

Mum's tribute

23rd March 2024

Francis

On behalf of the family, welcome to mum's funeral and thank you for coming, she would've been moved and delighted to see so many of you here today.

By way of a tribute to Mum, myself, Toby and Ned will attempt to paint a picture of mum's life, dividing the task into three sections - childhood and work, 'things mum loved' , and finally, family and friendship.

So I will kick off with mum's early years....

Mum was born on the 1 May 1938 in Peshawar (now part of Pakistan). She was the first born of Rosabel and Charles Crawford, a career military officer. Born during tumultuous times, the family were soon forced back to England and Charles posted to France to fight in World War II. Mum's early years were spent moving from one home to the next, the family eventually settling in Hampshire. In 1943, tragedy struck when Charles was killed in a military glider crash in Italy. The tragedy had a devastating effect on Mum who was just 5, she never fully recovered from losing her beloved father who she remembered to be kind, courageous and loving. Charles death also had serious ramifications for the family, particularly as Rosabel suffered from a painful and debilitating condition. However, through Rosabel's heroic efforts, the family made the most of a difficult situation, helped by strong links with friends and extended family and, of course, pony life.

School days were a crucible of sorts for honing Mum's leadership skills...of her escapades at St Mary's Wantage, the most memorable was an illicit nighttime swimming sortie at the school pool. Picture for yourself, ten shadowy figures stealthily creeping out of their dorm, and, flitting across the school grounds (and main road) to frolic in the moon shadowed water. The daring act complete, and thinking that they had got away with their fun, the group found themselves in hot water when one of the gang spilt the beans. Showing hard-headedness mum, persuaded all 10 of her partners in crime to come clean of course, the head mistress, nickname HelPat, wasn't able to expel them all, so they got away with it. A point of note, we have here present, from that daring party, Lavinia Grant-Ives, and, in spirit, Susan Baring - not the last encounter Mum was to have with that particular clan.

School ended at 16, and then there were brief spells spent in Switzerland and France learning French. Following that, Mum went to secretarial college then took temping jobs in London. Sadly, Rosabel died in 1959, Mum was just 21 years old and, with two younger sisters, felt deeply responsible for the family.

At this time, Mum's career was budding, from the outset, her fierce competitive nature came to bear... she would tell us with pride that it was her, answering the phone as a PA, who clinched the crucial deals when everyone else was out to lunch.

Working with natural wit and sheer determination she found herself in the 1960s with Noel Gay Artists, a musicians, actors and TV agent in Denmark Street. Surrounded by the glamorous world of music publishers, television personalities and authors it must have been a heady time. To our wide-eyed fascination, I

remember her telling us the story of how she sat in on an early Beatles recording session at Abbey Road. Initially, her clients were presenters, actors and television figures, as time went on, she gravitated towards writers until they were her only focus. It is no surprise that she thrived in this world; she set up her own agency and was asked to represent some of the most well-respected names of the age: Bamber Gascoigne, Freddie Forsyth, Robin Lane-Fox and Germaine Greer to name a few.

Mum's ability to make strong friendships ensured that our family life was regularly punctuated by visits from her writers - they were not just clients but an integral part of her life. I can vividly remember Bamber Gascoigne, my dear late godfather, hosting a version of 'Sussex House School Challenge' in the drawing room for my 11th birthday... buzzers and all!

With the onset of family life in the 1970s, mum chose to join Curtis Brown, a larger firm, to continue her career. I remember the convivial atmosphere at the offices above Mappin and Webb on Regent Street - where she sat opposite her old friend Robert Loder. It seemed like a perfect fit for her - she brought pzazzas and a fresh way of doing things, Curtis Brown offered the secure structure she needed, with her growing family.

Mum's career was so well suited to her, it fitted like a glove. It indulged her love of books and harnessed her natural ability to communicate. It also engaged with the subtler aspects of her character, like shrewdness, and, resilience, in the thick of negotiation. It was her trademark that these skills were always engaged to the benefit of her writers, who meant so much to her. It is a great legacy, that there is so much good literature, that has stood the test of time, was nurtured under her care.

