

A celebration of life

Sylvia May Hutchins

5th April 1926 - 24th October 2020

11.00-11.30 am, 5th November 2020, Cam Valley Crematorium

a personal goodbye

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The Tribute

Introduction

Sylvia was born on 5th April 1924 in Portland in Dorset, where she grew up. She often spoke of her childhood and teenage years there, with her good friend Iris and had very fond memories of that time.

Then she moved to north London with her family where her father ran a haulage business.

Here she met Bert, when her mother was childminding Bert's daughter Sylvie. They both left London in the mid nineteen fifties, moving to Benfleet where Bert was a carpenter and Mike and Jenny were born. When the children were very young Sylvia and Bert bought a plot of land and Bert built a new home in Homefields Avenue. A lot of the funding for the project had come from Sylvia's father and when the bank assumed that the house should be in Bert's name, Sylvia soon put them right. She was always very astute in practical and financial matters, though never a business woman, she had a 'business brain'.

The house in Homefields Avenue was the family hub. Sylvia lived there until March this year. Her mother and father moved in next door and then her sister Dora and Tom moved there. Their children, Peter and David, were able to keep in close touch with Aunty Sylvia when they visited their parents. In recent years, after the death of Bert seventeen years ago and then Dora, Tom and Sylvia would have coffee together and listen to the cricket.

Sylvia was a keen cricket supporter, she and Bert watched a lot of cricket together and she loved Wimbledon as well.

Sylvia loved the arts, enjoying paintings, the theatre and cinema. She enjoyed listening to music and was an avid reader. When younger she would go up to London every Saturday with Iris to see shows and they would go to red carpet opening events as well. Later she would go to the theatre and cinema in Southend and London with Jenny. In fact, for many years, she would jump on a bus to Southend nearly every week to see a film or meet a friend.

On the television, she enjoyed science and nature programmes as well as sport, particularly if they were presented by David Attenborough or Brian Cox and she read Richard Dawkin's books.

She had books about Tony Blair as well though it may have been his youthful good looks rather than his politics that appealed.

Perhaps not surprisingly for someone with these wide ranging interests and tastes, Sylvia enjoyed a serious conversation but she was not a great one for

small talk. She certainly 'knew her own mind' and could be quite adamant about her opinions.

Sylvia was not a great traveller but she was a keen photographer and took many photos on her holiday trips around the UK. She had lots printed, she had a knack for the well composed shot.

Sylvia had a close knit circle of friends and even when she did not see them very often she would keep in touch with letters.

Five years ago Sylvia suffered a stroke and spent some time in hospital at Southend. She vowed never to go into hospital again. She wanted to remain at home and be independent for as long as she could, and she did. She was in pretty good health until about nine months ago but typically, as she liked to keep her affairs in order, she had begun passing on her possessions, ensuring that they went to those that she wanted to have them.

She moved into Hargrave House Care Home in Stansted, in March, when she needed more help and support. Although at first she wasn't sure she would be happy there, because, she said, "everybody there was old". While acknowledging that she was probably older than most of them, she felt that they "seemed older". Nevertheless, she settled in well, made new friends and regained some better health. She was appreciated as 'a real character' at the care home.

Her family were able to visit and see her in the garden or through the window but thanks to the help of the carers there, Mike and Jenny were able to keep in touch most days via Facetime. Thank heavens for technology! Her sudden death on the 24th October was an unexpected shock but everyone is grateful that Sylvia did not suffer weeks of increasing discomfort.

My Mother, Mike Hutchins

We couldn't have asked for a better childhood

Mum did everything that she could to ensure that we had everything we needed or wanted when we were children.

Although mum and dad had to be very careful with money, mum always made sure that I had everything a young lad would want –train sets, cars, action men, football Subbuteo with all the teams - on reflection I was very lucky.

At school I can remember how Mum always encouraged us to bring friends to the house to play, and so school holidays were always fun with football games

in the garden and Mum filling us all with food and drink. She always welcomed our friends and took a keen interest in them, always enquiring after them and their families. Although many have drifted away over the years, some remained in touch with Mum as much as with us and it has been a great comfort to know that one friend in particular, Paul Gilham, has always been at hand if Mum ever needed help. I'm sure she saw him as another son.

Living at Benfleet, fairly close to the sea meant that Mum would happily prepare picnics and take me and Jenny off on the train to Leigh-on-sea, Chalkwall or Westcliff or the bus to Canvey Island and we would spend wonderful days playing on the beach, enjoying ice-creams and generally having fun. This later evolved to excursions to the cinema, theatre and galleries, which continued right through into our adulthoods.

We couldn't have wanted for more!

Mum was equally keen to see us do well at school – encouraging us to have a profession – and so again we were never short of the text books or equipment that we needed and Mum would dedicate much of her time to helping us with our school work as much as she was able – eager to see us progress in school as much as we could.

As we grew up, got married and had children, Mum took as much interest in her grandchildren Robert, Hazel and Mark as she had with Jenny and me. She was equally keen to hear about them, what they were up to, what their thoughts and ideas were and she would always buy them books, just as she has recently been doing with her great granddaughter Millie

Mum's life passions, other than her family, revolved around books, music, arts and entertainment. There was always music playing, either from the radio in the kitchen or Grandma's old radio-gram in the lounge and Mum often hummed the tunes as she went about the house. We were encouraged to read, to embrace the arts and to enjoy music. Mum even bought a piano so that we had an opportunity to learn to play an instrument.

