

Daphne Canning (1925–2023)

I have been very fortunate in the putting together of these memories because some years ago Mum used to attend the Windmill Thursday Club in Deddington, a meeting of the local older fraternity where they could have a day out and socialise. Whilst there, she was aided by Debbie Harris and Jean Rudge in the collating of her recollections, at the end of which was produced a pamphlet of her memories. I heartily thank those two ladies for their work because in reading it I found out things about Mum and her life that I had no knowledge of. And I make no apology in plagiarising this work because how else could I summarise a life of 97 and $\frac{3}{4}$ years, a life well spent by a mother, grandmother, great grandmother, sister, aunt, great aunt and friend.



Mum was born Daphne Maude Tucker on 16 April 1925 in Cricklewood, London and was to be the eldest of four girls born to Vincent and Maude Tucker. Her memoirs show that she had a very comfortable childhood and she grew up in a very happy family. On leaving school, where Mum claims she had been 'quite a duffer', in 1940 she went to Business College to undertake secretarial training. By now, of course, the war was on and her training was disrupted by the bombing. However, she did finish her training and consequently went to work for a firm of solicitors in Lincoln's Inn Fields. After just one year, aged 17½, she volunteered to join the Women's Auxiliary Airforce and was enlisted in December 1942, where she trained as a wireless operator and eventually a morse slip reader – quite a specialist trade.

Her training took her eventually to Chicksands Priory in Bedfordshire which was an outstation of Bletchley Park and, in later years, saw her acknowledged as a veteran of Bletchley Park, something of which she was immensely proud. Coincidentally, her father was also serving at Chicksands at the same time and it was there that she met my father, Ron.

Whilst there, Mum showed her strong mindedness by absenting herself from duty so that she could spend time with my father before he was shipped off to the far east. This greatly displeased and embarrassed her father, he being an officer on station, but earned her quite a degree of celebrity status from her colleagues and friends. Dad didn't get to Japan, which had been his original destination, but ended up in New Delhi. Dad was also a radio operator and so he and Mum were able, quite illegally, to chat to each other over the airwaves in quiet moments on night shift.

Dad returned from India in December 1946 and he and Mum were married the following April in Wembley, then went to live in my father's home village of Deddington.

Over the next four years, between them they produced three boys in fairly quick succession. First came David in 1948, then Paul in 1951 and finally me in 1952. By the time of my arrival they had moved from a tiny cottage in Deddington to a larger house in Banbury where Mum was able to start developing her passion for gardening.

There's no doubt that we three boys were quite a handful, but Mum was always a strict but fair disciplinarian. Even the beating that Paul and I received for destroying the tank of tropical fish was deserved, or the time she marched us the mile to town, with our own pocket money, and made us

each buy a cane. I don't actually remember her employing those canes on us but the threat was more than apparent.

Being suckers for punishment and not accepting that perhaps three boys were enough to handle, Mum and Dad began to foster children for anything from 2 to 6 weeks at a time. I believe that this triggered their desire to have a daughter of their own and in March 1958 they were able to adopt Gail which made the family complete. Always a source of pride to Mum, Gail has been her caring angel these last 10 years or more and was there whenever Mum needed.

In January 1964 the family moved to a converted stables in Heythrop. After much work a garden was cleared which really enabled Mum to get to grips with her passion for gardening. Heythrop was an absolute idyll for us, if a little isolated. To help Mum avoid this isolation Dad bought Mum a car with the intention of teaching her to drive. I think it actually turned out to be a fairly short-lived project because one day Mum was doing a three-point turn, managed to reverse off the road (no problem), went backwards about 10 yards across a stubble field (no problem) but at the 11th yard found the haystack that was standing and peacefully minding its own business (problem). No actual damage except to pride, perhaps. She got out of the car and never got behind the wheel again but went back to gardening.

It was also about this time that Stuart came to live with us. Mum had been friends with Stuart's mother but she sadly died from cancer and with no other relatives Mum thought he should come to us rather than be taken into care.

And then, in December 1966, son Paul was diagnosed with cancer with which he was ill for four years before dying in 1970 at the age of 19. Mum was, of course, totally distraught. She took solace in her garden and her work. She was at this time working as a classroom assistant in the infant school in Chipping Norton. This was a job she really enjoyed but was unfortunately made redundant in 1983 after 16 years. However, because she enjoyed the job so much she stayed on for a further year voluntarily. There does seem to be a common theme running here of her enjoying children.

In 1978, they gave up their beloved house and garden in Heythrop and moved first of all to Chipping Norton before moving, seven years later, into Dad's childhood home in Deddington where they finally settled together. Being the devoted wife that she was, Mum became Dad's carer and nurse through his illness, having developed Parkinson's Disease in 1995. He died in 2006 in which time she had been practically housebound. Then, in the middle of 2007, son David was also diagnosed with cancer and began a battle which, sadly, he lost the following year at the age of 60.

Soon after Dad's death Mum was able to move to a smaller house in Adderbury, very close to Gail, and where she was destined to pass her final years.

In her lifetime Mum experienced a good deal. As a youngster she survived being swept out to sea whilst swimming at Exmouth; falling out of a moving car whilst on a family holiday; and, as a young WAAF, escaping from her Kensington billet which had received a direct hit from one of the

first doodlebugs targeted at London. For many years afterwards she was picking out glass splinters from her head.

Her life spanned the reigns of five monarchs, she was a WI member, a leader in the Girl Guides and we discovered only recently that she had been a member of the Civil Defence Corps.

Her life was very much oriented to working with and helping children, but it was not without great sorrow, which she bore with great stoicism and fortitude assisted by her very strong faith. I think you will agree her's was a life well lived and Gail and I are very proud to say 'that was our Mum'.

I will close now with a little phrase that Mum would often come out with in her later years, 'well, there we are, that's it then'.

Nigel Canning