

Chapter 39

1993 - 2000 (The Beginning of the End)

The following pages will be difficult to write so I make no apologies if they're muddled.

I shall have to go back to the last holiday in Canterbury where we had made friends with



**1992 - Canterbury
Pat & Bill McKay with Doreen**

Bill and Pat McKay who came from Aberdeen. One night we were looking at a floodlit Weavers in Canterbury High Street. Walking along Pat said "If I didn't know better, I would say Doreen, that you have had too much to drink - you are all over the place walking". Normally we walked hand in hand but, at that moment, we were not. When we got home, Doreen went to the doctor and had to see a consultant. Up to that point she had a spot of Angina and also

an arthritic hand for which she wore a splint, however this walking problem was different. It turned out that she had hereditary Ataxia which was not curable and could get worse in the years to come. It didn't help with anything that followed.

We come to 1993. We had a good Summer and were on holiday at Filey in September living in a flat owned by Jimmy Harrison and family when a policeman called and told us that my son Michael had been found dead in bed. He was a diabetic. It was 30th September and we went straight home. A simple funeral service, as he would have wished, was held in the Sacred Heart Church. His ashes now lie in Betty's grave in Thornton Cemetery. It was the point, I think, at which both Betty Ritchie and Michael's wife Sue, were affected emotionally and did not get over it. More of that later.



**Thornbury, Bradford
Michael with his rebuilt Zephyr 6**

Doreen and I went to Bournemouth with the Methodists in October and on one day we went to Swanage. As we got there, Doreen started talking funnily and her eyes were rolling. While two people looked after her in a shelter, I phoned for an ambulance. Within ten minutes it had arrived and she was laid in the back of it being given oxygen. The crew had warned the ferry to stay until they arrived. She was taken on the ferry and I wondered



1993 - Bournemouth
Doreen with Marie & Charlie Birch

what she would have said had she known she was on water. She was afraid of water and the only boat she would go on was the ferry to the Isle of Wight. She said that, as she could see both Southsea and the Isle of Wight at the same time, that was OK. There was a reception waiting for us at Poole Hospital in the form of a doctor and three nurses. She was given various tests and was slowly coming around. The doctor told her that she would have to stay in hospital for observation. "Oh no" said Doreen, "I'm on holiday so I'd like to go back to the hotel". They reluctantly agreed so back we went in a car provided. When we walked into the hotel dining room for dinner, everyone gasped. Until the Friday, she stayed quietly in the hotel grounds. The return journey to Bradford was a bit dicey and near to Leicester we were stuck in a traffic jam. However we finally made it home and, on the following Monday, saw the doctor. A few days later, as she was getting ready for bed, she suffered another stroke and was rushed to the Bradford Royal Infirmary (BRI). This stroke affected her right side leaving her arm and leg useless. She came round to an extent and was given physiotherapy. Mr Newton, the Consultant, referred her to Mr Vowden, a Surgical Consultant. He saw both of us and said, after she had received a dye scan, that he was willing to operate. He told us, however, that there was only a 50/50 chance of success. We had already discussed this and told him that we understood this and that he should go ahead. She was then transferred to the Surgical Ward. It was a shame that the operation was nearly, but not quite, successful. Mr Vowden was upset that she had another stroke during the operation. He had the Sister phone me straight away. When I saw her, she was helpless but, after a day or two, she began to come to with her leg recovering first.

At home, I was preparing for her to come home. I had a local joiner make and install a hand rail on the left side of the staircase. The DSS also helped by arranging a bath lift lent me a wheelchair and gave me handles which I fitted to various locations to enable her to balance. Doreen was brought home to see how she would cope and, being satisfied, she was allowed to come home just before Christmas. She managed with the handrail but we thought it would be easier to have a stairlift. This I ordered through the Council. I had to pay for it but they agreed to maintain it on the understanding that when I was finished with it, I would give it to the Council. A neighbour helped by putting a stainless steel handrail on the right side of the stairs.

