

Serendipity

It was purely by chance that she found a sheet of paper amongst her Mother's files of poems and stories. "Did you know about this" she asked her Father, still grieving his twice lost wife of 53 years, first to Alzheimer's Disease and second to the fatal heart attack she suffered one evening before she fell down the stairs. At least that's what the medics told him kindly to assuage any guilt that he would have felt had he known she probably suffered the heart attack as she fell.

"Know about what", he replied absently. "Mum wrote that she wants to be buried at sea". "It's in her own handwriting", she added. "Well nothing would surprise me" he said.

The family were in agreement. "It probably is what she wanted" said her brother. After all the whole family were sea-faring, with boys being sent to sea aged about twelve". Her daughter wasn't so sure. "What if Nanny's body gets washed up on the beach?"

Eventually they agreed on a cremation with the ashes sprinkled in the estuary off the little coastal town where she grew up.

They had to stop for Dad's comfort break. No-one wanted to leave the ashes in the car so while they had coffee, the Urn sat at the table too. When they reached the seaside town, to their horror, the tide was out. Being Londoners it hadn't occurred to any of them that taking a boat out was dependent on there being sufficient water. It would be six hours before the next high tide.

They located Mum's cousin, Tony, the harbour master and explained their plan. "Well" he drawled in his Essex accent, "if you come back at 6 o'clock, I'll have the lifeboat out ready".

Dad wanted his lunch so they found the fish and chip restaurant they remembered from childhood holidays. Once again, Mum in her Urn, sat at the table while the family enjoyed the sea saltiness of the freshly caught and cooked fish, with chips that tasted like no other. Then they took her for a nostalgic tour of the town to where she went to school, recounting the stories she had told, such as being late, too absorbed by rainbow colours emerging from orange-peel dropped in puddles.

At 6pm they met Tony, and the trainee accompanying him, at the harbour. The family got on board and the lifeboat sped off. The trainee looked at them with some suspicion. Taking an Urn out to scatter ashes was rather irregular!

At the point of tipping out the ashes, Dad suddenly exclaimed "She never liked the water". The trainee turned ashen. Were his worst fears about to be realised? Tony piped up, "Sailors liked to be on the sea not in it". At that moment a gust of wind took the ashes away over the sea where they rested, not in it, but floating on the surface. "Your Mum knew what she was doing all the time" said Dad with a smile.