

# A celebration of life Olive Elsie Leech

7 June 1921 – 7 February 2023  
3.15 pm to 4.00pm, 2 June 2023, Warleigh Manor Farm



*a personal goodbye*

Humanist  
*Ceremonies*

## **Tribute**

Olive was born in Islington in London on the 7<sup>th</sup> of June 1921, the first child of John and Elsie Dainton.

This early inter-war period was known as the roaring twenties, and for those living an affluent lifestyle it was a time of optimism. Significant breakthroughs in the worlds of science and education, and early steps in emancipation, indicated a positive future after the devastation of the First World War and the global flu pandemic.

But for Olive's family it was a time of grinding poverty. The family lived in London in two attic rooms in a house in Oxford road, since renamed Elizabeth Avenue. In the 1920s this De Beauvoir Town district of North Islington was far from the desirable and prosperous area of today.

Olive was joined over the next ten years by younger siblings Ken, Albert, Jack, and the twins Stanley and Edith. Olive's memories of her childhood were of this cramped home with just the two rooms between the eight of them. Olive's father, John, was a veteran of the 1<sup>st</sup> World War, and was remembered as a bully and alcoholic who badly mistreated her long-suffering mother.

By the time Olive was 10, and with no social care system to speak of, she had become the main child minder responsible for her younger siblings. She also acted as her Mother's carer, since Elsie was frail and frequently bedridden.

It is hard for us now to imagine this, but during a crucial period of her childhood Olive was weighed down by relentless adult work and responsibilities. This wasn't so unusual for the time though and, without any alternative, Olive just got on with it. She nurtured her siblings well, always retaining her pride in their achievements as well as her concern for their wellbeing.

In 1939 as war broke out and her Father returned to the army, Olive, now aged 18, was finally able to enjoy being a young person. The start of the war actually marked the beginning of an almost carefree time for Olive, indeed, this was the period of her life that she reflected on most during her later years. Despite the air raids Olive enjoyed exploring London and, it seems, she had plenty of admirers and boyfriends at this time.

With the blitz the family were evacuated to Cambridge where she studied and qualified to work as a teacher. The Cavendish Laboratory of the physics department at the University of Cambridge needed a secretary and, with her short hand and typing skills, Olive fitted the bill. This is where she met John Leech who was evacuated with Queen Mary University to Kings College at Cambridge. John, who was 4 years older than Olive, had been exempted from joining the army due to his radar research work in support of the war effort.

According to Peter Grout, John had two '*women of interest*', but Olive was the 'winner' being very attractive - both to look at, and as a personality. John and Olive married in Cambridge in 1943.

With the end of the war in 1945 they moved to Brentwood in Essex, with John returning to the Physics Department of Queen Mary University in the Mile End Road, where he completed his PhD, and continued to work as a lecturer. They were now able to travel, with one memorable trip to Paris accompanied by their great friends Owen and Jean Davis.

They also visited the Lake District and Olive was always proud that she had walked along *Striding Edge* a famous 'Grade 1 scramble'. Its fair to say though that she generally preferred the great indoors. During this time she found a new joy in painting – there are mixed views on the output, but Olive herself never made any great claims for her paintings; she just enjoyed the process of making them..

In 1949 Rod was born and Owen followed two years later. Olive proved to be a loving and considerate Mother, though also somewhat anxious and at times prone to hyper vigilance. John meanwhile was very busy with his research.

When he was not at work at the University, he spent a great deal of time working in his study, writing. His book *Classical Mechanics*, first published in 1958, went on to become a standard text for the subject. Of course, as was the norm, Olive's role as principal carer, chef, house keeper and bottle washer didn't get a mention on the acknowledgements page.

While John's career was flourishing, and Rod and Owen were busy at school, Olive was able to explore her great life long passion for the theatre. It seems that the origins for this dated back to her time at the *Free Church Amateur Dramatic Club* in Cambridge before she was married. Here she played the role of Gwenny, 'a welsh woman of some age and the all seeing and all knowing maid' in a farce titled *The Late Christopher Bean*.