And so she came home Christmas 1993 amid much rejoicing. Whilst she was in the BRI, she had won £500 with a Premium Bond which a friend had given her years before. She also won the Ward 5 food hamper in a raffle. It was huge. Life was different but it went on. For the first six months she was taken by car to St. Luke's hospital for physiotherapy. This we continued for another year funded privately. In addition, the doctor visited regularly. Her friend Hilda Smith came every Thursday so that I could play bowls and both Jenny Butterfield and Margaret Goulding paid her regular visits. At this time she could just about walk as long as she could get hold of something en route. Thus she was just able to get up the outside steps and go to places like Asa Nicholson's. We couldn't go to church but, instead, Vincent Crolla came every Friday to give us Communion. Latterley, after Vincent suffered a stroke, either John Buffham, Mary Heseltine or Moira Ridewood attended.



Hilda Smith

I must just break off and record the happenings with Betty and George Ritchie. One day Betty said to me: "I've lost my get up and go". She certainly had and in 1994 they made one last trip to Filey after which it was downhill all the way. Betty was getting forgetful and only wanted to sit around watching television. Poor old George thought that she had got careless, and I know that she told the doctor: "I don't think George likes me anymore". Sad really but George did get to realise that she had a problem. They struggled on even when she became incontinent. Unfortunately she was also feeling sick all the time and eventually she was sent to the Leeds Infirmary. I went to see her every Friday while



Margaret & Terry Goulding

Margaret and Terry Goulding looked after Doreen. The Infirmary didn't seem to be very specific about what was wrong with Betty and she was getting more and more confused. George himself was having trouble with a toe which had to be removed at a later date. By that time, Betty had been put into the care of Hopton Court Care Home in Armley. The trouble there seemed to me to be a lack of stimulation for the patients most of whom were confused. Just for the moment I will leave their story.

Doreen and I muddled along until 1997 during which time Doreen had scalded her tummy trying to make a cup of tea. This took quite some time to heal. In 1997 she had, what the doctor who attended her, called a slight heart attack. Various treatments and tests were carried out and finally she was allowed home after being passed by the physiotherapist in the use of a wheeled zimmer. She was also supplied with a commode which, fortunately, she did not have to use very often. But, and there was a but, she was still ill with a chest infection and she was taken into the BRI where they cleared a lot of water that had collected on her chest. After a week, she came home again but could no longer walk except with the zimmer or my arm. At the BRI they had given her heart an echo scan but no-one ever told me what they discovered. After she came out, she told me that she did not believe that she would ever be coming home again which made me feel like crying. Her courage was awesome. We continued like that until about March 2000 when she developed a chest infection. For the first time ever, she had to stay in bed on the doctor's orders. For a time we thought that she would never get downstairs again but, having contemplated making a self contained flat upstairs, I had another thought, what about a second wheelchair? The one she had was too heavy for me to lift up and down the stairs so I bought a lightweight one which we used upstairs whilst the heavy one was used downstairs.

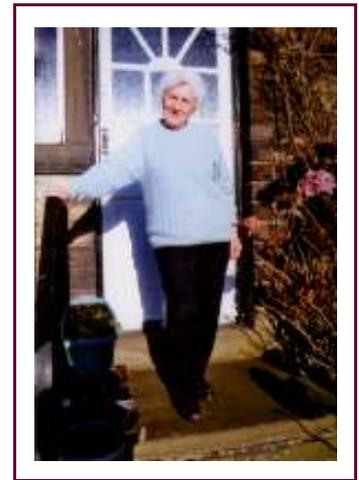


*1999 - Oakroyd
Doreen & Me*

When bowls started in April, Jenny looked after Doreen on Thursdays as Hilda had moved to Shipley. She also made us pies and stews with dumplings.

I found that, using the lightweight chair, I was still able to get her into the bath seat. She was so grateful that, at times, I wanted to cry.

Through all these years she was so cheerful and maintained that lovely smile of welcome. Wendy Appleton, one of the neighbours said to me recently, and I use her words: "She had that wonderful capability of making people she met feel special". I felt honoured to be able to help.



Jenny Butterfield

In the meantime, George had his toe removed but was not really well, whilst Betty had gone right into herself. I saw her in September 2000 and she didn't recognise me. George was now unable to visit due to his own state. It should be said that during this whole period in George and Betty's life, tremendous help was given by neighbours Mr and Mrs Steve Strachan.

