

Memories of Marjorie Nelson Winston

Mother recently said to me, looking back at her 91 years, 'I suppose my life has been an interesting one.'

Marjorie was born in Cottesloe, W.A. in a house opposite the surf beach, in July 1913. The winking light from the lighthouse on Rottnest Island, which she could see nightly, fascinated her. Years later, after her husband Neville's death, she and I made a sea trip across to the island and fulfilled her dream of seeing the lighthouse, whose light had winked at her every night, when she was just a little girl.

At 3 and a half years of age, Marjorie made her first trip to Victoria. Her family, the Renshaws, were the first Geelong people to cross the Nultarbor by train. She remembered the heat of that journey in the steam train, even at 3 years of age.

At 7 years old, back in Western Australia, after living at various locations around the State where her father managed flour mills, Mother and her family returned to Victoria, eventually settling in Geelong just down the street from All Saints, at 309 Pakington Street. She talked of great memories of a carefree childhood there. She and her sister and playmates or cousins used to run barefoot up to Queens Park on the Barwon river not far from the church, and play there all day, having a wow of a time as she phrased it.

Mother met Neville, an Essendon boy and her husband-to-be, on a double date, and they picnicked at Barwon Heads on the beach. From all accounts, although Mother was not one to gush, it was love from the start, a love which saw them through 43 years of marriage. In 1938, she married Neville. She was quite a rebel for her time, dressed in a beautiful pale blue lace bridal gown, because Neville liked blue! They settled in Essendon, in a new clinker brick home designed by Neville, and in many ways quite ahead of its time.

The following year saw the outbreak of WWII and the birth of Sandra my sister. Dad, after much heartache, made the decision to 'do his bit' and, when Sandra was just a few months old, joined the RAAF, as a flying officer, a decision which could not have been easy. For the next 6 years, Mum reared her daughter alone, except for precious short leaves whenever Dad could 'hop a train' to get home.

After the War, a second daughter, myself, arrived. We spent an idyllic childhood in Essendon in the 50's. I was an asthmatic child, and I'll always remember the calm, loving way Mum looked after me during the broken nights and many trips to hospital. Years later she admitted she had been very worried at times, but somehow she kept it to herself for my sake.

In 1974 Mum and Dad settled in their retirement at Anglesea, on the Great Ocean Road, again in a home designed and built by Dad. Life at Anglesea was happy, Mother and Dad making many overseas trips together. This came to an abrupt halt in 1982 when Dad suffered a sudden fatal heart attack. His funeral took place where we are today, at All Saints, where he married Mum so many years before.

Going on was a struggle for Mother after 43 years with her mate, but somehow she picked up the threads and eventually started to travel again boosted by the happy times she and Dad had shared. I remember her saying to me on the eve of one of her trips, 'God will look after me.' And he did.

In the 1990's, tragedy struck again when Marjorie's firstborn, my sister Sandra, and mother to Tony and Linda, died from a stroke in the prime of her life. Again, Mum had to put her life back together as best she could. It must have been very hard for her to outlive a child as well as watch her grandchildren cope without their mother.

Living at Anglesea for a total of 30 years, 22 of those as a widow, Marjorie became a local identity, driving her big old Falcon to the shops with her chirpy Jack Russell, Cindy, in the back seat.

In time, Marjorie resumed her trips overseas every couple of years until 2001, having a vitality that could only come from a strong life force. In fact, a favourite colour in her wardrobe was red, especially a hand knitted cardigan which was much loved. A very independent spirit, characteristic of her family, was a feature of Marjorie's personality. This could be an issue at times, but I think it kept her going. Top of the list of things she intended to do on returning home from her only stay in respite a few weeks ago was, "Collect Cindy", her dog. The next item on her list was "Arrange home care — if needed", followed by a shopping list. It is some comfort to me to know that, despite the shock of her passing, she managed to live in her own dear home almost until the end.

Marjorie's other passions, apart from travel, included pottery, having taken a course at Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, and growing things. She had a green thumb. I remember her reviving a maidenhair fern of mine which thrived in her home but was a very sad sack in mine. I also remember her taking a course in millinery when I was quite young, which she put to good use on my school uniform hats, steaming the brims which were invariably scrunched out of shape! Another great pleasure was her early morning cup of tea.

Mother was also very inventive, and produced a number of ingenious contraptions or "Heath Robinsons" as she laughingly called them, to fix various household problems.

She also left us with a number of sayings, one of which endures through the generations: the classic one is, "Watch where you put your feet" which always causes laughter and probably originated from the many camping trips taken when we were growing up. Another expression was "Not where we walk, please!" which was a warning not to empty the dregs of the teapot too near the tent, also during camping trips.

The union of my mother Marjorie and my father Neville produced 6 grandchildren and 7 great grandchildren at last count. At 91 years of age she will be sorely missed. Share a cup of tea with us in spirit, Mother dear, and many blessings and love from your family.

B. 10th July 1913
0. 22nd December 2004

NOTE: THIS EULOGY WAS GIVEN BY SUZANNE AT HER MOTHER'S FUNERAL