

A celebration of life

Dorothy Ormerod

31 December 1925 – 8 May 2020

Friday 29 May 2020, Park Wood Crematorium

a personal goodbye

Humanist
Ceremonies

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Tribute

Dorothy was born on the last day of 1925, welcomed by her parents, Annie and Robert Hargreaves. She was one of eight children, but sadly only three survived past the age of ten: Dorothy, her eldest brother Harry, and a sister, Alice, older than her by fourteen years. By all accounts, Dorothy grew into a beautiful young lady, and already had a boyfriend when the Second World War loomed into view. He was posted, and asked a friend, a certain Herbert Ormerod, to 'look after' his girlfriend. Bert obviously did a very good job, so good that he ended up falling in love with her himself. Dorothy was still only seventeen when he proposed, shortly before leaving to serve with the RAF, as a navigator on a Lancaster bomber. When she turned eighteen, Robert gave his consent to their marriage (parental consent being needed at the time, for anyone under 21). Bert was still away serving, so Dorothy eagerly sent him a telegram with the news, saying, 'Sorry couldn't phone, wrong number, so excited, Dad said yes'.

Times were hard, and fabric scarce, but luckily Annie was a seamstress, so made her daughter her wedding gown. Bert came home on leave and they were married at the Unitarian Church in Todmorden on 3rd June 1944, but he barely had time for his honeymoon in Blackpool before he was sent back up in the air, on a bombing raid over Germany. His plane was shot down, and he was first posted as missing in action, and then reported as a prisoner of war. The love birds were separated for months, until VE Day came and Bert was able to travel home again, to his sweetheart.

Bert was devoted to Dorothy, or 'Oboe', as he affectionately called her. The nickname stemmed from his time in the navigator's seat. In those days before radar, the planes were equipped with transponder technology to help them keep on course; as they reached their destination it emitted a sound similar to an oboe. Perhaps it was because Dorothy was Bert's guide through life; whatever the reason, the name was bestowed, and she was always Oboe to him, though Dot, or Auntie Dot to most others.

Dorothy had been looked after when she was younger by her sister, Alice, who had been almost a second mother to her. Dorothy so wanted to start a family of her own, but she suffered several miscarriages and stillbirths, before having her daughter, Diana Louise, in 1949. Dorothy made a wonderful mother, but Louise was a very poorly baby, and sadly died at the age of just three. Dorothy's nurturing capacity was such that she proceeded to work in a children's nursery after her bereavement.

Dorothy may not have had chance to be a mum as she would have wished, but she had no shortage of maternal instinct, and was a warm and loving auntie to all her nieces and nephews. She used to make them beautiful outfits, showing off her talents at crochet and knitting, and every cake she baked was perfect. Alice's daughters, Gail and Doreen were very close to her from being children, and when they had children of their own, Dorothy was like a second grandma to them.

And she always had love to spare for any of the children in the family; her great-niece Simone described how, 'at family gatherings, Auntie Dorothy was always amongst the noise and chaos created by young children. She cherished time spent with me, my brother, my sister and our cousin Katie. In fact, any child present would be made to feel special and loved. Auntie Dorothy played games and shared stories that would captivate you. She had a special connection with children.'

Despite their heartache, Dorothy and Bert had a wonderful life together, travelling afar, caravanning, touring or cruising; Bert's brother Derek and his wife, Winnie, were congenial travel partners on many of those trips, and their daughter, Dorothy's niece Joanne, remembers her family joining them in various places round Europe. Dorothy had learned hairdressing when she was young, but with Bert working as a geography teacher, she bought a haberdashery shop in Todmorden, above which the two of them lived for years. Joanne wrote:

'She loved the shop, chatting away to customers, dressing the window with a theme or colour each week; she had so much talent. I worked in her shop when I was at school; Dorothy taught me to knit. She would jokingly say I handled them like pokers; she was right and today I still laugh. Teaching my daughter, Lexie, to knit a while ago, the memories came back: how very patient and kind she was. Dorothy was always thinking about people. When I left home to start nursing, she gave me many items for my bottom drawer, including a tablecloth I still have today.'

