

## Paul's tribute to Mum

Mum once declared that she hated funerals. She didn't explain exactly why, but I suspect it was because she hated fuss, insincerity, or formality, and did not enjoy any public display of emotion. This time, she has no choice but to be here! Sorry Mum! I really hope she approves of this one, and I think she would, because Humanism seems to echo her life philosophy, and I would like to thank Simon for helping us to put together a meaningful tribute in tune with her life. I will try to be sincere, and keep my emotions under control.

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I was lucky to be the first born, so had Mum all to myself for two years. My first memories are of a woman who, I felt, treasured me, listened to me and respected me as a person, even as a very young child, and patiently tried to teach me about the world.

There is no doubt that she loved us children, indeed she had a soft spot for all children. She didn't speak of love, as far as I remember. That wasn't her style. She acted it – the way she greeted us – the way she played with us as children. We were always addressed as “darling”, but she was never one for lots of hugs and kisses. Her love was demonstrated by the way she tucked us in and read us stories at night, sitting at the end of our beds. I particularly remember her characterisations when reading from “Winnie the Pooh” which brought it to life and ensured that we always loved that book.

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Mum was never one to speak much about herself. In recent years, we interviewed her and started to piece together some of her early life history. However, from an early age she had kept a diary. This had been kept very private, and no-one was allowed to read it until very recently. When we did get access to it with her permission a year or two ago, it proved to be a treasure trove of her private thoughts, beautifully and honestly expressed, from her teenage years up to her nineties. We are still in the process of reading it and discovering remarkable new perspectives on the woman we thought we knew so well. Incidentally, if any close friends of Mum are interested in transcripts of the diary, please let me know.

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I'd like to refer to a couple of entries from her diary, both from 80 years ago in 1933 when she was aged 19.

The first illustrates her compassion for all living things. Her brother Alan had just been to a hunt meeting....

*Alan went to a foot harriers meeting at Yalton this afternoon. Mummy and Daddy took him out in the car. He thoroughly enjoyed himself, and was one of the only two to be in at the kill. I must confess that all kinds of hunting make me slightly sick. I know that's exaggerated, but nevertheless, quite seriously, I do hate the very idea of any kind of hunting. It may be because I'm a girl, and not so callous as boys or men, but I can't bear to see anything hurt. A few weeks ago Daddy was telling us about some worms he and Pat had put out for a robin they were trying to tame. He expected me to say “how nice” or something, but I, without thinking, said “how delightful” very sarcastically, thinking of the poor worms being eaten alive, and wriggling. (This is one of the things I just can't bear to see.) He exploded a bit, saying I was making a fuss about nothing, and hinting I did not really mind a bit. I flared up, and, as everyone seemed against me, and I was really in earnest, I dissolved into tears. I have never cried like that before. It really hurt me. I thought I had grown out of crying, but I don't think I ever will.*

Incidentally, in almost 65 years, I never recall actually seeing Mum cry, although she did go a bit quiet and misty-eyed once or twice!

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The second, also at the age of 19, relates her first visit to a dentist for an injection and filling. She had been sitting in the dentist's chair waiting for him to inject the local anaesthetic, but when he put the needle into her mouth, she started to feel unwell and felt she was going to faint...

*He made me drink something, and said it tasted horrible, but I didn't notice that it tasted at all. He made me put my head between my knees, and kept it there till I felt all right again. Then he drilled my tooth, and put the filling in. It didn't hurt a bit, as the injection had made my jaw quite dead, and it did not revive until lunch time, and then it hurt so to open my mouth . But it was quite all right today.*

*I have got to go again on Thursday, and he says that there are two more teeth to be filled and injected. I do hope they will only need one injection, and that I will manage to behave better this time. I am going to ask him to talk to me while he is doing the injection, if he can, because that might stop me working my silly self up into a panic. It is so idiotic to nearly faint when it didn't hurt at all; I didn't even feel the needle! He must think I'm a little fool. I must ask him on Thursday not to say anything about it to Dad when he goes next time, because it would only worry Dad and Mum to know about it, and Mr . Brooks might mention it, not knowing that I had kept the matter quiet.*

*It rather worries me to think I am going to faint so easily when I am a doctor. I do hope I will get over it. It is the third time it has happened. I must really try to stop it happening again on Thursday, I ought to be able to.*

To me this illustrates Mum's strong will developing, to conquer her weaknesses and be strong for others. She obviously achieved this because it was a quality we often saw in her.

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Another surprise on reading the wartime diary entries (as we had imagined her wartime experiences to be so hellish that she had never wanted to tell us about them) was that most of her complaints were about the dancing and drinking which went on in the mess, or the boredom when there was little to do, and she described Iserlohn in Germany (just before she met my father) as idyllic. As usual, her account concentrates not so much on the work she did in the hospital, which must have been tiring and emotionally draining, but on the beautiful scenery around the Iserlohn area, the joy of taking long walks in the countryside, and dips in the open air swimming pool before breakfast. Perhaps that is an example of her lifelong talent for finding the positive side of everything and just coping with the unpleasantness and difficulties of life without burdening others with them.

And that is an overriding impression I have of Mum – always capable, always ready to do what was required in a calm and sensible way. And always concentrating on the positive side, not dwelling on her own doubts or fears, very often using humour to lift everyone's spirits.

This positive attitude never deserted her, even in the last year when she became “Baby Mum”; no longer the capable, independent woman we knew. She still greeted me with a smile when answering a video call on Skype, still answered when asked how she was “Oh, I'm fine!”. Usually there was a wicked twinkle in her eye too, and she could still pick up on little jokes with a smile or a chuckle.

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She had a very strong sense of ethics and morality based on human values; she always seemed to know the right thing to do, and she did it. Her advice was always valued. Mercifully, she did not demand such high standards from others as she did from herself, although she was a very astute judge of character, and her judgements usually turned out to be right.

Not many of us can hope to live such a full life as Mum had, but I really feel that we can all learn from her the important lessons of her life – to enjoy everything that comes our way, value each person we meet and value each second we are alive. I am so grateful to have been her son!

(End)