

A celebration of life Elsie Christine Hart

25th December 1920 - 29th December 2020

4.00-4.30 pm, 14th January 202, Cam Valley Crematorium

a personal goodbye

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The Tribute

Elsie was born on Christmas Day 1920 in her grandmother's house in Shoreditch, the eldest of six children. Gladys came along eleven months later, and she and Elsie remained close always. Sadly, Dolly died in 1996 and Jim and Evelyn died last year but Elsie was also very close to her youngest sister Ann who grew up alongside her own daughter Lynn being of a similar age.

Elsie's father, James Webb, worked in Odhams Press in Fleet Street, but the family soon moved out to Cranham, near Upminster, where living in Willow Cottage the children enjoyed an idyllic country childhood and made lifelong friends.

Elsie's father had made a friend during World War I who later became the Harbour Master in Falmouth and every summer her father would drive the family down there to stay for a months holiday while he returned home. Elsie loved those holidays in Cornwall. Initially these journeys were made with Elsie and Gladys in the sidecar and their mother, Ann, on the back of the motorcycle but later, with more children, a car was required.

Initially Elsie and Gladys started work in London but Gladys wanted to work nearer home and so they both became machinists at the Co-Op Shirt Factory in Upminster where they cycled to work on a tandem. Both Elsie and Gladys met their future husbands there.

Elsie and Sydney Hart were sweethearts when Elsie was just 16 but Sydney left to join the Royal Navy in 1938 and then Elsie joined the WRAF's (The Women's Royal Air Force) in 1941 and Elsie 'packed him in'. However, when Elsie heard that Sydney's ship had been sunk, but thankfully he had survived, she realised just what a 'gem' Sydney was and wrote asking if they could become engaged. Her friend had an engagement ring that she had 'forgotten to give back' and so Sydney sent her the money to buy it and her friend duly performed an engagement ceremony with the ring, they were in a barrage balloon at the time!

Of course Sydney continued to serve in the Navy but he arranged for an allowance to be regularly sent from his wages to Elsie, to start saving up for their first home. Elsie remained in the WRAFs, she was stationed at Newton Ferrers in Devon, a lovely village in a beautiful area which she really appreciated but she was still homesick. One weekend she and a friend hitchhiked all the way to Liverpool St Station, to get home but being '*Absent Without Leave*' they had to do '*jankers*' on their return. This turned out to have some advantages though, as they were sent to work in the Officer's Mess, where the coffee and the food were rather better.

Elsie and Sydney were married in March 1944 in Hornchurch but both had to return to active service. Sydney was late returning from the war so although eligible for housing they lived at first with Elsie's parents in Elm Park where Lynn was born in 1946.

Then they were given a prefab in Rainham, which they loved as their first home but they were soon offered a three bedroomed council house, which was back in Cranham. Elsie was delighted to move back amongst many of her old friends and to be surrounded by open fields again. Ian was born here just twelve days after they moved. Elsie and Sydney lived there for twenty six years, amongst friends, and Elsie remained in touch with three friends from that road, visiting Peggy regularly until quite recently.

Later, Elsie and Sydney moved to Wickford in Essex to be nearer to Lynn and Ian and their grandchildren, Leigh, Spencer, Sean and Darren and Glen. Glen died when he was only five years old but Elsie and Sydney loved those five years with him. They were fantastic grandparents and together they enjoyed nineteen years of happy retirement. When Sydney died in 2000 Elsie moved into a retirement complex in Wickford where she soon made new friends and when Ian moved away she moved on to Audley Court in Saffron Walden where once again she made many new friends.

By 2009 Elsie's failing site made it more difficult for her to live on her own and she moved to live with Lynn, making more new friends as she always did. Everybody enjoyed her company, she had made lots of friends when Lynn and her husband Graham had run a pub in Elmdon. On the occasion of her 100th birthday at Christmas she received over 60 birthday cards as well as the message from the Queen!

Elsie was an excellent seamstress and could have trained as a dressmaker had she continued to work in London. She made lovely clothes for Lynn and when she was in New Zealand continued to send out beautifully made clothes for Lyn and the children.

Elsie loved history, she wanted to visit every castle and stately home across the country and kept a tea towel with Kings and Queens of England on it, to refer to if she got her history in a muddle. When her sight failed, she enjoyed the RNIB talking books, listening to history, both fictional tales and the non fiction. She really loved England and all its history.

She did not let her failing sight hold her back. She could sadly not really see the faces of her great grandchildren but she could still swim with them on holiday in Cyprus.

