

Kenda's Eulogy for Mum

Peggy Bernthal was born on the 13th of September 1934 and grew up in Gillingham, Kent. She was a surprise baby, and after she was born the surprises kept coming: she wasn't like the clean and tidy first baby, Betty; this one was a little bit wild. Her parents were teachers and the family home was a small private school. Mum loved it when the family were evacuated to South Wales during the war; and running around with her Welsh schoolmates in the hills near Swansea was pure bliss. But her heart has always been in Kent.

At three years old, she fell over in the garden and when she came into the house, her eyesight had been damaged. Despite operations as a child, she lost most of the sight in one eye. This didn't stop her becoming a capable horse rider, getting her driving license and training as a doctor; although she would occasionally drive on the "wrong fuzzy road" in fog.

As a small child mum contracted Tuberculosis. She moved to live with extended family in Bath, as it was felt the fresh air would do her good. Her father was living back in Kent, teaching. She got progressively worse. The doctors told her father to come immediately across from Kent, because she was pining for him and they believed she was fading away from missing him. He came, and she thrived.

When mum was in her late teens, her own mum became ill with cancer. It was an incredibly difficult period in Mum's life, and she lost her own mum when she was only 18, something that is unimaginable to us her children. We have been lucky to have both our parents into their late eighties, with relatively short periods of illness. Small mercies.

In her early twenties, Mum went to the labour exchange and asked what they needed. She had been doing admin for child clinics, and was keen to have a job looking after the health and welfare of children. The Job centre said that there was an urgent need for nurses to be trained, so she said OK and her medical career was born.

Some years later, Mum was looking after a little boy in hospital and he died for reasons unknown . It was a seminal moment - and she decided to train as a doctor in order to find out why he died. She got a place at Manchester University and she commenced a seven year training programme.

A few days after the course started, a bearded scruffy man with climbing gear arrived, fresh from Scotland, and sat next to her, in strict alphabetical order (Ken Beswick next to Peggy Bernthal). They happened to be the only mature students in the class, so a friendship began. Dad tried horse riding ... once; and mum tried rock climbing ... once. After that they agreed to have **some** separate hobbies. In class, Dad would help mum with chemistry experiments and a year or so later in 1958, the

chemistry grew to the point where they got married, during the summer holidays, with best-man and bridesmaid from their class.

They moved to Saxilby for Ken's first job as a GP, and started a family: first me [Kenda], then John. Mum was asked to do the baby clinics and school medicals. She declined at first, but was eventually persuaded and then she had a long career caring for, and promoting, the health and welfare of countless children across the County. Some of her discoveries and ideas were groundbreaking and she never wavered from doing everything she could to improve the quality of children's lives, especially those with rare conditions. Many a headteacher would call on her expertise, to help the staff and parents better understand the health of the children in the school.

In between work and home life, mum found the time to work with a homeless charity in London, train as an Anglican chaplain, up to the level of ordination, get an A' level in accountancy, do the accounts for the Lincoln branch of the 'Council for Christians and Jews', and help other groups in the locality including fund raising for Muscular Dystrophy research and also hosted regular tea-parties for a local group of older ladies with learning disabilities. She became a very good gardener when she lived at Kent House (next door to this Church) and this is the house that she and Ken designed themselves back in 1970.

Mum did not come from a Christian background (in fact the family heritage is Swiss Jewish), but she decided for herself as a young adult to be christened, and that's when she took her middle name Naomi. She attended the church, here in Saxilby, faithfully, as often as her health would allow. Her faith sustained her during difficult times and was of particular comfort to her during her final hours, as she spoke out Psalm 23 clearly and resolutely in A&E. She said that it made her really happy, as it was her favourite - she knew every verse by heart.

Although mum had the early stages of dementia in her latter years, it brought out a softness in her which was touching. Some of you here will have received a Christmas note from her, saying that it could be the last year she would send cards. How prophetic. She left in the house, many scribbled notes about her desires to help people who were vulnerable and animals too. She set up donations for donkeys, children with eye diseases, cats protection. She wrote in one note that she wanted to give money to *"help the bear"* that she saw caged up, and another to *"help the young girl"*.

[Conclusion]

Mum's life was marked by her heart of compassionate - in sickness and in health - and it is for this, and her many other glorious characteristics and lovely ways, that we shall remember her.