Toby

Mum loved her garden and plants almost as much as her family, and it was probably the place where she was happiest. Like most things in life she was rather opinionated in the way things should be done. When we arrived at the Old Rectory in the late 80s the first spring bought up thousands of yellow daffodils – what could be better – alas these were not part of mum’s vision for the Old Rectory garden. Daffodil, yes. Large yellow ones, absolutely not. So she took it upon herself to dig up every single one! And so much was her disdain for them, the casualties could not be composted at Ham but had to be driven miles away and dumped in the middle of Savernake forest!

She took utter delight in every new arrival throughout the year, from the hellebores, crocuses, fritillaries, narcissi, tulips. The list is endless and the stunning arrangements you can see in the church all came from Mum’s garden. She loved to show them to visitors, her infectious enthusiasm spilling over whether it be grandchildren, friends or even an unsuspecting delivery man.

Over her roses, she met her gardening kindred spirit, Roland Bristow, who was the gardener for 20 years at the Old Rectory. They worked perfectly as a team, hand in glove, thriving on the basis that they both spoke their minds and had a similar great sense of humour. They both understood that glorious gardens did not just happen by themselves but required endless planning and back-aching hard work.

Some of you may know that Mum’s mental health was a challenge but when she felt, as she described, the black dog of depression nipping at her heels, she found solace among her plants. She had engraved, on one of the wooden benches in her beautiful rose garden, the Ralph Waldo Emerson quote

“All my hurts, my garden spade can heal”

There was definite irony that a literary agent should have three dyslexic sons who did basically whatever they could to avoid reading a book. We wrote a rather bad poem for mum's 70th birthday which included the line;

*“Her three sons all blighted with dyslexia
She had to do something to prevent apoplexia”*

So this became another of mum's many callings. She joined The British Dyslexia Association, and almost overnight she turbocharged the charity, helping to destigmatise the condition and raise awareness especially in the business sector, highlighting that given the appropriate support dyslexics could perform as well as their peers. Her “Mansion House Budget Lunches” became a fixed part of the London social calendar and raised huge amounts of money for the charity.

After she left the BDA she still continued to help educate and gave up her time to teach reading to those in difficulty, both at local state primary schools and Feltham young offenders institute. Her kindness, patience and her amazing ability to connect with anyone of any age and background really came into its own. She was quite chuffed when, in her early seventies, one cold day, one of the Feltham prisoners told her she “looked hot”. Her immediate response that she was actually freezing, “no miss” came the reply, “I mean you look sexy”.

In her early 20s Mum had quite a major operation on her spine and was then bed bound in a plaster cast for 8 weeks. She would often tell us with glee that she had been kept high on morphine for the entirety of this recovery period. Following this she realised, maybe rather ahead of her time, that the key to a long and healthy life was to stay strong and fit. One of my earliest memories of mum was her appearing first thing in the morning wearing a bright red leotard doing things she called “exercises”, performed without fail every morning until the end of her life.

About 2 years ago mum had a nasty fall and badly broke her spine, she suffered a lot of pain following this but never lost the ability to get around independently. Her spine surgeon was amazed that she was still able to walk and put it down to all those years of exercises – a lesson to us all.

Mum's love affair with horses started in her childhood. She, her sisters and local friends would spend their free time with their ponies, holding mini-gymkhanas and selling the apples from their orchard over the garden wall to help pay for their riding tack. This moved into hunting in her rather wild twenties when she managed to juggle her career to allow her to escape London mid-week for a day's hunting and be back in the office the following morning, often via A+E as she was rather blasé about safety, choosing an elegant bowler over a hard hat. She also hunted on Exmoor where she would stay with her great uncle Keith Hamilton, who had become a father figure after she lost her dad at such a young age. He gave her away at mum and dad's wedding at Exford Church. Hunting friends described her as fiercely brave and an exceptional horsewoman.

Ned

Mum loved nothing more than a gathering. Whether with friends or family, the literary agent's "terrifying efficiency" was often applied to creating magical memories for those around her. Something that many of you sitting here today will have enjoyed.