In Essex Olive became a very active and important member of a number of local amateur dramatics groups. Olive, though, was by no means *amateurish*. Her standards were high, she was serious and dedicated, and the results, as can be seen from her clippings folder, were impressive and moving.

Olive had all of the necessary technical skills involved in stage acting – she was brilliant at memorising lines and movements, and had the ability to interpret a text, to both empathise with a character and see that same character from the outside. She had the vocal skills, the comic timing, the focus to stay in the role, the stamina to perform for several days in a row (including matinees).. But she had something else, that essential 'bit of sparkle' and stage presence that made her captivating and watchable.



We are now going to see Olive aged 94, though looking decades younger, performing a short piece by the poet and wit Pam Ayres. This was recorded on Gill's mobile phone; it was purely from memory and without any time to rehearse.

*Well I got up in the morning. Like you would.*

*And I cooked a bit of breakfast. Like you would*

*But at the door I stopped.*

*For a message had been dropped,*

*And I picked it up, and read it. Like you would.*

*"Oh Blimey!" I said. Like you would,*

*"Have a read of this. This is good!"*

*It said: "I live across the way,*

*And admire you every day,*

*And my heart, it breaks without you."*

*Well, it would.*

*It said: "I'd buy you furs and jewels, If I could,"*

*And I go along with that, I think he should,*

*It said: "Meet me in the Park,*

*When it's good and dark,*

*And so me wife won't see, I'll wear a hood."*

*Oh, I blushed with shame and horror. Like you would,*

*That a man would ask me that. As if I could!*

*So I wrote him back a letter,*

*Saying "No, I think it's better,*

*If I meet you in the Rose and Crown,*

*Like we did last Thursday."*

*Pam Ayers*

Lets step back a moment to the late 1950s, John's success as an academic led to a sabbatical in Ottawa. With Rod and Owen aged 9 and 7 this was a great adventure, and this year in Canada was remembered as an exciting and happy time.

On their return to the UK Olive continued with her commitment to stage acting. In the 50s and early 60s amateur dramatic productions played an important role in supporting local communities, providing much needed 'evenings out', while also fund raising for local charities. Olive contributed to this form of entertainment by acting in many local productions.

Olive was a gifted, confident, and courageous person who could tackle stage acting and other social situations that many of us would prefer to shy away from. But while Olive was brilliant at making other people feel relaxed and at ease, she suffered quite badly from anxiety. Olive was sensitive and perceptive and her childhood experiences cast a long shadow.

It must have been particularly challenging then for Olive when, following another sabbatical in Canada, John was offered a professorship at the University of Waterloo in Ontario in 1968. By this time Rod was at University and Owen was about to embark on his 'A' levels.

The professorship was an important opportunity for John, but Olive felt guilty, stressed and anxious about leaving her two children behind - even though they were no longer 'children'. Olive reluctantly agreed to move to Canada, but was also determined to make the best of the situation, so of course she joined the local choir and country-dancing group. As the wife of the Chair of the Physics' Department she hosted large meals for the academic community of Waterloo, and I understand from Peter Grout, that she did this brilliantly.

Olive had been prepared to live abroad and suffer the Canadian winters, for John's academic career. But once her grandsons were born, first Tom in 1982 and then Jack in 1985, she waged a determined campaign to return to the UK. Somewhat reluctantly John agreed to leave Canada, and in 1986 they moved to Oxford where he could continue with his academic life. They came here to Warleigh most weekends, with John taking on the unofficial job of 'head gardener', and Olive relishing her new role as Grandmother.

Olive didn't take long to adapt to living in Oxford, her passion for the theatre continued unabated, though now she became an avid theatregoer with weekly visits to the Oxford Playhouse. In her late 80s Olive took a tumble, falling down the upper circle steps and she finally had to give up these regular excursions.

Olive also took up Bridge and inevitably became a local Bridge Champion.. She was also very active with the University of the 3<sup>rd</sup> age and, of course, found herself a choir and a country-dancing club.

John's health declined after a car accident in 2000, and he died in 2004 at the age of 87. Olive missed John and struggled to live on her own. She saw the need to move, and with the help of the family she relocated to an assisted living apartment at Richie Court in Oxford. Here she soon had a reputation as a conversationalist, a performer and a great and loyal friend.

