

A celebration of life Ida Mary Steele

26th October 1923 – 26th August 2020

Woodvale Crematorium, Brighton
10th September 2020, 2.30 pm

a personal goodbye

Humanist
Ceremonies

The Tribute

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You will now hear the tribute, the story of Ida's life. This has been written by her daughter Sue, who has asked me to read it on her behalf.

My mum was born in Wraysbury in 1923, the youngest of three children. Wraysbury, if you didn't know, was at the time a small village in Buckinghamshire, beside the river Thames. Wraysbury has subsequently become notorious as the birthplace of Christine Keeler, "are you married or do you come from Wraysbury?" being a local saying, but it seems the hedonistic lifestyle passed her by.

She said that she had an unhappy childhood. Her father, a failed medical student, was Secretary of the village cricket team, and highly sociable, frequently leaving her mother alone while he played cricket and drank at the pub afterwards. He was subsequently discovered to be embezzling the funds. His father was Chief Medical Officer at Cirencester, and his son must have been a great disappointment to him.

She loved the outdoors and swam in the Thames, and was also proficient at rowing - she rowed the ferryboat. The family kept goats and chickens.

She hated school and left early. Despite being talented at English she never got to grips with arithmetic. However, a neighbour paid for her to go to shorthand typing college and she was excellent at both, and was proud in later life of the jobs she had, particularly working at Royal Holloway College for the professors of English and Biology.

In 1949 she married Ken Steele, a skilled cabinet maker and site foreman. She met him when he was in the RAF, having first gone out with his older brother Ernie. Her parents felt he was beneath her, and that as the youngest child she should stay at home and look after them, but the couple threatened to run away together, so they relented and organised a reception. One of mum's fond memories was being gonged off on the train to the Isle of Wight where they spent their honeymoon.

They set up home in a flat above a grocers in Staines High Street. Money was tight. Mum acquired the first in a line of cats, Tosca, who could not miaow, (Tosca is a character in an opera, for the uninitiated). She was constantly being catnapped by the grocers downstairs to take on the shop's mice.

I am an only child. Mum had a miscarriage when I was very young, and in later life told me she had an abortion shortly after they were married. She was a full time mum for most of my childhood.

*She was absolutely devoted to me and my dad. She taught me to read and write before I went to school – although she steered clear of arithmetic! – and encouraged me to read by taking me to the library. We read *Black Beauty* when I was very young, looking at the pictures and crying over the fate of Ginger together.*

My father moved round the country to enhance his career and she had at least eight different homes with him.

When I was nine we went for our first ever family holiday, to West Devon. My father was inspired, and decided he wanted to move there. He landed a job in Wadebridge, Cornwall. After a year they bought a remote run down farmhouse and three acres, so that I could eventually have a horse. My mother found herself helping renovate the house, and feeding and looking after the chickens and, when I borrowed a pony for the winter, helping with that. It was a lonely existence but she soon befriended the two nearest neighbours. Wadebridge was ten miles away and the bus stop, to catch the one bus a day, was a mile down the road. The previous occupant had left a moped in one of the sheds and mum rode this shakily into town.

For various reasons we were eventually forced to move back to London to a second floor flat in Teddington. Mum couldn't stand being in the flat and promptly acquired a part time job with a solicitors. We moved again to Twickenham.

At this time she suffered blinding headaches and visual disturbance. The local GP diagnosed migraine, prescribed valium and dismissed her as a neurotic housewife. She was certainly subject to depression throughout her life but the real cause of the headaches turned out to be glaucoma, "the Thief of Sight". A routine visit to the optician became an emergency admission to the eye hospital and a lifetime of unsuccessful treatment.

When I went to University my Dad got his final promotion to Brighton, and we moved again.

The bungalow in Shoreham was probably my mother's favourite home. Here she took up painting, got the bus to visit her friend in Shoreham town every week, and bicycled to us in Portslade to do the ironing and help water our allotment. My father's health was failing, however.

When Stable Cottages came on the market I showed it to Dad and he immediately suggested selling both our properties, and moving in together. In due course they moved into the extension he had designed.

My father died in 2000, shortly after the floods, and mum managed with help from Allan as her carer, and subsequently three visits a day from a Care Agency. Many thanks at this point to Louise her favourite carer for many years.

Mum had never learnt to drive but when we went to choose an electric recliner chair she spied a Mobility Scooter in the same shop. It was her great delight to trundle off down the lane, although her limited sight by this time made her a liability, and we endeavoured to walk with her. Once she ran over my foot. She was also prone to flat batteries and I pushed her on the scooter up the lane opposite our house on more than one occasion.

Following a fall in 2017 mum reluctantly agreed to go into a care home. She hated it. When I found the other care home in Ringmer, Holm Lodge, had a vacancy I arranged to show it to her. She said she didn't like it, but after I had confirmed to the Manager she did not want the room, she phoned begging to move there, and she was a resident for three years.

Here she starred in her own Mystery Thriller. Who was taking things from her room? Who moved things at night? Her view of Holm Lodge varied from 'I'm really happy here' to 'This prison'. She was often on the warpath, for example complaining the staff stole her knickers. (Not true; when I cleared her room I found every pair of knickers I'd ever bought her, albeit in various places). She would not accept that no one had reason to steal her things and during her last brief stay in hospital she inspired a safeguarding investigation by Social Services into her welfare.

Talking to the care home staff, I suggested gently that they would be glad to get rid of her and was surprised to hear, no, she was a favourite. She had her own opinion, right or wrong, and no hesitation in telling them.

It reminded me of one of my favourite Tony Benn quotes. "Say what you believe, and believe what you say". My mother to a T.

Thanks for writing that, Sue, it was a privilege to read it on your behalf.