for many years.

When she returned to London, Phyllis took her Civil Service exams and began work in the Town and Country Planning department in the West End. She volunteered at the Australian Boomerang Club serving ice creams to the service men, with whom she was very popular; exciting times for a 19-year-old! At the end of the Second World War Phyllis received a certificate of thanks from the Australian Government for her contribution.

She had a lively group of friends and a busy social life as far as wartime would allow. On VE day she and her friends danced a conga along Piccadilly!

She met Pip at a new year's party on the eve of 1948 that he had only attended 'by accident'. She was there with her current boyfriend. Weeks later Pip had managed to track her down and phoned her and asked her out. She said she fell in love with his voice. However, it took a while for her to drop the current boyfriend. From her diary it appears that she continued seeing both of them for quite a while! But she and Pip were perfect together. They were opposites, she was very effervescent and talkative, he was an academic, thoughtful and with a wicked sense of humour.

They had a hectic and very social courtship going to plays, concerts and cinema several times a week as well as seeing friends and family. She even went with him to see Arsenal on Good Friday. In April, Pip went away to Leicester with the RAF Reserves and Phyllis wrote in her diary 'Missing Pip dreadfully'. But Pip was a poor student doing his master's degree. Her diary for June 10th "Pip phoned at 4.45 - he's got a job - wonderful. He came over (all out) - he proposed to me - I'm so happy!" They married on July 10th, 1949 and moved to Reading where Pip took up his job as a lecturer at the University.

They were a very affectionate couple, devoted right to the end. She ran the house, chose his clothes, told him which foods he'd like. As an academic Pip was at home a lot, working in his study. When he did lecture, he would still bicycle home for lunch. Pip was a huge calming influence on her as she could be volatile - he would make her laugh.

Together, they created a very happy, secure home for their children. Gillian (soon to be Gilly, then Gill) was born in 1951, Tim in 1956 and Andy in 1959

Andy, Tim and Gill will now share their memories of their mum from the last 70 or so years. We'll begin with Gill.

GILL'S TRIBUTE

Mum

How do you sum up your Mum? This is really hard, especially as in these rather strange circumstances I'm really only talking to everyone who knew her as well as I did. All I can do is summon up some memories and try and pick out some parts of her story which are important to me. She was an amazing mum in so many ways.

My memories of early childhood are pretty hazy but I know that Mum was a fantastic homemaker and we were a very happy family. She had a tough time in my early years – she had miscarriages before Tim was born, her mother died after terrible suffering with cancer and to crown it all I was seriously ill with pneumonia and bed bound for weeks as you were in those days. Although I'm sure she must have struggled through all this, I can only remember patience and care from her. I don't think we were spoilt though – she could be quite strict at times – but more with the boys than me!

Mum's life changed a lot when we moved to the brand new housing development, Caversham Park Village in 1965. Everyone there was young – young families with young children, apart from Mum and Dad. And of course this was the swinging sixties and people wanted to be sociable. Mum and Dad became central players in the development of a new and very active community and they had a lot of fun. Mum's creative and organisational skills really blossomed – she ran all kinds of events, dances, jumble sales and helped backstage with all Dads' dramatic productions. She also acted as informal 'counsellor' to many young wives and mothers – I can remember so many of them sitting at the kitchen table seeking her advice.

Mum was a brilliant cook and caterer. I particularly remember our extended family Christmases. We would have great aunts, aunts, uncles and cousins (Sue and Alison will remember this I'm sure). We had to borrow trestle tables to seat everyone.

I left home for university in 1969 and every now and again I would turn up for the weekend with one or more scruffy friends in tow. They were always welcomed by Mum and well fed. Our house became the preferred refuge for many of my friends – or, as she often referred to them, 'waifs and strays'!

I'm going to fast forward a few years to when John and I got together in 1974 and decided to marry quite soon without bothering with an engagement. Bringing John to meet Mum and Dad was quite a big step and pretty scary for him. He was very different from all previous candidates and Mum was quite taken that he wore a suit! I think John would agree that Mum had no hesitation at all in welcoming him into the family and they quickly developed a really lovely relationship.

Fast forward again – Jess was born in 1981 and by this time we were living many miles away in Sunderland. This was her first grandchild and as soon as I left hospital Mum was there; cooking, washing and helping us in every way. She developed such a strong bond with Jess which continued throughout her life. When Mum and Dad retired in 1986, they moved to live round the corner from us and helped us in so many ways. But Mum brought all her skills and experience with her and soon became active in her new community.

She was such a people person – I was amazed at how quickly she got to know people in the village where we live. She was so busy – she took up aquarobics, joined U3A, worked to support the local hospice and organised regular activities in the village like fetes and jumble sales.

I used to think Mum was at her happiest stood behind a stall piled high with clothes persuading some lucky customer that 'this would really suit you'. People said she could sell snow to Eskimos and many local charities benefited for years.

Mum was a very loving person, never afraid to show her emotions – she loved us all, but most of all she adored our Dad. They had such a wonderful relationship with humour, patience and affection that I feel has been a role model for us children and grandchildren. It was so hard for Mum when Dad became ill and frail and although she was becoming a little frail herself, she looked after him at home until it was no longer possible. It was a very difficult time for her. When Dad died we knew she would grieve, but we hoped that after a time, life would improve for her.