In the many letters that we have received, mum's friends have highlighted how much trouble she took to "check-in" on the phone or in person. Very few could claim so many different enclaves of friends. Even in Mum's last week, she insisted on paying her regular visit to Reg, an elderly resident of the village. At that point it would almost certainly have made more sense for Reg to visit mum, but Mum's dependability and enjoyment of human contact was with her until the end.

Mum and Dad were married for 51 years, a tribute to how a couple can complement each other. No matter what challenges they faced they were always united side by side. Though, Mum's rebellious streak did often bubble up in the presence of Dad. Whilst visiting local churches with their friend Elio, Mum would often lead Elio astray. Mum, with Elio in toe, would duck under the velvet rope, against dad's wishes, and explore the off limits parts of the church, much to Dad's embarrassment.

On another occasion Mum decided she would create an elaborate mosaic in the rose garden at Ham. The following week, whilst visiting the beach in Norfolk, she saw the opportunity to source some raw materials for her project. After some convincing, dad

agreed to be an accomplice. In the blink of an eye, they were back at the car with carrier bags brimming with pebbles. Before they could make their getaway, a local resident approached the car and asked them to kindly put bags of pebbles back, explaining that Norfolk County Council had only recently had the pebbles moved onto the beach at great expense!

Some of my, Toby and Francis' fondest early memories include the tennis camps, music camps and multifamily skiing holidays. All organised by Mum. Whilst Mum did her best to get us to learn poetry and to enjoy riding, she also created a childhood of radio-controlled cars, motorbikes and zip wires, blissful for three hyperactive boys. Dad recently reminded me of when, in 1984, Mum even rose to the challenge of providing for her family in a foreign country - the Borders of Scotland. After Mum and Dad purchased a tumble-down farm with Toby and Emma Tennant, Mum found the elements often not on her side, a constant stream of damp clothes steaming on the Aga. Mum always took it in her stride.

20 years ago, when Mum became Gran, she relished in the opportunity to give her grandchildren experiences that they would never forget. These ranged from simple things like pressing flowers in the garden at Ham to the more magical, waving her literary wand to conjure Axel Scheffler, the children's book illustrator of The Gruffalo fame. She somehow convinced Axel to let her and all her grandchildren into his studio. When there, he painted a bespoke picture of them all together, each depicted as their requested animal in a forest glade, standing around the Gruffalo - The Gruffalo, quite possibly a representation of Mum.

Some of the more enduring memories from her grandchildren include; the wonder and sparkle of Gran's wardrobe, Mum letting her granddaughters practise the latest makeup techniques on her, feeding the chickens and collecting the eggs, putting up decorations and making gingerbread houses at Christmas, her wonderful storytelling and sharing her passion for books. When Daisy, my daughter was 2, Gran offered to read her a story in the evening on the sofa in the drawing room. When it came to Daisy's bedtime, thinking that Gran had possibly already put Daisy to bed and searching for them both, we ended up finally finding Daisy and Gran still on the drawing room sofa. Gran had fallen asleep whilst reading to Daisy. Daisy, despite being

trapped unable to move, was sucking her thumb contentedly, safe in the web of Grans sleeping arms.

Mum's intention was to bring people together for the sheer fun of it. Mum's early life was not by any means easy, with the loss of both parents by the age of 21, meaning she didn't have the haven of a family home. Mum's objective was to create wonderful experiences at Ham for friends and family, trying to make sure we would never leave, or at the very least we would come straight back. |

More recently our memories with Mum include spending time in the garden at Ham. Sitting on the bench catching up whilst watching our children jumping on the trampoline or on the climbing frame. As mum moved into her late 70s and 80s, whilst her reduced mobility stopped her from being so busy it did give her more space to be rather than feel like she needed to do. This period whilst challenging in many ways for mum, did give her the opportunity to enjoy the fruits of her labour, whether her blossoming family or her magical garden. We all feel immensely grateful to have had the time we had with the inspirational mother, grandmother, wife and friend that she was.