

A celebration of life

Rita May Woodham

3rd February 1933 – 2nd February 2021

3rd March 2021, Slough Crematorium

a personal goodbye

Humanist
Ceremonies

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Rita was born and brought up in Slough, and lived here all her life. She was the second daughter of William and Winifred Edwards (known to everyone as Will and Win). Will, who worked on the railway, ended up as a civil engineer with Great Western Railways, and Will and Win enjoyed gardening, and dancing. Rita had an older sister, Jean, who always looked out for her, and they enjoyed a happy childhood, despite it being partly in wartime. Their house backed on to the allotments, the allotments backed on to this very cemetery, so they had plenty of green space to enjoy themselves in.

They went to James Elliman School – as did Rita’s children in due course. Lyn remembers being known as “Rita’s girl” when she was there. When they left school, both Jean and Rita went to work for Eton Rural District Council, Rita upstairs and Jean downstairs. Jean still remembers that, as she took dictation downstairs, she could hear Rita howling with laughter upstairs – she had a great sense of fun. “She’d laugh to see a pudding roll” said Lyn.

Jean and Rita would walk home from work together, and would pass Ray’s road on the way. Rita already knew him a little from school, but began to notice him playing footie in the street. They bumped into each other face to face one day in Stoke Road. Rita, who was dating someone else, promptly dropped him, and Rita and Ray were married on the 2nd August 1952 at St Paul’s Church.

They had four children. Lyn first in 1954, then the twins, Susan and Martin, in 1958 and Trevor in 1961. Eventually there were 8 grandchildren and, so far, 12 great grandchildren, which pleased Rita no end because she really loved little babies.

Ray started off as a painter and decorator, and later became a painting supervisor for Slough Council. It was while he was working here that he and Cliff Morris became great friends, and Rita and Ray and Cliff and Pat, with whom they regularly played cards, and the two families became very close.

Some of Rita's domestic skills weren't so great. "It killed Mum to sew on a button" said Lyn. She did knit, but she couldn't sew the pieces together afterwards, and they usually got handed over to Jean to finish. And she killed any houseplant that came near. Although she kept the house beautifully clean, she also wasn't very fond of housework – her advice to her daughters as they set up their own homes was "Put a pinch of salt on it, it will still be there tomorrow".

But her cooking! Her stews, her roasts, her suet puddings! And her earthquake fruitcake, which inevitably cracked open (but tasted great). Visitors were always greeted with home made cakes.

Her great home cooking was a year round thing, but it particularly came to the fore at Christmas. They'd order a 28lb turkey, a leg of breaded ham and a leg of pork, and of course she would make her sherry trifle, so full of sherry that it would be illegal to drive after eating it. There'd be a big sack of toys for each of the kids, and later Rita would bring down Lyn's record player so she could dance in the kitchen while the men watched TV.

And she adored animals. She grew up with a dog called Jerry, and a cat who liked to sleep with Rita, despite it not being allowed. Later, she and Ray had 3 cats, Dinky 1, Dinky 2 and Dinky 3, usually introduced into the house by Lin. Rita would protest, but the new cat would quickly become an object of affection. Then there was Patchy the Jack Russell, not to mention the menagerie of wild birds and animals she fed, including a family of hedgehogs and even the odd rat.

Music was her other great love. She used to buy ex-jukebox records from Cyril down the road, and play them on her prized radiogram. She listened to the radio a lot too – Women's Hour, dramas, and the Archers' Omnibus while she was making the Sunday lunch. And of course, she loved her soaps – Corrie, Emmerdale and Home and Away were particular favourites.

In summer, they would enjoy themselves locally at Bayliss Lido, or go to the cinema. And they usually managed a week away each year, usually to Butlins

or Hayling Island, because Rita didn't like boats (possibly because she didn't swim) and had no intention of flying.

Rita was a strict, but loving Mum, who encouraged her children to do well at school, and discouraged them very firmly from being out after 10pm (the girls, at least).

She was proud of the children's achievement, and delighted to help out as the grandchildren began to arrive. While Martin was in the Royal Marines, she sent him a letter every week, and while Will and Win were alive she visited them every Sunday. She and Jean used to go to High Wycombe to shop – all lovely routines, and routine suited Rita.

As the children left home, Ray and Rita slipped into new routines, walking into town together, taking the bus to Staines to go shopping and going to Windsor for a morning out with coffee and cake. But they really never had much time to themselves, because as their parents got older, and the grandchildren arrived, there was always someone around to be fed, looked after or entertained. They began to take the grandchildren to Butlins as they had taken their children, and they went a few times with Grandad Woodham, Babs and Jacqui. Rita visited Win every evening after Will died, and Ray used to get their evening hot chocolate ready for when she got back. Then they watched the Ten O'clock News, after which it was bed-time.

Rita was of course ill for some time, and over the past few months she became weaker and slower. We often think of death as a cruel enemy, taking away those we love, but for those who are suffering or who have reached the end of their endurance, it can come as a quiet friend, closing the curtains, turning out the light, and settling us into a last sleep, free from pain and weariness.

I hope it was so for Rita.