It's fair to say that Mum's choice of music can be quite eclectic and she was quite open minded about the music she listened to – I can't remember her ever complaining about the heavy rock music that must have been heard thumping through the ceiling or drifting down the stairs when we were teenagers.

Mum's varied choice in music included the violinist Sarah Chang, the John Wilson Orchestra, Joshua Bell and John Borrowman was a firm favourite. Mum particularly loved musicals and had most of the well-known shows on CD and would get enjoyment from settling down at the end of the day,

sometimes singing along to the music as well as the DVDs. It came as no surprise to find Pink Floyd and Moody Blues albums sitting amongst West Side Story, Carousel, Phantom of the Opera and all the others that made up her collection.

Mum would regularly listen to the radio and was pretty well clued-up with current affairs and world issues and always had pretty firm views. She would also use the radio as her source for keeping up to date with the latest music, book and film releases. She kept a note pad by her side and would make a point of writing down the name of anything she heard that she liked and would later pick it up on her next shopping trip into Southend. In more recent years, as her mobility declined, she would pass on this information to Jenny and ask if she could order for her through Amazon.

Mum devoured books! Once all her chores were complete she would settle herself down in her chair in the lounge each afternoon and would work her way through the many titles that always surrounded her. She could quite easily finish in a day a book that would take the rest of us a month to read.

There was never a shortage of ideas of what to get mum for her birthday or for Christmas.

Mum also loved Art and was very supportive of a local Suffolk artist, Katy Sodeau, buying a number of her paintings which were hung around the house. She also loved the Elisa limited edition figurines and over the years amassed a lovely collection of these – over the last few years mum was keen to distribute these amongst the family so that we have all been able to share her love for the work.

Mum loved her garden. She was very proud of what she had achieved and still, at the age of 80, would be telling us, to our horror, that she had been outside climbing ladders to trim shrubs and cut branches. It was only over the last few years that mum had decided that perhaps she would benefit from some help outside.

Mum also loved wildlife and would try and attract birds to the garden with food and the plants that she grew. She did nothing to discourage the foxes at the bottom of the garden, which over many generations were constant visitors, despite the potential havoc that they would sometimes bring.

Needless to say David Attenborough was a great hero of hers and so alongside her music and books sat volumes of his work and DVD's of his many TV series

The same goes for Brian Cox – another hero who reinforced her views on the planet and how we, the human race and the solar system evolved. She cared very much for the planet although she did frustrate us with her desire to recycle every little bit of rubbish and scrap of food that she generated, even right to the end of her time at Homefields.

Despite her interest in the planet and beyond, she wasn't a great traveller – to my knowledge, she had never been out of the country, except on her holiday to Scotland with Dad and although she didn't have that many holidays during her life I do have very fond memories of our family holidays as children in caravans in Folkestone and the cottage holidays we had in Dawlish and Cornwall.

She also loved the trip to Cornwall that we had with her and dad when Robert was born as well as the trip that mum and I made to Cornwall in later years.

Jen and Paul also took her on lovely trips to introduce her to the Lake District, the Yorkshire Dales and the Peak District and she would return from all of these trips proudly showing me the many photographs that she had taken of her tours around the country certainly putting my photo skills to shame.

Mum also loved her cricket and tennis. She and Dad would wipe-out days sitting watching the Test Matches. Later on, after dad had passed away, Uncle Tom would pop over from next door and sit and keep her company while they would enjoy the cricket together and talk about family and world affairs.

Of course mum would eagerly look forward to the month of June and the start of Wimbledon when year after year she would sit down in front of the TV, draw the curtains to keep the sun out and watch Borg, McEnroe, Henman, Nadal, Murray and Federer play five sets only surfacing for supper at 'Close of Play'. Telephone calls to Mum often needed to be synchronised with the TV sports schedules.

Mum was very independent and was determined to see out her days at Homefields – the house that she and dad had built and where she had lived for the last 60 + years

With her health beginning to fail, she reluctantly agreed that she would have to leave Homefields Avenue. She moved to Hargraves House (Flat No 7) a care residence 15 minutes away from me and Debbie. Mum

settled into Hargraves House surprisingly well and lived there happily for the last 6 months of her life, calling it her home. She

made several friends with some of the residents and the staff and found plenty of things going on around her of interest.

Although due to the current restrictions physical visits were limited to garden visits, with the help of caring staff we all managed to have plenty of daily face-time visits with her enabling us to see her laugh and smile which she always did when she was speaking to you.

So, over recent months mum has continued to give us pleasure, telling us about the people at Hargraves House, or reminiscing and relaying the stories of her youth, when she and Iris (her lifelong friend who sadly passed away a few years ago) would meet American servicemen (or yanks as she described them) who were based in Portland during the 2nd WW – nice people she said with a wink and a glint in her eye, or of the exciting times that she and Iris had, travelling up to London every Saturday night to visit the West End to see the latest films and shows, hunting autographs and sometimes experiencing the red carpet opening nights!

We will miss you loads mum x