

A Celebration of the Life of

Sheila Georgina Fielder

7 January 1931 – 21 April 2024

22 May 2024, St Helens Crematorium

Celebrant: Nicki Alderson



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Sheila and her twin sister Doreen, were born to parents George Barnes, a gas fitter, and Violet Burston, a milliner, in Islington, London, on the 7th January 1931. Life was hard. The twins' parents couldn't afford to buy single beds for their girls so they sawed a double bed in half for the girls to sleep in!

The twins spent time at their grandmother's pub, The Pilot, in Greenwich, when they were young children. They would often play on the boats and barges on the River Thames, a short walk away.

One day, messing about on the boats, Sheila fell in the water, the alarm was raised, and she was pulled to safety after her auburn hair was spotted floating in the water. By a miracle, Sheila was unscathed. It was a story she often recounted.

When war broke out in 1939, the eight-year-old twins were evacuated to Earls Colne in Essex where they stayed for six very happy years with Mabel and Charlie Etheridge, a couple who volunteered to host evacuees. Their house had a path with a shamrock border and that started a lifelong love of this plant. Sheila planted it wherever she lived and even had a lucky shamrock tattoo. The twins would play in the fields and wave to the war planes when they flew over.

When evacuation ended, Sheila and Doreen moved to Hornsey Park Road in North London to live with their mother Violet again, new stepfather Don and new half siblings, Tina and Andrew. Unfortunately, the twins lost touch with their father George who had himself remarried.

Sheila always enjoyed dancing and would go on nights out in Wood Green where she met Norman Fielder, an electric motor rewinder. Things developed and they fell in love.

Sheila moved in with Norman's eldest sister Eileen, her husband John and their daughter Beryl, who had set up home in Tottenham. She enjoyed looking after Beryl who thought of Sheila as a big sister.

Beryl shared these memories of Sheila with Peter, Gary and Jeanette:

Your mum came to live with us when I was about nine I think. She shared my bedroom and she was great fun. Always happy and laughing and great to be with.

She spent part of her childhood as an evacuee with a lady she always referred to as "auntie".

I know your mum was very fond of her. She was a real old fashioned country lady and very superstitious and your mum was full of these superstitions. The best one was regarding her hair.

One morning your mum was in the bathroom having a wash and we suddenly heard screams and hysterics. It seems she was brushing her hair and she cleaned the loose hair from her brush and threw it out of the window, and a bird swooped down and flew off with it.

Apparently, 'auntie' told her that if a bird flew off with some of your hair to line its nest, all your hair would fall out, and your mum was convinced she was going to go bald. She was so upset, but my mum and dad managed to convince her that it wasn't true.

Sheila and Norman got married in 1953 and found 'furnished rooms' in Tufnell Park Road, opposite a dance hall. That's no surprise given her lifelong love of dancing. They moved to Norman's mother's flat in Burns Buildings, Caledonian Road, after she died and their first two children, Gary and Jeanette, were born whilst living there.

Around 1963, Sheila and Norman moved to a brand-new ground floor flat, in Selkirk House, Storey Street, near Kings Cross. It had a balcony, large light rooms, and underfloor heating - which was a particular hit. Peter was born whilst there.

Then in 1968, the family moved to a semi-detached house in Seafield Road, Arnos Grove, with a long back garden from which Sheila developed her love of gardening. In fact, she was happiest out in the fresh air and sunshine. They stayed for over 25 years until upon retirement they moved to a bungalow at St Lawrence Bay on the Essex coast. They made many friends there, however, Norman passed away suddenly in the year 2000.

Sheila stayed on in the Bay for a couple of years but then moved to Blackpool because she saw it as "somewhere with a bit of life!". She went to the Tower Ballroom to dance and met many new friends.

Sheila's very first job was on a sweet counter with her sister in Woolworths. Then the twins got a job visiting offices in the City of London to clean telephones, a popular job in the fifties, and a job they loved.

Sheila also worked at Barratts sweet factory in Wood Green. A loving mum, she devoted herself to raising her three children - as well as doing part-time work as a playground lady; in a newsagent's; and for a large part of her working life, in North London pubs.

