

WINIFRED PRICE

I would like to share with you the following tribute to my mother's remarkable life.

1. Childhood

As many of you will know, she was born as Winifred Berriman in November 1922, the daughter of Rye and Isabella Berriman and brought up in the North East mining community of Easington Colliery. She shone at school and to the great pride of her family qualified to attend the Grammar School of St Anthony's Convent in Sunderland. She was always proud of her background and I think many the values she took through life can be traced to her origins – a sense of community, a commitment to family and a deep and unfailing Christian faith.

2. Youth

She emerged from school as a confident young woman who, by every account, made a considerable impression on everyone with her sunny personality, good looks and sense of fun. She was a frequent visitor to her Aunt Jennie and Uncle Mick who had settled in the Midlands and there she would spend many happy days with her cousins, Eileen, Teresa, Shelia and Peter and formed a bond that would last for the rest of her life. It was on one of these visits, while still a teenager, and acutely aware of my grandfather's eye problems caused by years of mine-working, that she resolved her family would be well served by moving from the North-East to this area; she arranged a house for the family and helped my grandfather get a job at Powke Lane Cemetery; very soon the whole family, including her grandfather, were settled in Moor Lane, only four miles from this church.

In the Midlands she qualified as a Pharmacist and embarked on a career as a dispensing chemist, working for several doctors in Rowley Regis and then, following the introduction of the NHS, for the Quinton Chemists, JR Smith. Then her family were visited by tragedy in 1948 when her much-loved brother Jim, who had been an Army Officer, died suddenly at the age of 23. Unsurprisingly her parents were deeply scarred by this terrible happening and it fell to her to act as a source of strength and inspiration for the whole family, a role for which her courage and faith well suited her.

3. Family

Happier events were soon to come her way she and my father started courting and they were married in March 1951. In November 1952 my brother James was born and I followed in August 1956. In 1957 my parents moved into their own home for the first time at Alwin Road, Blackheath.

After nurturing a young family for some years a new challenge arose when my bother Jimmy was diagnosed as Autistic in 1964. At this time this condition was virtually unknown and, sad to say, the advice offered was that that he could only be accommodated in an institution. My parents comprehensively rejected this outlook and my mother, with the courage and love which were the hallmarks of her life, brushed aside the advice and instead resolved to look after him herself for as long as was necessary, a resolution that was to shape much of her remaining life.

4. Romsley

In 1974 the family moved to Romsley, to a house she had set her heart on while it was being built. During this time she made many new friends and enjoyed the life of the local community. This time was notable for the considerable support she gave to my father when he was working on the foundation of the Oakfield House autistic adult community which opened 1989. This great achievement received much deserved recognition and she was so very proud to accompany Dad see him collect his award of the MBE at Buckingham Palace the following year. She continued to care for Jimmy with unfailing devotion until, after attending a community called Longford Court for respite care for several years, he was happily settled at the wonderful community at Somerset Court.

From this period I also remember the parish suppers she organised annually at Old Hill Church and, after I moved to Cheltenham, how much she enjoyed helping me fit out my new house and also the visits we undertook around this time to see her remaining family and childhood haunts in the North-East.

5. Last days

In her last days she faced more difficulties as the terrible disease of vascular dementia took hold and her faculties started to fade. It is not easy to write about this period of her life, not because of the problems it caused, but because it is hard to find words to describe the incredible dignity and love she showed while enduring them. So many of her lifelong characteristics, such as her concern for others and her love of children, continued to shine through.

Words too are inadequate to say very much about the devotion of my father and his wonderful achievement in maintaining her quality of life in circumstances that would render so many of us helpless. I know he would want to express heartfelt thanks to the very many carers, relatives and friends who contributed towards making the final years of my mother's life so very good and worthwhile.

From this account, I hope you will see it as the life of someone who through courage, love and faith consistently overcame adversity, and with her great energy and good humour enhanced the lives of so many. She wasn't a tall lady, and when I would gently chide her about this, she would remind me that "good stuff comes in little bundles". She was so right.

She lived through 87 years of astonishing change in the world yet remained true and constant to the Christian principles she at learned from the very first.

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