

Tribute to my mother at her funeral.

I knew my Mum best when I was small boy. I spent most of my waking hours in her company or close by her in the home we shared. I enjoyed that privileged access to many of the details of her daily life which comes from being little.

I was living in a world of giants. The chairs were too high, the table was well out of reach. Many of the things I wanted to touch or explore were wisely put beyond me. I remember my mother teaching me to walk, holding my hand to reassure that I would not fall over. When I tried on my own I had to pilot a course from chair cushion to chair cushion to have something to hold on to. I remember loving the time in the afternoon when she would read to me. It was a chance to be close to her as I sat with her in the armchair she used. I would try to puzzle out the meaningless symbols as she read fluently to bring my chosen story to life.

My Mum was in those days a hard working and accomplished housewife. She ruled the home, cleaned and tidied, cooked and shopped, washed and ironed. She put herself through the contemporary tortures of the home perm, as I watched her trying to control the unruly rollers. I was fascinated by her dressing table, where she would sit on a low stool applying powder and lipstick. As I got a bit bigger she wanted me to get the tiny hook at the top of a dress into the wayward eye, and get slightly impatient if I fumbled it for too long. I would go with her when she went to choose a pattern for her next sewing challenge. I was ready with three year old's advice on which dress styles I liked, but she would understandably take her own counsel.

She was a talented seamstress and adroit with knitting needles. She acquired a knitting machine which extended her range and speeded progress on garments. I tried to assist her in the kitchen, gradually moving from high risk nuisance through play cook to providing some proper help. If she made mince pies she made the mince meat first. If she wanted to use minced beef she would create it herself in a hand mincer. She made jams and preserved the autumn fruit in Kilner jars, always worrying whether they would seal properly. Her Christmas cakes were good. She wrestled with the icing but always managed to pull off difficult tasks including writing messages and creating elaborate icing baskets.

When I was a teenager away from home long hours as my school stood on the opposite side of the city she had less to do. She announced she was going to get a job, and did so despite my father's early reservations. I enjoyed talking to her about her work, and saw her rise rapidly from sales assistant to First Sales to Manager of the local Lotus shop. It was my introduction to the world of a national chain, with a tricky political balance between what Head Office did and what the local store could do for itself. She became a valued Manager. Asked to keep an eye on a neighbouring wayward store when the manager was quite often on holiday, she unearthed the problems. They wanted to promote her to be a regional Manager, but she felt that would absorb too much time and involve too much travel.

In later life she became one of the Pensions Visitors for Debenhams who had taken over the shoe chain. She edited a Pensioner Magazine and went on visits to Pensioners who might be lonely or needed extra help. With her husband as chauffeur she did this for many years well into her 80s when she was normally visiting people much younger than herself.

I am grateful to her for providing a stable and well run home all the time I was a child. She wanted me to be clean, well dressed and eat sensible meals, and did everything to ensure that when I was small I met those standards. I have tried to be those things ever since! I have seen more of her in recent years as she came to live nearby. She told me many times she was very old and in her unsentimental way said she did not want to live on disabled. I tried to help her find things to do and enjoy after my father had died. My head tells me her matter of fact approach to death in old age is right, but my heart tells me I have lost my Mum and it hurts.