Elsie enjoyed lots of holidays, especially to Cyprus when Ian and Margaret were living there and also to Jersey where Ann, her youngest sister had

married and settled down after a time working there with Lynn. She enjoyed travelling to France as well.

Elsie was very determined not to give in to anything and she never felt sorry for herself, whatever her difficulties. She remained well and active until the last six months when she suffered some falls. She had to spend some time in hospital, particularly difficult in these times, but with the help of district nurses and then the palliative care nurses from the St Clare Hospice she was able to celebrate her 100th birthday on Christmas Day, at home with her family.

Elsie slipped away peacefully, at home, on the 29th December.

To have reached 100, and remained active and enjoying life for so long is a wonderful achievement.

Leigh, Elsie's grandson has some family memories to share.

Family Memories, Leigh Anderson

Hello everyone,

Firstly, I would like to start by thanking everyone that could make it today, I know it means so much to Mum and my Uncle, Ian and of course the rest of the family. We are so grateful that we can celebrate my wonderful Grandmother's life here today, particularly during these difficult times. Obviously, it's on a smaller scale than would have been the case normally, but I know there are a lot of you watching at home online and thanks so much for joining us.

I'd like to thank Lynn for her lovely words and for her help and advice in putting this together today.

So where do I start? I think, from a few of the descriptions that kept coming up when I talked to my family the overriding theme was her total dedication and unreserved love for her family and friends. She was wise, intelligent, beautiful, elegant, hardworking and of course her generosity knew no bounds !! Something that has been passed on to her children as my Aunt Margaret and Ian will confirm. I think these descriptions give some idea of the mark she made on us all.

As a mother, even looking back with rose tinted glasses both my Uncle and Mum are adamant that she was near perfect and in our eyes she was. Nan, with my amazing Grandfather Sid, created the type of family environment that many people, particularly in the difficult years after the war, could only dream of. I remember even from a young age hearing about their life as they grew up, the numerous funny stories of Nan, Mum and Ian causing various levels of chaos around Cranham or Malta and Grandad trying to restore calm.

As parents they were the perfect double act together, both with one mission to provide the most warm, loving and happy environment possible for their two beloved children.

What constantly shines through is the love and happiness Nan and Grandad created for them both. Nan just simply adored being with them both all through her life. She was never happier than when supporting them in any way she could. She was happy as happy as Larry spending days with Ian sanding the decks of one of his boats or climbing all over the site of his new office just to show support to her Son.

She could also be found scrubbing the kitchens in one of my Mum and Dad's pubs or helping to prepare the food or just supporting Mum wherever she could. Her personality and energy just shone through. I think that's why so many of the young girls that used to work for Mum and Dad over 30 years ago have sent such lovely messages and one of her favourites Emma is here today.

When we moved to New Zealand in the 70's it was never going to work in a million years. Mum and her were literally joined at the hip, in fact I think we might have to get Mum a 6 stone handbag for her left arm just to balance her up again. I can clearly remember how sad they both were when we left and their happiness as we walked back into their lounge in Cranham over three years later when we came home.

She was the same when my Uncle Ian and Marg moved to Cyprus, although it was a bit easier to get there. You just couldn't stop her wanting to get out there, even though she was in her late 80's and 90's by then. Getting her insured was a nightmare - "I don't care, if I pop my clogs just leave me out there, chuck me in the sea, bury me under an olive tree. I'm going!"

So begun many lovely holidays. Nan staying with Ian and Marg and Mum and Ian entering the overseas property market. Which if truth be told was only so they could all be out there together. Hours picking and sorting olives in 35 degrees, swimming with her great grandson Morgan, and even at 90 hiking up to a castle 700 meters above sea level. It even astounded the locals! Her zest for life was unbelievable.

I'm sure you will all agree Nans personality was infectious, people just could not help but gravitate to her. I remember thinking all through my life, "god she has so many friends that want to be with her". Not just for the fun side of her but also her calm way of listening, her wisdom, her intelligence and also her compassion. She was fair, she hated unkindness and if she saw something that wasn't right, she would be the first one to let them know.

She literally lit up the room in any situation even though she used to hate being the centre of attention. Something that my Grandfather would attest to if he were here. The stories of him persuading her to go to the Post Office dinner dances, which inevitable would mean she was on the top table due to

Grandads position. Mum said she used to cringe at the thought, but then as always dazzled when she got there.

After losing Grandad, the love of her life, Nan still could not be stopped. She continued to throw herself into everything. She moved house twice, made loads more friends both in Wickford and Saffron Walden before finally moving in with Mum and Ian. Nan continued to have lovely times with her brother and sisters and up until recently still enjoyed particularly lovely holidays with her beloved youngest sister Ann and her family in Jersey, who I know was desperate to come today.