But it didn't at all – although he had been very dependent on her, it was as if she couldn't cope without him, she missed him terribly – it was so sad. But of course, she still took a lively interest in all of us children and grandchildren – she lived for her family. One of her highlights the year after Dad's death was Jess and James' wedding in Italy. She was so proud of being the oldest person there and she had a wonderful time.

Mum was only in the early stages of Alzheimer's when we all got together in Sussex to celebrate her 90th birthday. She loved having all her family around her and it was a special time for us all. And then, very gradually, the Alzheimer's took over. Although eventually she lost her mobility altogether, she never complained. Her carers loved her as she was so patient, cheerful and always smiling.

We owe so much to our Mum. Beyond all else she believed in the importance of family and she instilled this in her children and grandchildren. Throughout my life Mum was always there for me, through the good times and the bad, I could talk to her about anything and we had a lot of fun together. I miss her terribly.

TIM'S TRIBUTE

As you will hear from Gill and Andy we had a happy childhood despite finding out later that Mum used to put us in our prams in the garden in all weathers.

My early memories include being in big trouble for drinking what I thought was Dandelion wine that I'd made by putting some yellow flowers in the bathroom sink.

I can remember Mum being very upset when JFK died.

Despite being very liberal in her outlook on life Mum tried really hard to be some sort of disciplinarian although the threat of "wait till your father gets home" didn't really fill me with fear.

As I reached the rebellious teenage years Mum and I developed a stormy and sometimes violent relationship where we would row but always make up minutes later.

Mum and Dad took an interest in what we doing at school and would always support us when we got into trouble which for me was frequently.

We had freedom, going out all day, playing football or going to the woods. Anything was ok as long as I was back for tea.

One thing I never understood was how Mum let me go with a friend on a walking (which became hitchhiking) holiday, staying in Youth Hostels around the south coast when I was just 14.

Our house was open to all our friends and they all adored her.

When I finally left home to go to college, it was phone home once a week at most and the odd visit to our house in Reading.

I think my journey from struggling musician to my current occupation was a bit surprising to Mum but I believe she was proud of my achievements.

When our children arrived mum was always on offer to help out.

Mum and Dad loved coming to our house in Italy and we have many wonderful memories of those times.

It's difficult to hold on to memories of Mum before her decline caused by Alzheimers.

From my 60th birthday party, less than 4 years ago, to now has been an upsetting time for us all but she was always well looked after and always had a smile on her face.

She was a warm, sociable, kind hearted person and a wonderful mum.

ANDY'S TRIBUTE

What can I say about our Mum? She was unique; loving, kind and compassionate.

My childhood was a happy one; stable, supportive and with quite a lot of freedom.

But our household was not typical. Mum was very hospitable and a great cook. Everyone was welcome. I would have friends round and she would always feed them, even with little notice. Mum would say, "if you can feed 4, you can feed 6". We ate very well but my friends were not always sure about some of the exotic "foreign" food Mum would rustle up. Dishes such as Lasagne, Spaghetti and Moussaka were not common in those days.

She was an experimental cook and ahead of her time in many ways, including in matters of equality. I remember Dad being at home a lot. On one occasion, he was doing the Hoovering and my friend said to me later, "Doesn't your Dad have a job!"

Mum did lots of work for charity. She was known as "the Jumble Queen" where we lived. I would often answer the door to random strangers who would thrust bin bags into my hands with stuff for her latest sale.

Mum was fantastic when things went wrong, particularly when I had one of my many accidents that led to trips to A&E. She was always calm and reassuring and she never panicked.

Mum never ceased to amaze me. Put her in any situation where there were other people and seemingly within 10 minutes she would know their life stories. She loved people and was fascinated by their lives. She could be a bit of a snob at times and she was sometimes hilarious, always without trying to be. Dad and I would be in hysterics after something she said and she would always wonder why we were laughing.

After Gill and Tim left for College I had 7 more years living at home. This was generally happy although Mum and I had plenty of "moments". We started to get on much better when I finally left home and we only saw each other every Sunday.

Mum, ever the practical one, had prepared me well for this moment. She had taught me how to cook, use the washing machine and iron; even how to sew on a button. I think she was desperately trying to hasten my departure!

If Mum was a Superhero, I would say her special powers would be caring for others, managing in a crisis and of course - talking!

We will all miss her dearly.

After a full and active life Phyllis's world all but collapsed when Pip died. Phyllis was devastated and never recovered. Symptoms of Alzheimer's started to show themselves. She had the loving support of her family and of Gail who was her home help, and then carer. Gail had cleaned, cooked, and helped around the house for many years. She was a very important person to Phyllis, becoming part of the family and really, was like another daughter to her. When Phyllis was no longer able to live at home, Gail visited her at Parklands, four or five times a week.

Phyllis was very well looked after at Parklands and her family are very grateful to the staff there for the care they gave her and to those who were with her when, towards the end of March, it became impossible to visit her in her final days. Phyllis died on the 31st of March, aged ninety-three.

She was well loved by everyone who knew her. Some of the many tributes received included:

'She was a delightful person full of charm and personality, a joy to be with'

'This is how I think of your Mum; full of life and vibrant as a spring and summer day'