

Tribute

Freda Robinson was born in Yiewsley in Middlesex, on the 7th January 1927, the fourth daughter of Fred, who worked in the government pensions department and Elizabeth, a housewife and mother of six children. The children were quite widespread in ages, so Freda spent most of her time with her younger brother Alan and it is clear from her own childhood memories that they had rather a love-hate relationship.

Freda has written such lovely memories of her childhood days, about the freedom to wander in the fields and play with local children, of walking to her first school on her own, of developing her interest and love of the garden and nature from her father, of learning crafts and cooking from her mother, making do and mending, and being charitable and giving to those who had less than them. Christmases were particularly busy and happy times centred around family pursuits.

As a child Freda also had the experience of life in a big city when she and her twin sisters went to stay with their aunt and uncle in Nottingham, during the long summer holidays. New to her was playing rounders and tag out in the streets with the other children, alongside factories and big shops, watching her uncle work in his carpenter's workshop and being treated by her auntie to ice-cream and other luxuries which she didn't have at home.

Aged nine, Freda and the family moved to a brand-new estate house in the village of Farnborough near Orpington in Kent. Freda went to the village school, before taking her 11+ exam and moving to the senior school in Orpington and aged 13 went to Chiselhurst Technical College where she studied shorthand and typing.

However, by this time, when Freda was twelve, war had been declared and life was very different for the whole family. Freda's dad was transferred with his job to Blackpool, and as their house was under the flight path of German bombers, the family had to spend many nights in shelters and eventually Freda's mother took the younger children to stay in Nottingham for a while. Freda officially left school at fifteen and began work in a solicitor's office but when she was seventeen, she began another very exciting, memorable and obviously exhausting time of her life when she joined the Land Army in Nottingham. The girls lived in dormitories, three per room in manor houses or farms and cycled out to various farms each morning. There would usually be German or Italian prisoners working alongside them as well. The work was hard but fun: the nicest was threshing in the summer and the worst jobs were in the winter, when they had to separate the wheat from the chaff, the frozen wheat seeds pinging off and hitting them in the face. Freda continued her work as a land girl when she went back to Kent, where she still lived in a hostel, but she eventually had to give up because the heavy lifting work was damaging her shoulders. Freda made a good friend in Jeanne who married a G.I. and moved to the states and up until a few years ago they remained in touch.

Freda used to go to local dances with her friend Christine and it was here that she met Christine's cousin and her future husband Jack who sadly wasn't much of a dancer but did have a car! They married in their early twenties and Freda had had three children, Geoff, Hazel and Sheila by the time she was 27.

They had moved into a house in Basset Way in Farnborough which came with an elderly sitting tenant whom Freda had to care for, as well as the family and countless pets.

Life as a young mum. was very hard. It was during the post-war period of deprivation, with few housework appliances of convenience, the village shop was a bracing walk away, Jack worked long hours but was also 'the man of the house' with all the connotations that held and money wouldn't have been plentiful. Freda took strawberry picking jobs when the children were small and eventually returned to office work until she had to leave to care for her own mother. There was then a job as a wages clerk and pub work.

The children remember their mother as a 'stoic', a woman who just got on with things with no complaints, an easy-going lady but also the disciplinarian who took no nonsense and who meted out punishment with the wooden spoon if need be.

Christmas was again a period of hard work but great fun and a lot of effort went into giving the children the best time but without the commercial spoiling that too many modern children receive. Cooking the turkey and preparing Christmas lunch for a large family was undertaken pretty much single-handedly.

One of Freda's deep-seated loves was watching sport on television, particularly Wimbledon but also the Olympics. On the occasions that either of these classics coincided with holidays or other events, it was imperative to get the television set up so that normal service could be resumed as quickly as possible.

Family holidays were often camping or caravanning when the children were small and before they had a car Freda would pack up all the bedlinen and clothes in Jack's old kit bag and send it on to the site before they took the train to their destination. This was often on the south coast, Westgate for example, the Isle of Wight, the New Forest. Later on, there were holidays in Devon, with friends Dick and Elsie, and a trip to visit a war-time friend in the Netherlands, or Spain and a very wet week in Austria.

The children all moved abroad when they reached adulthood, Geoff, and then Sheila, to Canada, Hazel to Australia and whilst this would have been very difficult for Freda and Jack, it presented them with opportunities to travel themselves to visit the children and have marvellous holidays and adventures.

Hazel returned to the UK after two years and Freda became a grandma with the birth of Adam and Donna, born to Hazel and Pete. This was followed by Stepanie to Geoff and Carolyn and Amy and Wendy to Sheila and Don. Freda also became a great grandma when Daniel and Joseph were born.

Jack and Freda moved to Poole but sadly Jack died when Freda was only sixty-six. Not wanting to burden the children with her own grief Freda always claimed to be fine, but in reality, even though she was an independent woman with friends and many interests of her own, she cried every day. She worked in charity shops, followed her interests, holidayed abroad with Geoff and Sheila's families, visited Hazel and family on the bus or train but always, always maintained her beautiful garden.

Fifteen years ago, Freda moved to Wells to be nearer to Hazel and she bought her property in Carlton Mews in the centre of the city; an easy walk to the market, to the shops and across the fields. Freda maintained her fitness into her early nineties when she began to experience signs of dementia. She moved to Court House Care Home in Cheddar last year where she was very happy, and with the utmost dedication of the staff, and Hazel, was well looked after until her peaceful death on the 11th August. Freda lived her life with a 'can-do' attitude, she worked extremely hard, made the most of all the opportunities that came along, dealt with sadness and misfortune in a stoical way and has left her lovely, loving family with many, many happy memories.