I find it hard to express how much she meant to us all as a Grandmother. We all had such a special relationship with her, including Glen, who she spent so much time with her when Mum was at work and who she absolutely adored. Because we all lived so close when we were growing up a lot of our lives intertwined, so the experiences and memories are the same. I could stand here for a week and go through all the stories. Darren banging his head on the floor after all of us were mucking around sticks in my mind, and Nan showing her feisty side giving us all a good old rollocking "you bloody maniacs" all of this recorded on tape by a giggling Grandad.

I remember another time we all visited Spencer at a Scout camp in Ashdown Forest. My clever uncle told me to bring my catapult if I wanted. Now of course those that know me would know I didn't take much persuading. Needless to say, the rest of the day involved a manhunt involving half of the Essex Scout group after I'd shot the particularly mouthy head Scout and me cutting my head open when I fell out of a tree. I can still hear Nans echoes around the forest to the Scout master "you will never find him you know. He thinks he's Robin Hood!"

We all went to the same School. At different times we used to take our friends to Nan and Grandads for lunch. Sean used to take 3 or 4 on a regular basis with Nan happily making them all lunch, they all absolutely loved her. As we grew up, we all just loved visiting them, just turning up and walking in like it was our own home. Spencer sitting with Nan for hours on end going through all the boxes of photos and hearing her stories. Darren sitting for hours chatting about anything and everything and wondering why he's still suffering from memory loss after the infamous head banging incident.

Nan also adored her four great grandchildren Morgan, Lily, James and Emily. She was never happier than when she was playing, swimming and singing with them. What's remarkable is that she had a good few years with them all, something that I know was very precious for them all.

From a personal view I used to love just being with her. Taking her places, walking along the Thames while visiting Hampton Court.

Even until only a few years ago she would still keep up with me doing long yomps around Audley End Estate. I just used to crack up how fast her skinny little legs would move. "I'll tell you if it's too fast" she used to say.

A special day that sticks in my mind was before her eyes really started to play up. I was on leave from the Marines one autumn and we decided we would walk all along the back of the Collages in Cambridge, it was just perfect and all the better she could see all the trees. We still talked about it years later.

If I was busy with a renovation project I'd love to take her around with me. Having to lift her into the Land Rover always caused hysterics. Off we would go with an ice cream driving across the countryside to pick up some oak doors or look around some reclamation yard. It would inevitably end up with me sticking a pith helmet or some other antique on her head and taking a photo for a laugh. She is incredibly strong for her size and still thought all 6 stone of her made all the difference trying to get the heavy purchases in the back, "Ohhh Leigh watch you don't bust your boiler !!!".

I used to love winding her up for a laugh as well, particularly about politics. I can still see her face getting redder and redder only last year when mentioning Maggie Thatcher. She knew what I was up to and always tried to shut me up by giving me a kiss, but it showed how sharp her mind still was.

Darren, Sean, Spencer all have similar memories with her. It didn't matter about the generational gap we could all relate to her, loved being with her, talking through our problems, listening to her advice. To all of us she was simply our Rock.

As Nan moved in with Mum and Ian for the last 11 years she still continued to have a wonderful quality of life. Yes of course her failing eyesight was a bugger, but she just got on with it. Even after her couple of falls she was still walking around inspecting various things like Ian's garden, visiting one of Spencer's multi-million pound projects in St James's or even at the beginning of November inspecting my new bath! She just wanted to be part of things and show support in all our lives. It's what she did.

Finally, and I know she will hate it, but the quality of Nans life right up to the very end was made possible by my amazing Mum, who couldn't have possibly given anymore love and care. It allowed Nan to be where she most wanted to be, at home, warm, comfortable and peaceful surrounded by her family. This includes a special man, Ian, who treated her like his own mother. Not many men would be able to do this but as I saw with his support to my Dad when he was ill, it was no surprise to me.

I think though, it helped that the Mother, Grandmother, Great Grandmother, Sister, Friend..... Elsie Christine Hart was the most remarkable, wonderful, loving, caring person you could ever wish to know.

We will miss her terribly, but all of us are so lucky she was part of our lives.

Elsie led a full and happy life, she was an unfailingly kind person who did not like any unkindness or unpleasantness. She and Sydney would do anybody 'a good turn'. She would tell Lynn and Ian off if she thought they were being unkind but was always fair. She had a great sense of humour and was a good listener, she had great wisdom. She was always pleased to see people and made them welcome. She was an amazing person, a gem, dearly loved by so many.