Simone remembers Dorothy arriving at Christmas with all sorts of handmade gifts, including wonderful baby clothes and beautiful crocheted baby blankets.

Dorothy and Bert made the perfect couple, and such a handsome pair, always smartly dressed. They enjoyed a marriage full of love and remained utterly committed to each other for the 67 years they spent together, up to Bert's death in 2011.

Even just before he died, Bert still had great travel plans for Dorothy, and he made Gail promise to take her auntie round the world. So, in her eighties, that's what they did! Going via Singapore, they visited Simone and her family in Australia, Joanne and her family in New Zealand, and Lizzie and her family in Florida. It was a fabulous adventure, and a huge pleasure for Dorothy to meet the next generation of her extended family.

Simone wrote:

I am grateful that my children, Robert and Alice, have such fond memories of her visit to Australia, even though Dorothy was in her 80s! Alice running into Dorothy's room in the morning to snuggle in bed with her and chatter away; Auntie Dorothy taking interest in all their hobbies and pets, even feeding our pet rats peas! We all

fondly remember how Auntie Dorothy always made a point of saying she could not eat any more but managing a second helping of dessert! Auntie Dorothy brought a spirit of happiness and joy with her. She had a glint in her eye and an appreciation of life and what it had to offer, including the small things in life.

While Lizzie said:

As a child myself I visited Dorothy many times, and she came to our house with Bert. There would always be a table spread with food and Dorothy would be helping, both to prepare food and keep all the children amused. She would bring shiny new coins and small trinkets she had collected just for us, nothing of great value, but just her collection for the children to excitedly receive and rummage through. When she had poodles, they came too. I remember amusingly her borrowing my old pushchair for one of the poodles that had a poorly leg. She dutifully took it out daily in it, put in on the grass to do whatever and then pushed it back again to the flat. People must have watched and laughed.

I'm so glad Khloe got to meet Dorothy, when her and Mum visited Florida. She was so enjoying her trip and so pleased to see me again, especially meeting Khloe for the first time. We had such a lovely time together; she was up for anything. Still the same Aunt Dorothy I remember, who always had time to listen and talk to you. Khloe loved having her with us, and Dorothy went out with us everywhere. She was in her 80's yet we "dragged" her around, to the beach, and amusement parks. And shopping; she loved clothes shopping...every morning she would be up, dressed, ready to go.

When she was widowed, Dorothy was amongst friends, living in Southport in a warden-assisted flat and happily maintaining her independence. But eventually time and age caught up with her, and she started to show signs of dementia. She was very close to her great-niece Katie, who at the time was working at Lee Mount Care Home in Halifax, so that seemed the obvious choice when looking for somewhere to take care of Dorothy. And she settled in there very contentedly, making new friends, in particular Eve Brady, Gail's partner Alan's mum. Alan and Gail, and Katie and her partner Chris, would regularly take the two of them out, shopping for clothes, to see a show, like Shrek the Musical, or Educating Rita, or just to enjoy a meal and a sweet dessert to follow.

Thankfully, Dorothy's condition progressed slowly, and she enjoyed life at the care home, and mixing with the other residents and the staff. And her dementia journey brought out some amusing traits, alongside the memory loss. For a time, she became obsessed with the Fifty Shades of Grey films, playing them constantly and never failing to be tickled by the somewhat suggestive material contained within, material her visitors and carers were treated to 24/7. Luckily they could all have a good laugh with her about it. Dorothy also developed a spot of kleptomania, and family and

carers were continually having to empty handbags, coat pockets, drawers and shoe boxes of her latest haul of tissues, toilet rolls and napkins.

Dorothy remained quite the party animal all her life, always enjoying conversation and company, so the last few weeks were especially difficult for her. It is some comfort, though, that she had decided she was ready to go, and that she passed away quietly and peacefully at the end.

After her true love, Bert, died, Dorothy wrote a letter to Simone which she finished with the words: 'Now I have to look to the future, and remember all the good times.' Simone suggested that we could all learn from her beautiful aunt, reflect on a life lived to the full, remind ourselves of the good times she had and turn our faces to the future.