

A celebration of life

Cynthia Swift

2nd July 1923 – 11th September 2021

1.15pm, Hastings Crematorium

a personal goodbye

Humanist
Ceremonies

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Cynthia was born in 1923, the seventh of Jane and George Booth's eight children. George was a railway worker, but was in poor health having been gassed in the First World War, and he died when Cynthia was sixteen.

It was a happy childhood, though, in many ways, and she was very close to the brothers on either side of her, Doug and Ginger, who of course led her into all sorts of trouble, from scrumping to setting the bed on fire by reading by candlelight underneath it. Doug was, sadly, killed during the Second World War, in particularly tragic circumstances, and Cynthia treasured his memory, with a big photo of him prominently displayed in her bedroom.

Cynthia left school at 14, as most people did in those days, and went into service, but she was not happy, and her Dad came and rescued her from her difficult employer. Her next job was in a laundry, and it was there that she met Ted. This was a happy chance. He was actually a postman at the time, but as posties finished work early in the day, he took a part time job as a laundry driver too, to supplement his income. And one day, there was Cynthia!

They got engaged when she was 18 and married when she was 19, on the 24th April 1943. No less than 78 years of happy marriage followed.

They started married life living in Jane's house in Sevenoaks, and Ted was a fireman during the War. Cynthia went to live with Ginger's wife Jessie in Pagham for a while, out of the path of enemy bombers, and Margaret was born there. Ted cycled from Sevenoaks to Pagham to see them – a distance of 73 miles. Google maps says it would have taken him six hours each way. That's love!

Once life had settled down after the war, along came children Mike and Marilyn, and in 1951 they moved to their new home, Crossways in Westfield, and then on to Church Fields in 1953. Ted did various jobs in this period, mainly working on a farm, but also being a wedding photographer in his spare time (it's in the genes!) and then moved into the building trade where he prospered, eventually having his own business installing swimming pools.

Cynthia, meanwhile, worked in the Post Office in Westfield for many years – a great way to get to know your community! – and later worked for Doctor Wright for 18 years. In 1965 they bought The Haven in Westfield, where Marilyn still lives, so it's been a family home for nearly fifty years. They made great friends in Westfield, too – Iris, Joy and Tony Mayer, Molly and Derek Angel, and Win Willard. Friends Cynthia talked to at the post office, over the garden fence, and at the Plough.

Meanwhile the family was growing, with grandchildren Jackie, Marie, Nicky, Claire, David and Darren, followed in time by great grandchildren Martin, Jamie, Liam, Charlie, Jasper and Juniper. Just think of all those children that Cynthia enjoyed knitting for! Darren has fond memories of the Postman Pat and Fireman Sam toys she knitted him, and Marilyn remembers her knitting an extra border to lengthen one of her husband's sweaters.

Her knitting was often colourful, and so was everything else. She dressed colourfully, and it's good to see that so many of you here today are brightly dressed in her memory. And her gardens, in all her homes, were always full of colour. She never missed an opportunity to get out there if the weather was good enough. She loved her cooking too, producing the best steak and kidney pudding ever, and rock buns which no-one else could manage to imitate.

And as well as colour, her home was full of music. She had a lovely voice, and she and Ted used to dance together wherever they could, be it at events like Darren's wedding, or at home with the radiogram on at full blast. And then there were the dogs, Drifter the goldie, and the two Kims. One of the Kims was acquired by accident. When they were at the Haven, the family decided to create a fishpond in the garden, and Mike and Marilyn were sent off on the bus to Hastings to buy fish food. However, in the pet shop, they fell in love with a puppy and bought it for 7/6d. They arrived home with it and proudly told Cynthia that they'd bought it for her birthday. That Kim lived to a ripe old age.

And then there were the holidays. Camping in the West Country when the kids were young, the two of them caravanning once the kids had left home, and big holidays with the extended family later to the Channel Islands, Portugal and Ibiza.

When Ted retired they decided they wanted a change, and moved to Shaftesbury in Dorset. They stayed there for fourteen years until Ted's ill health made them feel they wanted to be nearer family, so they returned to Sussex, first to Fairlight, then to Parkstone Road.

Cynthia will be remembered as a wonderful mum, the kind of mum who is always there for you. Marilyn spent a lot of time in hospital as a child and Cynthia would come on the bus to visit her regularly, sometimes bringing a peach, wrapped in tissue paper, as a present – an expensive luxury in the 1950s. She was one of those mums you could talk to about anything, she was always there for you. And she was the same as a grandmother, she loved all the family and her smile when they visited would "light up the room", right up to the end. Even in her last few years, she always recognised those close family members, including little Juniper – and smiled.

And above all Ted and Cynthia (or Cindy, as he called her) were a devoted couple throughout their marriage. When she spent weeks in hospital, after several falls, he'd go and sit with her all day every day, and later, with the help of carers, he was determined to keep her at home.

Cynthia 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 Cynthia.