

## **GISELA EMMA GERTRUD BYGRAVES**

Thank you very much for coming to celebrate Gisela's life today. The extract of music you've been listening to is from a song mum heard at one of our Mainline Big Band gigs last year and when we got back home she commented how moving it was. The lyrics from these verses are particularly pertinent as, for me, they reflect the love mum gave others, through thick and thin, and the care and companionship you gave to mum, and me, particularly in the time since dad died, and especially over the last 6 months.

Now, you'll find some biscuits on the pews and they are "for you from Gisela". There are 12 different pictures and these will be the anchors of my eulogy to my beautiful and amazing Mutti Tutti.



The cup cake represents the thousands of cakes and biscuits mum baked over her life time. Once, mum and I were chatting about the fun inscriptions we'd have on our memorial stones and mum said she'd have "she baked"!

Cakes and biscuits were symbolic of mum's love and affection for, and appreciation of, others.

I have put on plenty of pounds in weight over the years as I was addicted to mum's baking. One cup cake was never sufficient. I'd cut a 2<sup>nd</sup> one in half, wolf down one half, then study the remaining half and after very careful consideration I'd eat it with such lightning speed as if the faster the transit to my stomach the quicker the calories would be burned up.

I am particularly proud of mum's gluten free baking as her sponges would hold together under the cake fork and not disintegrate into crumbs, unlike some gluten free cakes I've eaten in London cafes. I also admired her 'off-piste' approach to cooking and baking where she would put her own stamp on a recipe.



This is an image that takes me back to my late childhood and one of mum's jobs in helping dad to build the family home, Zwiebel Kotten, was mixing cement. Mum and dad were a true partnership with a mission to provide for the family. When I think

back to that time I am in awe of how many jobs and responsibilities mum was juggling **and** fulfilling – out working to earn money, building the house, running the household – cooking, washing, cleaning, ironing, looking after her family in health and through sickness. At *that* time remember, there weren't the modern white goods and gadgets that we have now; it was a copper, mangle and a bungalow bath.



A key way that mum connected with people over the years has been writing cards and letters. Each month she would have a piece of paper on one of her kitchen cupboards with a list of birthdays, wedding anniversaries, anniversaries of folk passing away. To this list would be added greetings of joy with births and passing exams, and expressions of gratitude with 'thank you' cards.

When mum managed to get some 'free' time in her 50's she took up calligraphy and produced some beautiful pieces for the family.



Mum worked for the RSPB and passionately enjoyed her time there. She was involved in packing gifts and took great pride in ensuring goods were packed robustly and with precision. I enjoyed watching mum wrap gifts at home – the care, the neatness and artistic touches. So different from the slapdash way I scrunch paper around a present.

The logo talks about 'giving nature a home' which reminds me of all the pets mum has looked after alongside all her other roles in the family. There were budgies called Peter 1<sup>st</sup>, Peter 2<sup>nd</sup>, Tina the alsation, Winnie the rabbit, Demerara the cockatiel, goldfish in the house and in the pond outside.

When I was a student up in Leeds mum and dad came to visit and I was thrilled to present my mum with the surprise of..... a tortoise. Poor mum looked momentarily utterly shocked but she quickly regained her composure and graciously accepted the creature and welcomed it into the family.



Mum was incredibly successful in keeping orchids blooming for months. She loved their beauty – shape, texture and colour.

I found my Mutti's artistic flair in bringing window sills to life quite breathtaking – glassware and ceramics nestling between vibrant healthy plants, framed by beautiful curtains. Mum's window sills always reminded me of the Dutch windows we'd see when driving through Holland on our way to Germany, when I was a child.



This reminds me of my childhood when I'd help mum make lavender bags for Christmas pressies. Dad grew the lavender and mum dried it. She would use a range of pretty remnant fabrics bought from Hitchen market – affordable gifts made with love. This week I received a letter from a family friend in Germany who spoke about the stunning lavender bag mum had made using fabric that had belonged to my grandmother and each year our friend puts fresh lavender in this unique bag.

Dad cultivated the land behind the sheds for mum and there he grew flowers for drying. Mum created beautifully artistic arrangements over many years. She had a natural flair for design and fashioned stunning displays.

