

A Tribute to Betty Cullen From Her Son Chris – 10th Decmeber 2009

Thank you for being here today to give thanks and to celebrate the life of Betty (Mum).

Mum was born in Lincoln on the 1st February 1929 to Margaret and Joseph Drury. She had a sister Elsie and brother Maurice, sadly, both of whom are no longer with us. At the age of 21, on the 9th September 1950 she married Peter at the St. Mary Le Wigford church in Lincoln. They had known each other for quite some time before marrying and in his youth Dad was a member of the Army Cadet force. He became a skilled drummer in the Cadet Force band, a band that paraded at various times through Lincoln City centre. And according to a reliable family source, it was during one of these band parades that Mum caught Dad's eye or perhaps it was the other way round? After their marriage, Mum worked for some time at the GPO as it was known in those days, where she learnt her typing skills in the Telegram office.

In August 1953, I came into the world. A memory from my early childhood was that Mum would cook a meal for us both, plate up a further portion and pack it into a large leather briefcase. We would then catch a bus from the South of the City to Lincoln City Centre and then another to the Ermine where her Mum and Dad lived. She did this routinely, many times and although I didn't fully understand at the time, she was doing this to help care for her sick parents. This was the first time that I saw her immense capacity for caring for others. I'm sure that at times she would have found it very difficult to balance all the needs of her family and yet still be able to provide the nursing care, but she managed it. She told me that even as a child she cared for her parents through illness though I suspect that this caused problems later in life. Being conditioned to listen for sounds at night from such a young age, she often found it very difficult to sleep. Clearly, the care was not without its cost but what was equally clear to me was that the care was so freely given.

Mum found it especially easy to have great compassion for all forms of innocence. Whether human or animal, the young especially drew Mum's heart and affections. She always had an affinity with animals – from childhood pets like the family dog "Budge", the cats and the rabbits and yes, even the pigs! She once told me the story of how her Dad somehow forgot to mention what happened to "Gorgy Porgy" - when they were having the family Sunday Roast! Throughout my childhood I remember Mum as being a very caring and loving mother, perhaps on occasions a little too caring, but perhaps that wasn't a bad trait, all in all.

In the early '70's Mum was to suffer from cancer and while this was a devastating blow to her in many ways, as I well remember, she nevertheless beat it and thankfully it never returned. It was around this time that she developed what was to be a life-long love of Bedlington Terriers. This started with my first pet dog and continued long after I left home. They were to become a great source of strength and companionship to her and as she herself put it - "they give you so much unconditionally".

In the late '70s Dad suffered a major heart attack. Mum once again became the carer and saw Dad through to a good recovery, but Dad was never to work again. However, this enforced early retirement provided an opportunity for Mum and Dad to pursue an interest in caravanning. They spent many happy days in the peaceful solitude of the countryside. The Rockingham Forest near Stamford was a special place for Mum and after visiting it I can fully understand its appeal for her.

In the early '80s, along came the Grandchildren and Mum became the doting Grandma, a role that she enjoyed immensely – in fact, for the rest of her life. I suspect that the days spent with both Danny and Philip were among the happiest of her life!

The late '80s and much of the '90s Mum spent with Dad involving themselves in the Bedlington Terrier "world". Mum learnt how to clip the dogs to "show" standard and spent many happy days attending local, regional and national dog shows where her dogs won quite a few prestigious awards. Mum and Dad made many friends through these events, friendships that have continued to this day. These friendships I know were very important to Mum.

In the late '90's Dad developed a serious medical condition that affected his mobility but of course Mum was there for him and she cared for him until he passed away in 2001. Of course this was a major blow for her and she relied heavily for day-to-day company on her last dog, Lieber. He meant just about everything to her, as he was her constant companion, something that family members just couldn't be. We helped where we could and we were all proud of how Mum coped with the inevitable changes in her life. Her skill at seeking out the most advantageous savings account was indeed legendary! The speed at which money was moved between accounts was truly amazing. Mum was also very keen on horse racing and was very knowledgeable on the subject. She was very partial to a little flutter and I have to say, seemed to be very successful at times but I know that most of the winnings, more often than not, found their way as gifts to her much loved grandchildren.

Two years ago her beloved Lieber became sick and was put down, a decision that I know Mum much regretted. She believed that a part of her also died that day and I understand what she meant. Her life definitely changed from that day, forever.

In 2008 we had the pleasure of welcoming Asha, our first Grandchild into the world and Mum was so very happy to be a "Great Grammy". She thoroughly enjoyed the special occasions with her "little" family as she referred to us - none more so than her 80th Birthday lunch. She once wrote in her diary after having a thoroughly enjoyable family day, that she went to bed, "contented". Though other nights we now know were not all like that, she really missed her little dog so very much.

Mum was in many ways a complex person. She was generous to a fault, compassionate and loving to anyone or anything in need, but yet, so very private. I say that not as a criticism but it is just how she was. We were very proud of her and what she was still capable of doing, right to the end of her life. I thank her for all that she has given me and for what she has done for others throughout her life.

Mum was, and is, a good and kind soul and I fervently hope and pray that she has found the peace and contentment that she was looking for in the latter part of her life.

God bless you Mum.