Olive had many visits from family and they also brought their friends along. Owen spoke about how he came to see and appreciate a different side to his Mum at this time.

Now, on her own, Olive's quirky ways and somewhat slapstick humour came to the fore. She is remembered to this day at Ritchie Court for her regular impromptu singing, she could have the whole dining room singing along to some old number, to much hilarity.

Her favourite story at this time was about Malcolm Muggeridge, a journalist and broadcaster and a household name of the 60s and 70s who frequently denounced what he saw as promiscuity. Olive had a rather racy story about him that she liked to tell with her impeccable comic timing, pretty much to anyone and everyone she met, even those who had heard it many, many times before. It seemed that no visit would pass without the question – *“have I ever told you about Malcolm Muggeridge?”*

One of Olive's great friends at Ritchie Court was another Olive, a retired school head teacher who lived next door. They would sit together in the sunny window bay in the shared space near to their apartments chatting, and occasionally arguing, for hours. They fell out and reconciled so often that it was generally best to start any visit with .. *“And how are things with the other Olive today...”* The sunny bay they had adopted was famously known as the *Olive Grove*.

Olive's carer at this time (that's our Olive, not the head teacher Olive) was Heather Steel, and we are delighted that she was able to join us today. Heather spoke of many memorable hours with Olive, with a lot of laughter and some risqué anecdotes, as well as occasional bleak days when anxiety became overwhelming.

On one occasion Heather thanked Olive for something, by saying, "oh that's sweet of you" to which Olive replied that "sweet" was an inaccurate description of her. Heather explained that she didn't mean 'sugary sweet' like syrup, nor did she mean 'saccharin', but rather a deeper sweetness like treacle. Olive approved of this and from then on the name *Treacle* stuck. Here is a direct quote from one of Heather's emails:

*"Treacle was an outstanding personality and she loved her two sons very much. It used to amuse me when she worried about Owen driving in the dark, or even worrying that he might get wet in the rain!"*

While Olive, or, as we now may think of her, *Treacle*, worried about Owen's safety on the roads, she enjoyed driving into her 90s - though never in the dark, and never around roundabouts. Owen worked out that trips to Summerstown, a quarter of a mile down the road, were pretty much her only option.

When she finally agreed to give up driving and reluctantly handed her keys over to Jack, they couldn't help noticing that her Micra was covered in dents. For someone, with such an astoundingly good memory, it was curious that she couldn't remember how any of those dinks had come about..

Olive's hyper vigilance extended to concerns about her own health, and some might even have called it hypochondria. She took to wearing her trademark flip up clip on sunglasses after being told by an optician that she had early stage, age related macular degeneration (indeed who over the age of 55 hasn't got early stage MD). Olive immediately became a member of the *Macular Degeneration Society* and received their magazines for years. When someone at the society's switchboard asked her "just how bad is your eyesight Mrs Leech", Owen overheard her saying (with a certain affront), "I can see perfectly well thank you very much".. The glasses remained, but the subscription was cancelled.



In 2018 Olive broke her right and dominant wrist, and at the age of 97 she moved from her assisted living apartment to a residential home in Bathampton Manor and a couple of years later from there to Greystones. Both homes were near to Warleigh, so Owen and Gill were able to see her more often during the week. Despite the difficulties caused by the Covid Lockdowns from 2020, this period from 2018 is remembered as a happy time.

Throughout her life Olive could recite poetry and speeches at the drop of a hat. Some here may even remember her reciting *The Quality of Mercy*, Portia's speech from the Merchant of Venice on her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, word perfect..

We are now going to watch a recording of Olive reciting the poem *The Truly Great* by Stephen Spender. One of her personal favourites, this recording was made when Olive was 95; again it was made quite spontaneously on Owen's phone.