Flowers makes me think of fruit. In 1995 I was co-ordinating a project in my organisation and we were expecting 8 visitors from different areas of the UK. I said to mum that I'd like to leave them some fruit in their hotel rooms as they would be with us for a few days and working very long hours. Well, mum went out and bought a roll of clear wrapping, like that you have around your biscuit. She got home and straightaway constructed huge cones. In each one she carefully arranged a wide selection of colourful fruits and she tied the top end together with a vibrant ribbon. I felt so happy delivering these to the hotel. Mum had a knack of transforming something ordinary into the extraordinary.



Mum has drawn considerable pleasure and comfort from this particular church community that daddy served for 80 years: the friendship, the laughter,

the spiritual comfort and the singing. Mum really loved singing and had a great sense of musicality.

I was utterly astonished last year when mum and I went to my home in Peterborough. She took the dust sheet off the piano and started to play a Mozart aria completely note perfect from the beginning, and she sang in German. I had never seen or heard mum play the piano before and I felt such pride and wonder.



This represents the decades of DiY mum pursued. She was self taught and worked to very high standards. The varnish on the wood panelling up the stairs still has a perfectly smooth high gloss finish. She papered the bathroom well over 20 years ago and it still looks stunning and fresh, and none of the paper joins have peeled or frayed.

A lot of mum's furniture and mine is 2<sup>nd</sup> hand. We bought a lot from Johnny Phillips in Biggleswade. Mum brought things back to life following hours of stripping with nitromors acid and staining and then iterative cycles of sanding and varnishing. She taught me to do the same and it was an enormously satisfying experience.



This image represents a lifetime of cooking for the family and friends. I loved Mutti's approach to experimenting with flavours and using the ingredients to hand to create a nutritious dish at the best possible value.

In the 1980s mum and dad used to run charity dances at the Weatherly Centre in Biggleswade. I remember how at the end of the event, after we'd cleared up all the rubbish and tidied the hall up, we'd go back home and then mum would start cooking fried egg sandwiches for the band and friends. Looking after, and nurturing people was important to Gisela.



Over the last couple of years of dad's life mum took on more and more gardening. The garden was enormously important to dad and mum so loved him, that she worked really hard to keep the garden looking good. Even after he died mum was driven to keep the garden going in honour of his memory.

Gardening was not only an expression of mum's love for dad, it also reflected her tenacity and independence. Last year we bought 3 bamboo trees and within days mum decided to plant them herself, she dug deep holes in ground that was hard and full of roots, planted the trees and regularly watered them so that they flourished. I found her strength of will and determination hugely inspiring.



This represents years of dedication to her family. Mum made suits, jackets, coats, dresses, skirts, trousers, curtains, cushions and so much more.

Just like her DiY work, mums tailoring was impeccable with patterns well matched, garments hanging perfectly and always fully lined, unlike designer labels on the high street.

I remember mum making me a jazzy Aztec print kaftan in an afternoon. This was so that I could go to a George Melly concert with dad in the evening, wearing something distinctive and affordable.

When I went off to college at 18 I felt anxious and homesick. To cheer me up mum sent me a saxophone sling which she'd bought from the lead tenor player in the Syd Lawrence Orchestra. I was really chuffed. When the sling finally disintegrated mum carefully studied the design and then made me a unique one in green velvet, recycling the hook from the original. Nothing useful was ever wasted. Mum's creation lasted at least 15 years.

Mum's handiwork touched people she never met. She made me this bag (scarlet fur fabric with black spots) years ago and when I took it to work my director would lark around like a young boy and our spirits would be lifted. Another feature of mums work is that she would recycle buttons and buckles from old clothes from my German relatives bringing important connections with the past into a current creation. So **very** special to me.



This 12<sup>th</sup> image reflects the love that Gisela had for others and gave so generously. All the little stories I've shared now are based on this love. Mutti nurtured us to that we could fulfil our dreams and for this I am forever grateful.

Whilst writing this eulogy I was noting so many wonderful characteristics. I found a word bringing these together and that is 'charming': and the particular meaning of this for me is the way mum's life stories captivated me.

Each letter of this word describes characteristics and values that I will always admire and treasure:

C - courageous

H - hard working

A – artistic

R – resilient

M - masterly

I – individual

N – nurturing

G – gracious

I want to finish my eulogy with playing you another piece of music. It's a german sing-a-long tune that was the sort of music mum would work to in her younger years, we'd bring out at parties and play in the car and all sing along to. Whilst listening to this song I invite you to recall your own images and memories of Gisela. I will think of her as she was in November last year, in her kitchen baking a dozen tins shortbread for Christmas pressies

Thank you for joining me on my sentimental journey.