

THE EULOGY

For

EMMA ELIZABETH PARTIS

1910-2007

My father was the love of my mother's life. This is for both of them:

December 3rd 1906. John Waldron Partis was born in Walworth, London. He grew up to be a 6foot 3inch gentle giant and became better known as Jack. A man loved by everyone.

October 27th 1910 Emma was born at Rotherhithe to Thomas Young Evans, a general labourer, and Florence Evans (nee Hogwood), a 28 year old tin worker. Christened Emma Elizabeth Evans, she was one of six brothers and sisters. She became better known as Bessie. She grew to be only five foot tall.

On 13th September 1916 Mum's father died on the battlefields of the Great War at Thiepval in France. She was five. Times were hard. There was no welfare state then and food and money were in short supply. She told me that as a little girl would often sit on the kerb outside her house and play Fives or Jacks, feeling hungry, wondering where the next meal would come from. Later her mother, Florrie, was to re-marry and went on to have three more children including Mum's beloved stepbrother, Johnny.

Mum went to Silwood Street School and after she left school, in 1924 aged 14, she worked as a Nippy (waitress) at Lyons Corner House, the famous tea-rooms at Trafalgar Square.

She was also a keen cyclist and at one time was her club's 10 mile time trial champion.

About 1935 she went to a party and met Jack who at that time worked at The Brick - The Bricklayers Arms Depot of The Southern Railways. They fell in love and whilst courting Dad, who couldn't ride a bike, would walk Mum home to Rotherhithe. The route was under the railway arches of the old Southern Railway, near the now defunct Spa Road Station, just past the old Peek Frean biscuit factory.

Jack and Bessie married 3rd June 1939 at St Catherines Church, in Eugenia Road, probably to save Dad's legs!

They honeymooned at Eze in the south of France, travelling by train, of course!

The marital home was at Orpington in Kent, typically within earshot of the railway.

The Second World War started in September 1939 and Jack went off to Nigeria. He was sent home in 1943, a very sick man, having contracted Black Water Fever. This is a highly contagious and deadly type of Malaria which causes the destruction of the red blood cells, but with Mum's love he survived and their first child, John, was born in 1944. Just over two years later, her second child Geoffrey (Me), followed. This was good as she often said she loved little boys but hated little girls!!!

After the war Dad re-joined the Southern Railway and worked at Orpington. He was Mr Partis of the Parties Travel section! Mum stayed at home and looked after the boys.

Dad's work was to organise train outings for parties but he also took great delight in arranging complicated train and cycling holidays throughout Europe for the Partis family.

Note: He even learnt to ride a bike at the age of forty nine!

As a family of four we lived in an almost idyllic setting at Cloonmore Avenue, Orpington in a house overlooking fields and woodland.

About 1958 Dad started to feel tired. He had contracted leukaemia. Leukaemia attacks the white blood cells and is thought to be connected with the Black Water Fever he had during the war. Dad died on 27th October, 1964, aged just 57, after surviving for five years - almost unheard of in those days.

Mum was 54. Yet again Mum had a major setback in her life, especially when three weeks after Dad died a newspaper headlines proclaimed "at last a cure for leukaemia!" Also with his usual aplomb Dad managed to die on Mum's birthday, which also made it difficult to wish her "Happy Birthday".

And that's not to mention the kind person who sent her a card that first Christmas saying "may this be your most joyous and happiest Christmas ever!"

Mum had stayed in Orpington for a total of fifty one years. For many of those years she and a group of neighbours would meet every Friday night at our house to knit and put the world to rights. They called themselves The Natterers. There was Nell, Evelyn, Doris, Gladys and others who were all my "aunties". All good friends to Mum, but some were special. Our next door neighbour was Olive, a very special friend to Mum and I would like to publicly thank her, and her husband Arthur, for that. In particular I also remember the very special Jim and Hilda Abrahams who was always there when needed.

1986. At the age of 75 and after 51 years at Orpington, Mum's arthritis was getting worse. She found the hilly terrain of Orpington a little too much and we moved her to Sheerness to a beautiful little house close to the town centre. Here she could walk to Sheerness market, Tesco's, Woolworths, Boots, et al on the flat. Oh, and don't forget the Co-op! In Sheerness we were able to spend more time looking after Mum's needs, especially doing her washing and taking her shopping.

Christmas is a very special time of the year. Sometime Bessie would spend them at John's, usually ours. Unforgettable times. Certainly my children will never forget having Mum come to stay for Christmas - and how they spent Christmas days with Mum in the house.

For a woman of such robust health Mum spent a lot of time in hospital. About 1954 it was "women's problems" and it was at this time we first went to visit the orphanage at Woking. I remember the John Grooms house looking formidable. There was a very large lawn in front of the house, but with football fields behind, it looked great fun.

Over the years there were several stays in hospital, with new knees fitted and then the pacemaker. Cancer scares, nose jobs and cataracts. Each time she would write copious notes about her stay in hospital, generating stories to make your toes curl. Who can forget the chips? Or the peas? And then there was the nurse who spent half an hour sitting on Mum's bed. Much to Mum's annoyance she didn't do any work at all, not even plumping up Mum's pillows.

Well Mum was a formidable lady, not to be messed with. She survived all that life had thrown at her and always defied the doctors and went home.

In May 2004, whilst in Medway hospital, they started to use Mum's first name of Emma. As Emma she came out of hospital like a new woman. At that year's Eastchurch school fete in

July we had a lovely day. My children were all there. Mum was so happy. There are pictures of her laughing and joking, but don't mention the sweet peas she picked in the school's children's garden! The evidence will be on show you when we get back to the home.

Then in September 2005 Mum became ill again. We were summonsed to see Doctor Haywood at Minster Hospital, who told us she only had three days to live. Well no-one explained the game plan to Mum and yet again she survived, but went on to break her hip and spent a total eight months in hospital. After 19 years of independent living at Sheerness she was now in need of more care and attention than we could give so we looked for a care home. We visited Woking Homes and fell in love with the place. Mum moved in and took up a new hobby – eating! You all know how special Woking Homes is and I publicly thank Mavis and all the staff, including the very special and patient Neil, for all the love and care they have given Emma. Thank you.

Born in 1910, fatherless at five, married at 28, first child at 34 and second child at 36. She widowed on her 54th birthday. She had been happily married for 26 years, but was a widow for 43. She died peacefully in her sleep late on the afternoon of 20th September, 2007, aged 96.

Emma is survived by her two sons, seven grandchildren, and to date two and a half great grandchildren!

Well that about sums it all up. As Bessie she was a formidable lady who had a very hard life, but generous to a fault – often trying to force sweets, or broken biscuits, on people. In the end, as Emma, she had the last 18 months of her life living contentedly in a wonderful place.

She told me that as a little girl, sitting on the kerb playing fives, she could never have dreamt about living in such a wonderful place, with so much warmth, love, and FOOD!



Jack and Bessie's Wedding – 3rd June 1939
(In later years she was better known as Emma)

Eastchurch School Fete – July 2005



The sign said
"Please do not pick the Flowers"

Guilty!

'Me and My Mum!'



Mum. The last photo of her living happily at Woking. (25th August, 2007).



This is a photo of Nos. 48-52 Eugenia Road, Rotherhithe, Mum was born at No 48. I'm not sure which side it was, but the picture does show 'the kerb' Mum sat on.

Incidentally, Mum used to do voluntary work for The Abbeyfields Association in the 80's. No 50 (the centre house) was their very first home, opened in 1960. I only found this out after she died. I just wish I could have told her!