*The Truly Great*

*I think continually of those who were truly great.  
Who, from the womb, remembered the soul's history  
Through corridors of light, where the hours are suns,  
Endless and singing. Whose lovely ambition  
Was that their lips, still touched with fire,  
Should tell of the Spirit, clothed from head to foot in song.  
And who hoarded from the Spring branches  
The desires falling across their bodies like blossoms.*

*What is precious, is never to forget  
The essential delight of the blood drawn from ageless springs  
Breaking through rocks in worlds before our earth.  
Never to deny its pleasure in the morning simple light  
Nor its grave evening demand for love.  
Never to allow gradually the traffic to smother  
With noise and fog, the flowering of the spirit.*

*Near the snow, near the sun, in the highest fields,  
See how these names are fêted by the waving grass  
And by the streamers of white cloud  
And whispers of wind in the listening sky.  
The names of those who in their lives fought for life,  
Who wore at their hearts the fire's centre.  
Born of the sun, they travelled a short while toward the sun  
And left the vivid air signed with their honour.*

*Stephen Spender, 1928*

Gill is now going to say some words about Olive.

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*“The thing about Olive was her commitment to always looking her best. I never saw her without the full complement of earrings, bracelet and necklace: her nails were usually polished (and her hands were lovely); her hair was good and she always had colour-coordinated clothes. I realise this was – at the end – largely thanks to the lovely staff at both Graystones and Bathampton Manor – but I know it came from her.*

*It was always important. (Except for her shoes maybe?). The related thing was her beady inspection of everyone else. Introduce her to friends and she’d come up with an immediate compliment. Not something safe or general...but she picked that feature which you knew was your special one....your best one.*

*With men this was a chance to flirt: If you were a tall she’d say Ooooooh .... You’re a big boy ! If you still had a good head of hair and were over 60, that would be mentioned too. And one of her favourites, and again never given without good reason was “ Haven’t you got lovely legs !” Several people in this room know this one....*

*For women it was often ‘lovely hair’ (but never randomly....always when you just had it cut.....or done. And if you had no lovely natural features it was always. That jacket.... It REALLY suits you ! So once flattered, she was in ! A great and natural ice-breaker.....”*



I'd now like to introduce you to Peter Grout who worked with John and knew Olive for over 50 years.

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*"I am very pleased to be here today contributing to the celebration of Olive's life, and being asked to talk a little about Olive in Canada.*

*So here are my ramblings, some recollections and thoughts.*

*I was only in Canada permanently for three and a bit years, so in many ways, what I say, spans a short period – 3% of her life so I have taken the liberty to add a few other remarks.*

*But, first why did my tale come about, John was my research supervisor from 1966 – yes, I really am that old!*

*In 1968 John took up post in Canada and he walked into my office one day in February sat on the edge of the desk and just said to me 'I am going to Canada, do you want to come?', the rest is history and why I am standing here today.*

*In about March 1968 Olive was visiting John at Mile End Poly, as QMC was affectionately known, she came into my office to meet me for the first time, however she swore that she had met me before!*

*A couple of months passed before I went to dinner with them in Brentwood ostensibly to look at pictures of Waterloo but really to collect things John wanted me to take with me, for him to Canada. Olive met me at the door, ah, she said it is very nice to meet you; I have NEVER met you before!*

*So, there we are the first time I met Olive she swore she had met me before and the Second time that she had never met. This became a great joke between us, and I frequently reminded her of it, even when she was a 100! Always taken in good spirit, usually with the comment 'Oh, Peter did I really'. I can hear her laughing now. This, amongst other things, provided a bond between us.*

*So, to Waterloo. I think fair to say that she was a somewhat reluctant immigrant. First living in Waterloo Heights, then at 240 Shakespeare Drive - her life was full of interest, she effectively built a new home, a task which she found a little daunting but undertaken with zeal. No carpet, but broadloom, no taps but faucets, no settee but a chesterfield, the list goes on.*

*Television was a problem, Canadian Television left a lot to be desired, until she discovered that she could watch her favourite, 'Coronation Street', I think she seldom missed an episode – but I guess each to his own.*

*She missed her boys and was always happy when they came to visit; she mothered them sometimes to their chagrin. She talked to me a lot about them, I probably know more about them than they can imagine. It was clear that she cared deeply about them, as any mother would. She was particularly delighted when Owen went off to the Falklands, sporting his John Lennon glasses; he went to teach English and to play his guitar, probably more of the latter, a trip that was probably the making of him.*