George died on 27th September 2000 and Betty died on 11th October 2000. Both funerals were held at Rawdon Crematorium.

At George's funeral service, an address was given by the Reverend Canon Robert Lunnon who is the husband of George's niece Pam.

The address overleaf was given by my son John at Betty's funeral. I was proud of him. He did it very well.

I have reproduced it all despite the fact that some of it is a direct repeat of what I have already written:

All of you here today will have your own memories of Betty, as a Sister, Aunt, Great-Aunt, Friend, Neighbour or Carer. My own memory is of two people, Betty and George, together for 60 years and living in their own home for more than 50.

Betty was brought up in an Armed Service atmosphere living with her parents and brother in various Army Camps, the most interesting being the time she spent in Egypt. It was really, therefore, no surprise that she fell in love with an RAF man who was a friend of her brother. They married in 1938. She was just 21.

She was a lovely homemaker and did everything possible to create a happy atmosphere both at home and with all the people she met.

Although she was a trained dressmaker, her real interest was the home and activities she engaged in. She started playing tennis at the age of 14 and played her last game at the age of 70.

Unfortunately she had no children but was a most wonderful Aunt to her brother's children and their offspring; the same with her husband's

relations and their offspring. They all loved her. I can only speak from my own personal experiences, but both my brother and I spent many happy hours in and around Number 51 and both sets of our children were always made most welcome.

Part of her home making activities included hours spent in the garden and walking many miles. The favourite walks were at Filey where she spent many happy days every year.

Her interest in the RAF was almost an obsession and she spent a lot of time collecting articles, photographs etc. and carefully making up a collection which was both happy and sad. This is illustrated by two poems which she was fond of.

The first (and happy) was called:

THE SALVAGE SONG

(or The housewife's dream)

My saucepans have all been surrendered

The teapot is gone from the hob

The colander's leaving the cabbage

For a very much different job.

So now, when I hear on the wireless

*Of Hurricanes showing their mettle
I see, in a vision before me
A Dornier chased by my kettle.*

And the sad? - Not really.

DO NOT STAND AT MY GRAVE

*Do not stand at my grave and weep
I am not there, I do not sleep
I am a thousand winds that blow
I am the diamond glints on snow
I am the sunlight on ripened grain
I am the gentle autumn rain
When you awaken in the morning's hush
I am the swift uplifting rush
Of quiet birds in circled flight
I am the soft stars that shine at night.
Do not stand at my grave and cry
I am not there, I did not die.*

A fitting epitaph to a gentle lady.

Both Betty and George wished for their ashes to be scattered at Filey where we all had such an enjoyable time over the years. This was done on the Brig on the 13th November 2000 by Canon Lunnon and Pam with some other members of the family. The Canon conducted a simple service.



The Brig at Filey

The executors of George's will were Pam Lunnon and my son John. The immediate job facing them was to clear the house. Pam dealt with the solicitor whom George had employed. Betty's Will was held by her bank but an agreement was reached between the bank and George's solicitor so that the solicitor could deal with both wills; this was a sensible option.

Pam and some of her family together with John, Maria and Nick got together and put in a tremendous effort to sort out the house and contents. This was a particularly harrowing job for John and Maria because they had, over the years, spent many happy hours in the house with their children, particularly at Christmas. Suffice to say that the job was finally completed. Paul brought a van to clear some of the heavier items. It was the end of an era.

May they both Rest in Peace.

As regards Michael's family, Sue had some sort of breakdown after Michael died, is slightly paranoid and unfortunately has withdrawn into herself. She still remembers me at Christmas, Father's Day and Birthday and sends me cards and a present on each occasion. At the time of writing she is a little better and is looking forward to looking after Holly for a few days each week when Sally goes back to work. She will not, however, visit here. Paul and Sally are now living in Haworth and Paul hopes to take over the garage at the end of 2001. Sarah lives in Ascot and works at Lonza in Slough on research work. She is doing well but is still trying to establish her final objective. Her real interests are forensic techniques.



Paul & Holly at Oakroyd