

A celebration of the life of Beryl Yvonne Halls

3 August 1933 – 2 July 2019
22 July 2019, Chilterns Crematorium



a personal goodbye

Humanist
Ceremonies

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Beryl Yvonne Halls was born in Weymouth on August third, 1933. Soon after her birth, her parents, Winifred and Charles Dibben, a confectioner by trade, moved up to Amersham. By the outbreak of the Second World War, Charles was a confectioner and a baker, which was a reserved occupation, so he was unable to join up. Instead, he served in the Home Guard as an Air Raid Precautions Officer. Meanwhile, Winifred, stayed at home to take care of Beryl and her two brothers; Norman who was born a year after Beryl and Gordon ten years later. With only a year between them, Beryl and Norman enjoyed a lifelong close relationship until his death in 2006.

Beryl attended St. George's Church of England School on White Lion Road, before going on to Whitehill School in Chesham. She then trained at secretarial college in London, commuting on the Met line, and went on to work in hustle and bustle of Fleet Street.

Beryl had her fair share of admirers before being swept off her feet at a bus stop by an Irish charmer who hadn't so much kissed the Blarney stone as swallowed it whole! Patrick McKenna was thirty when he came over from Ireland – twelve years Beryl's senior – her parents were not so impressed. Their unease did not stop Beryl however, who went on to court Patrick. She and Patrick married in July 1951 and, in January 1952 Beryl gave birth to a baby girl named Susan. Sadly, Susan was born with spina bifida and died when she was just one week old. Beryl was only eighteen when she lost her daughter, Susan, her loss stayed with her throughout her life.

At this time, not having anywhere else to live, Beryl and Patrick rented a single room in Chartridge, still living there in 1953 when Jennifer was delivered early at Old Amersham bus station – Beryl didn't quite make it to the hospital in time; she had to give birth in her landlord's car with Patrick in attendance.

Thankfully, being in possession of a baby but still lodging in one room, Beryl and Patrick were given a two bedroomed house in Little Chalfont. Whilst there, Beryl gave birth to John in 1954, Tricia in 56, Peter in 59, Patrick in 61 and last but not least the baby of the family, James, in 1964. A two bedroom house with six children was, I'm told, very cosy!

Beryl often said she was at her happiest when her children were small and you could see this with her grandchildren and great grandchildren; she was in her element with babies and toddlers. Times were not easy; she was a caring mum who always insisted on cooking proper meals and sending her kids off to school properly dressed. This, involved hand knitted school jumpers which her children wore with a certain amount of angst as they did rather stand out in the playground! Looking back now though, the family realise that they were, actually, works of art! Beryl knitted all her life, for her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren until, sadly, arthritis meant she had to stop. There are loads of pictures of family babies in hand knitted hats and matching mittens, scarves and jumpers and these were always much admired by friends and passers-by.

Beryl was a very loyal mum; children and family came first. She loved her children unconditionally even when, sometimes, they gave her grief! She didn't question their choices and they always knew she would accept their life decisions. There was never any favouritism; she had three Ps and three Js, although she did used to joke that the P's gave her a few more headaches than the J's!

She loved family get-togethers at Easter and Christmas – Christmas Eve was her favourite when the family took it in turns hosting big family parties, with one of the grown-ups dressing up as Father Christmas for the grandchildren and great grandchildren. She adored being surrounded by family. She always made everyone welcome and never turned anyone away; there was nearly always at least one Irish relative staying in the house.

The family lived in their council house for thirteen years. During this time, Patrick's business had been growing and Beryl ran his accounts; she was always very good at figures. She kept her own very meticulous accounts right up to the end of her life – in fact she got quite frustrated when she wasn't able to keep on top of them! In 1966, business was successful enough to buy a three bedroom detached house which, over the following years, Patrick converted into a five bedroomed house! With central heating! Five bedrooms *and* radiators; this was luxury! Here, the family lived until Patrick and Beryl parted ways in 1975 and Beryl moved to Amersham.

In the eighties, after her kids had flown, Beryl enjoyed her independence and kept herself busy. She revisited her lifelong love of dance, regularly going ballroom dancing with her brother, Norman. She put her business accounting skills to work, taking a job as an office administrator, and made extra money by taking in Gill, a lodger she found through the college. Gill was an art student and lived with Beryl for several years before leaving for university. Beryl became something of a surrogate mum to Gill and such was the strength of their relationship that they kept in touch, exchanging Christmas cards every year and catching up throughout their lives.

In September 1986, aged 53, Beryl married Geoffrey Halls. Initially, they lived in Geoff's house in Rickmansworth before buying a bungalow in Chesham. Beryl settled in very well at the bungalow – there she continued her passion for gardening and watching her birds. Beryl still went out to work; she was never shy of hard work.

In 1999, Geoff sadly died. Beryl lived in their home until her final days, never wishing to move as she liked her neighbours and the street community.

After Geoff's death, Beryl started attending the bereavement charity Cruise - which then became a social event. Beryl went for coffee, and lunch, once a week for many years, and made a great circle of friends whom she referred to as the 'girls' including Beryl, Barbara, Irene and Mora.

Beryl was also involved with a hard-of-hearing group; having accompanied a friend to a meeting, she ended up on the coffee and tea rota there and made another great circle of friends – including Kate, who has been so supportive.

Her friends would describe Beryl as someone who would say it as it was; she didn't suffer fools too well and never really mastered the art of camouflaging that! She wasn't at ease in new social situations and was a little awkward until she got to know you. She would much rather sit quietly and listen to the conversation but she would always have an opinion! It might not be expressed straight away but you would definitely hear it later!

Beryl kept up to date with current affairs, particularly politics, joining public meetings relating to current affairs, always at the front of the crowd. She had quite the social conscience and was very aware of the inequalities of life. She was patriotic and in her last few years, like many of her generation, she wasn't slow in coming forward about controlled immigration; leafleting the neighbours and sticking to her opinions when her children expressed theirs! She definitely took a certain pleasure in winding them up!

Beryl remained fit and active right into her eighties. She loved travelling and there are many holiday photos. A knee operation hit her hard but didn't stop her from driving and staying active. It wasn't until her cancer treatment that she had to slow down and she did miss her independence. She had supportive neighbours, especially Mora who brought her her paper every day and her medication once a week. Mora was a wonderful companion in Beryl's last years when they would sit watching TV till nodding off. They liked to support the ladies' football teams, which involved a certain amount of shouting at the telly, and developed a mutual love of rugby; not necessarily for the actual game, more for the big strong men!

Two years after her diagnosis, Beryl was admitted to hospital. On June the 29th she was transferred to the Florence Nightingale's Hospice where the ambience was calm and peaceful and the caring attention she received was without fault.

On Tuesday 2nd July, Beryl died peacefully with her family around her.

Beryl has requested her ashes be scattered along with her beloved Scottie dog's ashes in her favourite woods where she played as a child.