*Olive always took an interest in other people and their difficulties, always keen to help them in any way possible, she befriended many, the Van der Kooy's with whom she kept in touch all her life, the Eastman's, the Cowan's, the list is long but finite. Those that are still around were saddened by her death.*

*As for me she was always keen to know what I was doing, always if I mentioned a girlfriend, she was always keen to know 'What is she like in the sack?' Me, being a gentleman, never satisfied her curiosity. But she always added, 'Can I be Godmother to the first'.*

*I remember her coming to several wine and cheese parties that I organized for the undergraduates, she was at ease with both sexes, I heard many chuckles. Many students talked to me afterwards saying what a delight she was - typically English, no one ever said that she had inquired about the sack!*

*Olive took an active interest in the University of Waterloo's various societies in particular the Music Society and the Film club the latter in the Winter months was a Sunday must, especially if it was showing an 'English' film. I went very infrequently though I remember very clearly one occasion, the film was 'Alfie', the audience was sparse. I, with a friend, happened to sit behind Olive and John. John had seen us, Olive had not. At one point in the film Olive burst into a great laugh. Being devil's advocate, I said to my friend in a rather loud voice, 'Philip, that woman has a very dirty laugh', she remained silent the rest of the film. But there was great hilarity between the four of us when the lights came up! She had a great sense of humour.*

*She occupied her time playing Bridge and Scrabble, pastimes she really enjoyed and was despite, what she said, very good. She continued to play both in Oxford.*

*Then there was Olive the driver, Olive pretended not to like driving, but she did like to go fast in the Mustang! I tried not to be a passenger!! But then perhaps she wanted to get home quickly because she did not like driving.*

*Olive the singer, she did sing in a local choir, which she continued to do so in Oxford - I cannot comment on her abilities - I always managed to avoid going to hear her!*

*Olive the diner. It was always an experience going out to dinner, or for that matter a just cup of coffee – Mother's on King's Street was a particular favourite. One could guarantee the first table that was chosen, would be either too cold, too draughty, or a view of kitchen, or no view at all, a move was instigated again and again, I think the record number of moves was five, finishing back where we started.*

*Olive the cook, now Olive would always say she could not cook – she certainly did herself an injustice. Whether it was making her own muesli from scratch not just mixing it, but first roasting the various grains; to her sublime Prime Rib, that was to die for. It would have put many Michelin starred chefs to shame.*

*She often entertained members of the Physics Dept., showing her skills. A task expected of the Chairman's wife and although she did not admit it she enjoyed doing so.*

*Olive the tea drinker, Olive would only drink Twinning's tea until the day she was introduced to 'Red Rose' then nothing else would do. She was converted - even if as the advert said, 'Only in Canada!'*

*Olive the artist, she produced one or two rather good paintings - good for an amateur, though Olive did not accept compliments about her painting.*

*Overall, I would say that Olive did keep her light under a bushel.*

*So Olive was actually very busy.*

*I returned from Canada Christmas 1971, my interactions with John and Olive continued in Sheffield, London and for about 40 years in Oxford.*

*I returned to Canada on many occasions to an extremely warm welcome and the Prime Rib!*

*Both also visited me almost annually. On one occasion she stayed at my Father's House, in Brighton. He thought her a delight with a wonderful sense of humour, so much so, she was nick named 'Aunty Olive'. He wanted her to revisit but unfortunately, for him, I soon moved to Oxford and that became their visiting base. And also where they settled when they returned to England. My Father often asked how was 'Aunty Olive'.*

*So, there is a snapshot of Olive 'In Canada'.*

*My wife and I continued to keep in touch with Olive when she was living in Oxford and Bath, though regrettably covid and Anno Domini kept visits to Bath rather sparse in the later years. But the general good-natured humour continued.*

*In summary it has been a pleasure to know Olive over the last 50 odd years, always a good sport, I can hear her now saying, 'Oh Peter, did I really say that!' Unfortunately, she never got her wish to being Godmother to the first – there was not a first. But this was, I am sure, was more than compensated for by her Grand and Great grandchildren upon whom she doted.*

*She often said to me how grateful she was to Owen and Gill for the way they looked after her both in Oxford and subsequently in Bath, and I must also add my thanks to them.*

*Finally, I will miss Olive, for all her foibles she was a wonderful, loving person.*

*I wait with interest to know that if I meet Olive in any form again, will she say, 'I have met you before!' or 'I have never met you before!'"*

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We now have a tribute for Granny Oxford from Olive's grandsons Tom and Jack.