Sheila enjoyed those types of jobs where she met lots of people. Some of the pubs were rough and Sheila had to be strong and assertive when dealing with customers.

As a teenager Sheila enjoyed roller skating at Alexandra Palace with her sister. She also enjoyed cycling and she and Norman had a tandem bicycle they would use for days out. They later bought a Matchless Twin 500cc motorcycle, which they used for holiday trips.

She would enjoy nights out with Norman at the Wood Green Empire and one night Sheila got up on stage to be hypnotised by Ralph Slater, *'The World's Greatest Hypnotist'*.

Weekends and summer holidays were spent in their own caravan at Millbeach, near Maldon in Essex. They spent many happy years enjoying the sea air.

In her fifties, Sheila bought a Honda scooter and enjoyed the independence it gave her.

Sheila would visit Doreen in nearby Clacton when she could. In later years, the twins would frequently keep in touch by letter. Sheila always reminisced about happy times spent with Doreen.

Norman had also always been reluctant to holiday overseas, however, in 1987, Sheila persuaded him to go on their first holiday abroad to the Algarve. They enjoyed it so much they holidayed abroad almost every year afterwards. In 1992, Sheila flew on Concorde to Paris accompanied by Jeanette.

When Norman passed away, Sheila didn't let her loss get her down for too long and decided to live life to the full and blossomed into a vibrant, adventurous wonder woman. She went on more adventurous holidays and travelled the world every Christmas and New Year. She even visited the Falkland Islands in 2003.

Peter found a postcard from the same trip. It reads, *"Nearing the end of holiday, it's been good, went on a chair lift into the mountains. It's lovely scenery, cruising towards Cape Horn. Saw icebergs, glaciers and we had a 10-force gale one night - it was something to remember"*.

On the same cruise, she entered a talent show dancing to “Rock Around the Clock”. In 2004, she was in Thailand when the tsunami hit but stayed on supporting the local economy in any way she could.

Every time someone mentioned a foreign place, she would say ‘I’ve been there’ and she had! She was fearless and adventurous and travelled to far away destinations on her own. Sheila was a tough cookie and while on holiday in Cape Verde, in her early 80s, she bravely fought off an attacker in her resort hotel room.

She was proud of her fashion sense and always looked smart in colourful clothes - orange was a favourite colour. Sheila loved Marks and Spencer - especially the Food Hall. She LOVED the M&S Food Hall!

Sheila enjoyed watching football on television, especially her team, Tottenham Hotspur. Darts was another passion - her favourite player was Michael van Gerwen.

In later years, Sheila bought a laptop and learned how to send emails to her friends and relations including Elaine, Pat and Thelma. She also enjoyed her embroidery, word-search puzzles and watching the wild birds outside her window. Peter bought her a budgie which she named Georgie and he was very special to her.

In the later stage of Sheila’s life in Bootle, she needed carers – with whom she got on very well. She was very grateful for anything and everything they did for her. The words they heard her utter most were 'thank you'. Sheila’s family have asked me to thank all her carers from Apollo Healthcare in Liverpool - you kindly attended to Sheila’s needs and enabled her to be comfortable in her last years of life.

Sheila will be greatly missed.

Peter would now like to share some memories of time spent with his mother.

When I was a young boy, I accompanied Mum on her shopping trips and she was my buddy for cycle rides, walks and kicking a ball about.

Mum always made me laugh. When mum first met Linda, she looked her up and down, paused, and said “I’m so glad Peter has a girlfriend, he’s never brought a girl home before. I thought he was going to be a bachelor for the rest of his life!” Thanks Mum!

When visiting Mum, she would always greet me with a cheery smile and say, “Hello Peter, I’ve made your cheese sandwiches!”.

In her 70s, Mum got tattoos; learned how to email and use Facebook; and was often out dancing until midnight!

I listened as Mum reminisced about growing up, living in London, life with Dad - and her holidays. We laughed a lot and watched football and darts! What fun we had.

The last couple of years must have been difficult for Mum as she became dependent on others.

Mum never wanted to go into a care home and I always said I would look after her and I am so glad I was able to do this.

Miss you Mum, lots and lots.