

A daughter's eulogy

As read by Martina Jones at her mother's funeral.

Our mum, Maria Jones, was born on 9th January 1928 in Leon, Spain. She was the middle of three children, the others being boys. When the Spanish civil war broke out in 1937, the family were living in the Basque country where they had relocated for her father's work. They were republicans and her father joined the resistance later becoming a prisoner of war. I don't believe I ever heard my mother talk about her experience of the war until I asked her with this tribute in mind. Her memories were of the bombings, children screaming, the need to shelter in the hills and being told about friends and neighbours who had been killed. She said it was impossible to discuss the war with other people because you were never quite sure which side they were on.

The situation was so bad that at the age of 9 her mother told her that she and her older brother would be going away for a couple of weeks on a ship to another country. She had a new pair of sandals and a change of clothes. On 31st May 1937, the SS Habana set sail from Bilbao for Southampton. On board were 4000 children, teachers, volunteers and priests. It was a dangerous voyage and on the way there was an attempted bombing of the ship.

Once they arrived at Southampton they were housed in tents in a farmer's large field. After 3 months the children were moved into colonies which housed 50 or 60 children in large houses. They had no lessons but did chores and enjoyed playing together. Mum picked up English as she went along but her overriding memory of that time was of how much she missed her mother.

Most of the children suffered abuse and exploitation in one way or another. At the age of 11 mum and her brother Paco went to stay with a couple who had a smallholding and shop near Birmingham. They weren't really looked after, they were just there to work and although they attended school it was a 5 mile walk and if they were late they were caned.

After a few months they returned to a colony in Margate and not long after Mum found out that she was going to live in Buckinghamshire on the farm of a lady called Miss Fry. She took herself off on a Greenline bus and went to the village of Buckland. When she arrived at Church Farm she stood at the end of the drive and looked on in awe. This was barely a farm and more like a manor with 16 bedrooms. Mum was the only refugee in the house but there were 12

evacuees. The children made their own amusement and were educated at home because Miss Fry was a teacher. She was very happy at Church Farm which became her home until Miss Fry died in 1958.

By the time the war ended and all the evacuees had left, most of the Spanish children had gone back to Spain. Mum also had the opportunity to return home but both Miss Fry and her mother thought that her prospects would be much better if she remained in the UK. Really the only employment open to mum would have been domestic work. Isabel Fry was a descendant of the Fry's chocolate family, a distant cousin by marriage of Elizabeth Fry the prison reformer and sister of Roger Fry the artist and member of the Bloomsbury group. She became mum's legal guardian and in effect mum became one of the family hobnobbing with the rich and famous and even had a young girl called Peggy who was a sort of ladies' maid.

Perhaps the greatest opportunity given to Mum at this time was that of education. She had a very keen mind and a strong desire to learn so she did a correspondence course through Cambridge university in English literature. Although she enjoyed this her real desire was to become a nurse so after a year she gave up the course and went to London to study first as a nursery nurse. She lived in University House Bethnal Green where she met a group of students who invited her to Westminster chapel. Mum commented that the Catholic Church didn't allow you to go to another church but the students said 'well they won't know will they!'.

Well life is full of different moments and some moments are more important than others. That first Sunday evening in Westminster chapel was such a moment. Mum heard things that she had not heard before, things that were transformational and would take her in a totally new direction. That moment was a personal encounter with Jesus the one who would become her best friend, her constant companion throughout the rest of her life and the one whose presence she is now in.

She then went to train as a nurse at St. Luke's hospital in Guildford followed by a stint in a TB hospital once she'd qualified. As she got off the bus at Mill Mead hospital a trainee nurse called Fred Jones was bidding farewell to his French girlfriend as she returned home to France. The young Spanish girl caught his eye and it wasn't long before they started dating and eventually married on the 24th of July 1954. With a desire to start a family the next 6 years saw mum have several miscarriages and even considered adopting a baby from the Caribbean. However in November 1960 Stephen came along followed by me in April 1963. As our two bedroom bungalow in Guildford became too small for us dad put in for a transfer to Andover in Hampshire where we moved in 1965.

These were not happy years for Mum. Although she loved her children dearly she craved adult company and stimulating conversation and struggled in the church where the teaching was shallow and uninspiring. Dad eventually put in for another transfer and we moved to Cheltenham in 1973.