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**Tom:** *We were asked if we would like to say something today - both of us said yes, but with no real idea of what we might say... It's obviously been a few months since granny died - and perhaps both of us in our own way have likened this task to some kind of 'Product Evaluation' process...Searching for the right questions to ask ourselves... In the end, we met up in a pub last week and over a few drinks walked down memory lane gradually uncovering many, memories of our shared time together. It is still hard to believe that she is no longer around as she has been with us all of our lives..... most of the memories we uncovered were of us in our formative years ... and we'd like to share a few of them with you.*

*Looking at them all - a few themes emerged...some we have already touched on, but the first was all about her motherly protective nature.*

**Jack:** *One of the things I remember was the contrast between our relatively 'free range' life in Warleigh versus a visit to Oxford for a school holiday. In Oxford I remember learning about things like talcum powder, having someone obsessively dry between your toes after a bath, being reminded to wear more clothes, being given an Echinacea tablet to put under the tongue if you were the slightest bit unwell. I remember finding all of these things a little strange, and unfamiliar, but also comforting and reassuring. Granny was in charge and that felt nice.*

*The flip side of this however was that Granny could sometimes go too far in her protective nature... I remember on one summer visit, Granny took one look at us both and decided there and then that we needed a haircut. She proceeded to frog-march us down to the nearest barber and demanded a 'proper boys haircut' for us both. It's funny that this is a memory that has stuck with us but we could both recall that line very easily. In hindsight it was probably the first moment of realisation that whilst Granny was great, we were probably quite happy that she wasn't always in charge.*



**Tom:** *When I was 9, I broke my wrist when I fell out of our tree house. On Granny's next visit to Warleigh, she insisted on placing a large yellow bed pillow over the rocks I had fallen on to reduce the risk of damage when one of us fell again. Even then – I remember being conflicted in thinking this was both a good.... and a bad idea... Good in that there was some logic to having a primitive form of crash matt in roughly the right place... but bad in that it clearly wasn't big enough considering the height of the tree house, and not to mention how 'uncool' it felt to have a yellow pillow under such a terrifically high tree house.... Looking back -I do feel sad that I didn't see the gesture with the caring intent that it was indeed.*

*Fast-forward to 2015, and I find myself installing a Chandelier I had made for one of the Oxford colleges. I called in to visit Granny for a cup of tea and a traditional game of Scrabble, It was very rare for us to only be in each other's company, but I was too tired to play... I ended up going to sleep on the sofa, and as I drifted off, I felt a blanket gently fall on top of me, I heard the curtains quietly close, and a cup of water was placed just in reach... As a then 35 year old there was something very comforting in allowing ones self to be cared for like that by your grandmother, stirring dormant memories from when we were young children. The experience still sits with me.*

*The second theme - and one we have already heard a bit about - was around her ability to make other people feel good.*

**Jack:** *As mum has just said, Granny could always be relied on for a confidence boost and I can still hear her cooing over us as we grew older, 'ooooh Tom', and this very quickly extended to Kate and Alice who she got to know over the years. What was always impressive about this was not only its consistency, but also its canniness. She wouldn't provide a false compliment for the sake of it. If our hair looked scruffy, this would certainly not be the subject of a compliment! Instead, she would invariably pick out a key observation about that person, highlighting their winning feature.*

*Granny always seemed to have an unusual approach to things and. despite the mixed results from her methods, it was always entertaining. For birthday and Christmas presents Granny could be relied on to get something really exciting that our parents would never have dreamed of.*

*From a plastic speaking parrot to 'moon boots', powered by industrial strength rubber bands, that still emerge throughout the house today. She had a talent for identifying these things and I think they captured a part of her personality; colourful, expressive and fun.*

