



Celebrating Lois Mary Williams

7th February 1925 - 31st December 2023

Saturday July 13th 2024, 1pm-5pm, Sidcup Place.

Lois lived many lives and spanned the world during her 10 decades through her travels, passions and friendships. She was mother, grandmother and great grandmother to 21 descendants. She has been a social work team leader, an actor, a founder member of the National Childbirth Trust, and a lifelong campaigner for human rights, justice, peace and equality. A writer, a poet and an indefatigable communicator, chronicler, and correspondent. Today we celebrate Lois and how her life and gifts have enriched our lives.

We have drawn on Lois's self-written obituary produced as a writing class exercise, so some of the words used are her own and are shown in *italics*.



Born in Kidderminster, Worcestershire, she was the daughter of Mona and Cyril, a carpet manufacturer and gifted amateur musician, who played with Elgar.

Lois, the eldest child, was followed by Elizabeth and Alan.

'The Kidderminster Johnsons were thought to be descendants of Dr Samuel Johnson - or so had declared an ancient aunt interested in family history. Lois was rather sceptical about this until she saw his portrait – it was the image of an uncle. 'Maybe, then?' she said with caution.



Mona was an affectionate and rather shy mother. Cyril had a mischievous sense of humour. When he laughed, he would have to take his handkerchief out and wipe his eyes. He told slightly questionable stories, always on Sunday nights. To her mother's 'Oh, Cyril,' he would put the blame on having sat through two sermons and playing the church organ twice.'

Every summer the family de-camped to a hotel in Llandudno for a seaside holiday. Lois's childhood brought her music, laughter, tennis and lifelong friendships including Monica, Shelia, and Doreen.



In her teens Lois attended Malvern girls' college as a boarder. 'Auditioning for every school play and being good at sports earned her a place in the headmistress's good books and the title of 'goody goody' from Betty, her rebellious younger sister. An actor manqué herself, the headmistress directed Lois away from the expected female accomplishments of shorthand and domestic science and



towards acting. 'Any fool can cook' she argued as she convinced Lois's mother to support a successful RADA application.'



At Rada (1942-45) she won the gold medal and met Clifford, whom she married in 1949. Her acting career began with the Entertainments National Service Association in 1945, followed by many repertory theatre tours and seasons at the Shakespeare Memorial theatre in Stratford alongside

Paul Scofield and Joss Ackland. These provided rich material for her creative writing in later years.



The family years in Molesey and Sidcup saw the births and childhoods of Nicholas, Rebekah, Adam and Dido.



Looking for a satisfying and challenging role in her mid-40s Lois qualified as a social worker at North London Polytechnic. Newly qualified Lois persuaded the director of Social

Services to pay the deposit and act as surety for the purchase of a moped by Bill, a teenager in care. This meant Bill no longer had to get up at 4.30am to reach work and complete his apprenticeship. It sparked a successful engineering career. Lois remained in touch with Bill for the rest of her life.

In 1971 Lois moved to a job in the half-built modernist utopia Thamesmead, described at the time as the cockney Venice-on-Thames. Lois believed with a passion in the plans for an integrated community, promising harmony and improved quality of life to Londoners moving from poor inner-city housing. Thus began 19 years of working collegiately with residents, GPs, health visitors, schools and the church, including the inspirational Right Rev Jim Thompson, then rector of Thamesmead, to try to make a difference to the lives of children and families in the area.



“Did I ever regret becoming a social worker? Never. It was a challenge I loved,” she said “No one day is ever the same - people are full of surprises, many good surprises as they get back on their feet and you can say goodbye”.

Inadequate infrastructure left Thamesmead marooned, but Lois continued to work tirelessly, remaining compassionate and determined. In addition to her role as social work Team Leader Lois set up a marital and relationship counselling service and secured funding for other valuable innovations including a community nursery; a school counselling project; and a service giving free confidential sexual health advice to under 19's. She contributed to research on community attitudes to health and was regularly invited to primary school assemblies when she would tell stories of her travels to Australia and Jordan. In July 1998 Lois was invited to the Queen's Garden Party in recognition of her services to the community and families of Thamesmead.



In the mid 1970's Lois returned to treading the boards at the Geoffrey Whitworth amateur Theatre in Dartford. She enjoyed leading roles in plays such as "The Cherry Orchard" and "The Right Honourable Gentleman".

Lois's campaigning passions and interests were strong and numerous. Her own experience of medicalised and cruel childbirth in the early 1950s led to her becoming a founder member of the National

Childbirth Trust. She joined the 1958 CND Aldermaston march with Adam in a pushchair, and remained a peace campaigner for the rest of her life. She was a member of CND, Amnesty International, Greenpeace, the British Humanist Association, the Howard League for Penal Reform and the Labour party.

'Lois was a lifelong collector of friends and an inveterate letter writer from whom no one escaped. She strongly endorsed Dr Johnson's dictum that "friendships should be kept in good repair" through constant correspondence.'

On retiring from social work in 1990 she travelled for seven months by inviting herself to stay with her many friends and family scattered across the globe. Naturally she was received with delight.



With Rosemary and Fiona, Shelia's daughters, Western Australia 1991

Lois's 34 year 'retirement' was filled with the writing of poetry, short stories, the companionship of her writing and poetry groups and campaigning interests. Between 1996 and 1999 she completed a Combined Studies Programme at The University of Kent in Creative Writing, Poetry and Autobiography.

Lois remained a constant visitor, and host, to family and friends. This included several trips to Hong Kong and Sydney.

Her last three months with us was a magical time. She held court from a bed under the stars in her living room and, despite her growing weakness, shared memories, stories and much laughter with her family, friends and carers.



Lois is survived by her four children, eight grandchildren, nine great-grandchildren and her sister, Elizabeth. Her brother, Alan, died in 1994.

Programme

Please note that the event is being recorded for people not able to be here today.

WELCOME

EULOGY

-LUNCH-

MUSIC - Grieg: Piano concerto in A Minor, Op. 16 – third movement Allegro molto. Arthur Rubenstein

Bach: Goldberg Variations – Aria played by Matthew

READING - Eileen

POEM – “Choices” by Loïs

MESSAGES FROM FRIENDS

MUSIC -The Animals: “House of the Rising Sun”

MESSAGE FROM BILL

MUSIC - Henry Purcell: Dido & Aeneas

“Dido’s lament” arranged, sung and played by Caius and Theo

POEMS – “Rose- Red City”, and “To my Granddaughter” by Loïs

MEMORIES - By Scarlett

MUSIC – Gershwin: Porgy & Bess

“Summertime” arranged sung and played by Theo and Caius

READING - “Reflections” by Morgan Bailey,
3rd year Medical Student, Kings College London

MUSIC - Benjamin Britten: Peter Grimes. “Dawn” from the Four Sea Interludes. Op. 33a



'The effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life' – George Eliot, 'Middlemarch'.

Thank you for joining us today to celebrate Lois.

Please donate to the charity chosen by Lois
Amnesty International

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/giving/donate/give>

To watch the event:

<https://visual-memorials.co.uk/>



