

My mother, the youngest of three sisters, was born in Edmonton, Middlesex, on 12th July 1922 as Joan Eileen Rosa Matthews, a set of names which gave her the initials 'JERM'. I remember her saying that this caused her some grief and embarrassment at school; JERM, something infectious. But then children can be cruel can't they.

I had no idea until recently that she wrote a brief account of her early life and I am quoting her words when I say that her earliest memory was of herself sitting at a table with a notebook and pencil which her mother had bought from a door to door salesman.

Joan's father, Arthur, my grandfather, was an instrument maker during the first World War, a reserved occupation which kept him out of the fighting. After the war he bought a bus which he and two others ran as a 'pirate' local bus service until some time in 1927 when the business was bought out, leaving Arthur with enough for a deposit on a £500 terraced house in Chingford, Essex.

During Joan's schooling there, it being the depression, things became difficult for her family after her father's wages were reduced so that he could no longer pay the mortgage and her mother, Olive, had to find some work, sometimes keeping both parents away from home until late at night. These were hard times for a growing family.

When Joan married on 7th October 1945 their wedding photograph shows my father, Ron Trott, still in his army

uniform for the ceremony. Life for the newly-weds must have been difficult then but I'm sure my brother Graham and I were always part of the overall plan. By the time I was born each of my mother's two sisters had young children, my cousins, and I can recall spending a memorable part of my childhood with them.

When my grandfather retired he left Essex to run a guest house on the Kent coast in the town of Broadstairs and some of my first memories are of holidays spent there with my parents and grandparents and of playing with my cousins who lived nearby. Broadstairs has a small beach of fine sand on which I used to build castles and explore the seaweed washed in there.

I can recall a small raft anchored in the bay to which I would swim (I must have been older then) and I used to struggle up on board together with my brother Graham, he being a little older than me, all the time no doubt under Joan's watchful eyes.

We enjoyed the sort of strict upbringing that expressed the values of those times as our parents tried to better themselves in the post-war world. My father's employment enabled us to re-locate from Middlesex to the rural surroundings of Tunbridge Wells in Kent and by the time I was five years old Joan and Ron owned their own house

and working hard, Joan had created and maintained a comfortable home for us.

Our family holidays started to be more adventurous - camping, first at home (including my first trips to Scotland) then abroad in Europe. We acquired a small motor caravan in which I remember several long, hot drives to the south of France to enjoy the warmer climate there.

As we grew older, however, and by the time Graham and I were in our teens, we both

wanted to live a different lifestyle, like teenagers do, so we left home and moved away.

Thereafter our small family never again lived together in one location and having each moved about so much since, none of us can really say that we belong to one particular place or area any more.

After my father retired from work in 1978 my parents found themselves moving house again and beginning an ambitious project on a piece of land in Suffolk, on which Joan

and Ron were to build a house and eventually cultivate the land so as to grow most of their own food, creating their own version of 'The Good Life'. Joan always loved the outdoors and this life suited her well but sadly in August 1986 my father took ill and died suddenly leaving Joan struggling to cope with life alone for the first time in her life.

The need to be close to her family became even more important to her but now Joan's efforts to stay close to at least one of her two sons were, unintentionally, thwarted by both Graham and I who, always following employment opportunities, moved here and there across the country.

Then in 1991 Joan moved to Faversham in Kent where she met and later married Albert Woodhead, a retired Royal Naval Officer. Again following the urge to stay close to her sons, Joan moved with Albert north to Norfolk where they bought a small but comfortable new house to live in. Unfortunately this new happiness for Joan was short-lived because Albert's health was beginning to deteriorate and sadly in April 2004 he passed away.

Once again Joan was alone, but companionship this time came in the form of an old friend, George, who himself had been widowed some years earlier. George has always enjoyed travelling, often in some comfort it has to be said, and in accompanying him,

Joan's life began to include travel across the world to far away places she had never dreamed of visiting.

The sight of these two octogenarians jet-setting around the world lends truth to the thought that you should never consider yourself too old to enjoy life. That Joan was able to continue this until the age of 90 says a lot for her own spirit and determination and I'm certain that even today, had her health not failed her, she would right now be packing her suitcase for her next journey across the seas.

Last year Joan moved into the house next door to mine, here in Carradale, once again following the urge to be close to her family. As ever, the people here did all they could to make her feel welcome and many in the village

will still remember seeing her make a daily outing to the shop, setting out in all but the worst of weather.

But sadly she knew her health was failing and she struggled to come to terms with the less active lifestyle that this led to, unable to do the things that gave her pleasure, her artwork - painting and wood-carving - then finally she lost her mobility too. Her tough old spirit kept her going, confounding the medical profession, but in the end her body let her down and she slipped quietly away on 3rd June 2013.

What Joan has left to myself

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and my brother Graham above all is a sense of integrity and honesty of which we both agree we should be very proud. We may not always have wanted to live life as she did nor espouse the same values or beliefs as hers but we do not regret a moment of the love she gave us and the humanity she instilled in us. Suddenly the person we could turn to for comfort and help when we needed it has gone.

Her death has left a mighty big hole in our lives.

Graham and I are both eternally grateful and deeply indebted to the community of nurses, doctors and carers who between them made it possible for me to give our mother what she wanted at the end, a peaceful death in her own home. We also thank those in our community who have expressed their condolences and offered us support at this time. Thank you all from the bottom of our hearts.

MALCOLM TROTT

Joan Woodhead



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