**Tom:** *As well as the physical accolades she used to shower us with, I am pleased to recall the joy and pride she had in showing off the things we had made to anyone and everyone in earshot - whether we were in earshot or not. When I was younger, I would cringe with embarrassment, but as I got older I learnt to see it slightly differently and exchanged my embarrassment for simply enjoying her enjoy it all. I never knew how much something could seemingly keep on giving. Over the years her shelves became full of various things we had made and written - an old school painting, a university essay, a matchstick pineapple, and some, the wire silhouette of Shackleton and the collapsible church stayed with her right to the end...*

*One regret I have is that I was never quite able to reciprocate this praise, and I think she would have loved to have received similar compliments in return.*

*The Third theme we discovered was around the theme of 'Adversity'.*

**Tom:** *Granny was well known for slightly over-egging the odd ailment - we would hear of "broken backs", "blindness" and there was always the constant threat of an imminent migraine.. Often triggered at the sound of the word "chocolate" ...Not that we didn't believe her, but it sometimes felt that she seemed to want to place herself in imaginary adversity as if it was a state she craved. The stories we told and heard all added up to create a persona of someone who appeared quite vulnerable and risk-averse.*

*A few years ago, Owen and I were on our way to see her and he dialled her in on the car speakerphone. She was not aware I was also on the call, and I remember being shocked to hear how different she sounded - she was almost unrecognisable ...she sounded old and frail and in discomfort. It was only then did it dawn on me that in all these years, I had never actually heard her make any complaints to me. All the phone calls I had had with her even towards the end, she had sounded positive and spritely. I like to think that she was deploying her acting skills and maybe this was one of her ways of protecting her grandchildren from the realities of older age.*

*She could also be very supportive - One memory I have of this is when I phoned her up one evening and told her that I had broken up with a then- girlfriend she had liked. I expected her to be disappointed and I would feel worse, but to my surprise and relief, she just offered comfort and positivity.*

**Jack:** *From being a good Granny, she went on to become a great one and her names live on through Erin, who shares her middle name and Theo, who shares her last. It was great to see her meet Erin and Theo and for Tom and I to witness her becoming a grandparent all over again - watching her interact with them made us imagine this was how she must have been with us when we were that age. One of my final memories of her is visiting at Christmas with Theo and watching her come alive to the point that she broke into a round of 'jingle bells' with him – momentarily back in her element.*

**Tom:** *She always ended a phone call with how much she loved us, and in the last few years, I'm pleased that I was able to tell her that I loved her back. But we wanted to end with this one..... During a visit a couple of years ago*

*Kate and I asked her if she thought there might be an afterlife. She paused for a moment before saying “- no, it's like being the flame of a candle - once you are snubbed out – that's it.” - She was calm, matter of fact. Strong, impressive, and surprisingly un-dramatic.”*



We have heard today about a remarkable person and a great character. Despite the tough times in her childhood, marred by poverty, by having to care for and protect her siblings and Mother from her erratic and violent Father – despite not being nurtured herself, despite suffering from anxiety, despite all of that - Olive was a great and infectious enthusiast. She had drive and determination, she educated herself, she honed and employed her talents, and she loved and cared for her family to her final days.

Olive would never, ever have considered herself as *truly great*, or even just great.. In fact she was quite self-deprecating. But why shouldn't her name also be 'feted by the waving grass and streamers of white cloud' as Stephen Spender so lyrically described in his poem. Feted for the person she was - an outstanding personality; talented, clever, sensitive and generous; an irreverent wit; someone who could recognise the special beauty in others, and, by naming it, bring lightness to an otherwise dull day.

Olive lived long enough to witness Tom and Jack's progress to adulthood and was hugely impressed and proud of them and all they have achieved personally and professionally. She was able to meet, and fall in love with their partners, Kate and Alice, and then to fall in love with her great grandchildren, Erin and Theo. Now that she is no longer with us, all of that love hasn't gone away, Olive's legacy will persist in so many positive ways through her family and the people she touched.

Thank you all for participating in this ceremony today. We will now play a song that Gill mentioned earlier - *Come into the Garden Maud*, performed here by John McCormack. This is also quite literally your invitation to gather outside on the terrace where, once everyone has a glass, Owen will give a toast to the truly great life of Olive Elsie 'Treacle' Leech.

