

# A celebration of life

# Pauline Gene Wilsdon

29<sup>th</sup> December 1926 – 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2020

1.00pm 20<sup>th</sup> July 2020 South Oxfordshire Crematorium

*a personal goodbye*

Humanist  
*Ceremonies*

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## TRIBUTE

But first a few words from Pauline's youngest son, Tony.

### TONY:

Thank you all so much for coming in these difficult times, and the kind thoughts and cards from so many that could not make it here today.

Sadly it has just proved too difficult to get a venue to have a drink afterwards which would have so disappointed Mum, as she did like a drink and a party.

So as you all know Mum was quite a blunt person she didn't really care what she said if she thought it was true. My wife Pam recalls that the first time they met after a couple of pleasantries she asked "Do you believe in God?" and almost straight away "do you like hunting?" So the interrogation had begun. But Pam somehow passed the tests and was allowed into the family.

So what was she like as a Mum? Well Mike and me both survived childhood and turned out ok I think.

But there is one legendary incident before I was born that I must tell you about, when the neighbours popped round to find Mike stuck halfway through the cat flap, so they rescued him and went inside where they found Mum upstairs on the bed who explained that he was annoying her so she put him out in the garden to get some peace, and nothing wrong with that in her eyes.

She never particularly liked children and she did expect us to fend for ourselves if we could.

My diary for when I was 7 recalls that one school holiday I woke up to find that Dad was at work and Mum and Mike had gone out so I got up got some breakfast and just carried on with my day, probably nowadays that would be a bit frowned upon.

Mum lived a full and varied life, opera, fine arts, holidays abroad and in this country, book club, church recording, historical societies, Ashmolean museum member, Giffords circus, the ploughing match and of course the beagling especially the social side, organizing eggy teas, quizzes, walks and much more.

She was always politically incorrect, sometimes downright rude. But she was my Mum

Pauline was born in London in 1926. The year of the General Strike. There was no electricity or fuel. Pauline entered a world lit by candlelight and heated by peat fires. She seemed to have contracted every childhood illness going. Due to the war her schooling was a bit of a hotch potch. When she left school, she took a commercial certificate and found work as a typist and assistant secretary.

Before studying physiotherapy.

Her first job was with Stewarts and Lloyds steel works in Corby. Her second was with Morris Motors in Oxford.

So it was that in 1949 a young, newly trained physiotherapist called Pauline Milford arrived in Oxford and took lodgings in a house in Cowley. One of the other lodgers invited her to join a local tennis club that rented a court from Oriel College during the summer vacations. Where she met the twins Ray and Cyril.

Ray was, apparently, very impressed with Pauline – because every time she missed the ball she said “shit”.

The feeling was mutual.

Ray’s fanatical interest in golf waned in favour of investigating local pubs with Pauline.

Which culminated in a wedding. On 25<sup>th</sup> August 1951 in Cainscross Church in Stroud – where Pauline’s parents were now living.

The couple honeymooned in Ventnor on the Isle of Wight for one week.

Soon after they had the house built in Barton Lane – where they were to live for the rest of their lives.

Pauline and Ray discovered they were both interested in horses. One of Pauline’s patients had a couple of what she called “old nags”. The pair had lessons from a retired Major who had taught rookies in the Household Cavalry. Their first session was totally devoted to naming of the parts - of the horse and the tack. It didn’t put Ray and Pauline off.

They went to Point-to-Point horse racing for many years firstly as a couple then as a family with Michael and Tony and often with Ray’s brother Cyril and his partner. Not so much for the horses said Pauline – “purely to gamble”.

They went pony trekking in Llanwrtyd Wells in Wales. The tiny town was trying to establish a tourist trade by repurposing the ponies normally used for shepherding. The place is now better known for the World Bog Snorkelling Championships. Pauline’s pony was slow. Ray’s was fast. To make things worse Pauline started to feel unwell. First signs of pregnancy.

Mike was born in 1957.

As the boys have attested, Pauline was no perfect mother.

Take her cooking...

...and the dreaded words “It’s a bit of an experiment.”

That's not to say that Pauline couldn't cook. She was fine on standards like steak and kidney pudding. She just preferred "a bit of an experiment".

She would often embark on a new recipe only to find she lacked key ingredients – which she would substitute from her superannuated larder. A cucumber would be replaced by a cabbage. Pepper replaced by curry powder. Very old curry powder. And she didn't pay too much attention to the recommended quantities.

When Mike's wife first met Pauline – apart from the interrogation – she had to eat lunch. Pauline had made a stew. Garnished with what looked like mushroom. And turned out to be pigeon hearts – a bit chewier than mushroom. Mike discovered that most of her pigeon hearts had been smuggled onto his plate.

Mike still doesn't want to talk about the rollmop herring.

But the boys survived. Relatively unscathed. Grew up. Left home.

The eighties and nineties were Ray and Pauline's salad decades – the happiest time of their lives the boys think. They had no childcare to worry about. They were financially secure. They were healthy. They went on holidays. Their social diary was always full. They went to the opera. They went hunting.

Pauline described beagling as "a wonderful schooling in the art of venery and an enthralling occupation which has never faded". For the avoidance of doubt, "venery" in this case is the Middle English word for hunting – nothing rude.

Pauline was the moving force behind many of the hunting socials. She organised egg teas. Cherry pip spitting. Woodlouse racing. A sheep testicle dinner. Tony tried it. He says it tasted like your average testicle.

Ray attended his last Dummer hunt function at the age of 90. But it was his last. He died in December 2015.

I conducted his funeral. And resisted Pauline's attempts to get me to join the Dummer hunt.

Here to tell us about Pauline and Ray's hunting years is Hugh Smith. Hugh...

**HUGH:**        *not supplied*

After Ray's death, Pauline moved to a flat in Witney. She kept herself busy with her arts and historical dos. But by last Christmas even she was starting to slow down.

She has bequeathed an unfinished project to Tony – her tapestry tie back. Pauline calculated that it should take about 250 hours to complete. The ideal lockdown pastime...