Mum was much happier. She and dad found a home here at Cambray, and as Stephen and I were more able to fend for ourselves she went back to work, eventually retiring from the radiotherapy centre at Cheltenham General in 1990. By this time dad had been diagnosed with cerebellar ataxia and was becoming increasingly disabled. Mum became not so much dad's carer but more his work mate. Dad has always been very keen on DIY and gardening and Mum took on these roles with dad directing. When she wasn't helping dad she was knitting or reading Christian books. When we were children mum found a pattern for a jumper with three buttons either on the shoulder or at the back of the neck. She resized this same pattern for jumpers throughout our childhood and once we declined her offer of knitting us jumpers, once we were adults, she instead knitted that same pattern for children's jumpers which until very recently ended up in local charity shops.

Her other big delight was reading Christian books. Anything and everything. She and dad enjoyed visiting the Good News mobile library every month and she was often asked to write reviews for books that they were trying to promote. Personally I don't know anyone who knew as much about the Bible as my mother. There didn't seem to be a question she couldn't answer, and if there was she would find out the answer. She was an academic really and one person who could see that was Alan Pilbeam who will be speaking shortly. He could see that she needed to be stretched in this area and would pose her questions on the bible to answer in short assignments. Actually to me she seemed to know everything. She was a wise woman who gave good counsel. She also lived by the bible command '..do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God'. She once told me she learnt at a young age to deal with what she could and take the rest to God. But perhaps more than anything she was determined.

If she was going to do something she was going to do it; even if she couldn't she would find a way. Under no circumstances did she ever give up except for ill health and then she had to be very ill. I remember whilst I was working abroad she had repeated pretty bad chest infections which were the beginning of bronchiectasis. On one occasion she wrote that she had another chest infection which had come completely at the wrong time because she hadn't finished creosoting the fences. It was because of her determination that she almost reached 95 in spite of poor health. Her oncologist described her as bulletproof.

However being such a determined person came with its downside. My mother in polite terms was feisty, fiery and a woman of strong opinions and she didn't mind who knew them. She also didn't really understand humour. It's not that she was offended by it she just didn't get it. It was an interesting experience living in the home of a feisty fiery mother who didn't really understand humour and a father who was extremely laid-back and had a sense of humour as dry as a bone. But they made it work. As they say opposites attract and they loved each other very much. When dad died 13 years ago something in Mum died with him. Although not noticeable to most, her health began to slowly deteriorate and she was never quite as clear minded as when dad was alive.

However in spite of this she maintained her independence well into the pandemic. She kept house and home together and did all the gardening on her own. She pottered into town and enjoyed Tuesday lunch and the Women's Bible Study Group here at Cambray. When the pandemic hit she was shielding and spent 5 months almost completely on her own. We had regular family WhatsApp phone calls and friends and neighbours kept her larder stocked up and made sure she was OK. Amazingly mum thought this had been a really good time for her. Not being able to do her usual occupations to keep her busy she decided to reread her Martyn Lloyd-Jones books, the pastor of Westminster chapel where she had been as a student, and of his books she had many. She increased her bible reading and during this time had a real sense of being close to God. By the time we came out of the second lockdown mum's health was starting to deteriorate. Although her health had not been good since dad died she'd managed to keep on top of it but by March of last year she found out that the cancer for which she had been treated in 2009 had returned to her liver.

Although her oncologist had described her as bulletproof he indicated that her time was short. However he had underestimated this feisty 94 year old. Although she was becoming increasingly breathless and took quite a dip in the summer when she was hospitalised twice with pneumonia, she refused to give up. She loved going out to eat in cafes and having drives in beautiful places. We had numerous weekends in the Forest of Dean and on one occasion she even managed a short walk at Soudley Ponds. In August we arranged for carers to visit but although she enjoyed their visits she couldn't really understand why she needed them. Even with severe breathlessness she made sure she went up and down stairs several times a day stating that if she stopped she wouldn't get up again. Whilst spending a few days with me in December it became evident that the chest infection she was being treated for was not responding to antibiotics. She managed to get into the car and as we travelled up the M5 the scene became whiter and whiter. By the time we arrived home she insisted that

she would walk from the car to the front door in her dressing gown and slippers and several inches of snow. I suggested she sleep in the chair that night until we could get her a hospital bed but she refused and made her last journey up the stairs to bed. A few days later she did a bit of knitting and had a hearty meal of macaroni cheese, lasagne and tiramisu before slipping into unconsciousness. On the 21st of December 2022 she went to be with her Lord and Saviour.

I would like to thank everyone for their kindness and prayers over these last few weeks. It has been quite overwhelming the number of cards and well wishes we have had from you all so I thank you again from Stephen and myself.