

SHEENA YOUNG (NEE KEITH)
1930-2020

Sheena was born on 8th April 1930 in Wooler, which nestles at the foot of the Cheviot Hills, North Northumberland. She was the first child of James Keith, a journeyman butcher, and Kathleen Smart, a milliner. The Smarts were a family of slaters and plasterers who had played a prominent role in the region for at least five generations.

For the first six years of her life, Sheena was an only child and then her sister Eileen arrived, to complete the family.

Sheena was usually top of her class at the Wooler primary school - and at 11 years old she got a place at the Duchess of Northumberland's Grammar School for Girls, in Alnwick. The school was situated in the Dower House of Alnwick Castle and one feature was the canvas fire escape chute which the girls had to slide down from the upper floor window directly on to the main road below.

Growing up in Wooler, Sheena was the youngest of a gang of four girls, who amongst other things tried smoking cigarettes in the seclusion of a hay loft - no health or safety there. They had a happy childhood together, enjoying the safe and open space of the village and the surrounding hills.

She also had a small menagerie, including Tim the border terrier, a tortoise, a budgie (which came to a premature end when Sheena accidentally sat on it) and a Bantam hen which, mysteriously, only ever laid an egg on Easter Sunday.

Her parents expected her to become a teacher, but experience as a prefect convinced her otherwise and, in 1946, she started work in the laboratory at the Glaxo factory at Barnard Castle, experimenting with antibiotics. The following year she switched to a new training course for radiographers at Newcastle General Infirmary. On becoming qualified, she joined the radiography department of Aylesbury General Hospital and soon moved to nearby Stoke Mandeville. On their days off, she and a colleague would don their long gloves and take the train to London for afternoon tea and the theatre. An idyllic life.

In 1958, barely a fortnight after the marriage of Sheena's sister, Eileen, in March 1958, their father Jim Keith died suddenly, on Sheena's 28th birthday. She was at a dance in Aylesbury and saw her landlady appear at the door and knew immediately what it was.

With her mother now a widow, Sheena returned to her home county and took up a senior job at Hexham General Hospital. She was one of few radiographers to be equally trained in therapeutic and trauma cases.

At Hexham she continued her long-standing interest in Scottish country dancing and was a keen member of the local Ramblers group. By now she saw her future as a modern female professional and spotted a Superintendent's position at Edinburgh's Hospital for Sick Children. She remembered being asked if she had any intention of marrying and having children. She knew when to bite her lip and got the job. With a flat in Bruntsfield, a short walk from the hospital, membership of Dalmahoy Golf Club, with concerts and all the joys of the Scottish capital, she greatly enjoyed her way of life.

In early 1961, Sheena was introduced to Mike, by her good friend Dot, who she had met on a Ramblers holiday in Switzerland. Fair enough, on first acquaintance neither Sheena nor Mike felt any repulsion and a bit later Mike wrote to her suggesting he might visit the Edinburgh Festival in the September. Would she be around? Sheena panicked at the thought of having a relatively unknown bloke on her hands for a week and made a counter-suggestion which she thought would give her more room for manoeuvre, suggesting that Mike instead should sign up for a week's rambling group at Hassness, Derwentwater which she was already booked on. Mike read this as eagerness on her part and hastily put his name down, full of confidence. So the relationship was launched on a misunderstanding but eventually resulted in a marriage (in Wooler Presbyterian Church) on Mike's 31st birthday in May 1963.

Their first marital home was in Forest Hall, on the edge of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, within reach of Sheena's mother, and close to Mike's job in the city. They were delighted to be able to start a family almost immediately, and Philip was born in 1964. With spacing that was not entirely intentional, in the five years they were on Tyneside, Catherine and Nicholas also arrived, so that Sheena was well and truly into motherhood - something she did wonderfully well. She also found time to become an early consumer champion, even appearing on local television surrounded by ladies' shoes and obviously concerned about the shortness of her skirt.

In 1968, the family moved to live in Mirfield, near Mike's new job at the BBA Group, and did so most happily, with wonderful neighbourly families all around. Janet was born there, thus completing the family. Holidays and weekends were spent in a yellow motor caravan, which Sheena used as her runabout. Once Janet was settled into her

schooling, Sheena looked around for things to do in the community, something she did all her life, and became an adviser at Citizens Advice, complicated work, requiring a sharp mind and a good personal touch.

In 1986, after 18 years, the family again moved, to Bushey, with Mike becoming Pensions Director of Smiths Industries in North London. Over the years, Sheena accompanied him to conferences all over the UK, enjoying glider trips, dodgem tracks and lots of fun. As the children's hard work and talent was rewarded, many graduation ceremonies were attended with great pride.

Naturally, Sheena immediately joined the Watford and West Herts Scottish Society. She was soon on the Committee and was twice President of the Society. Mike and Sheena were both founder members of Bushey U3A and Sheena joined what is now the local Arts Society. Sheena ran the U3A five mile ramblers for many years.

By the time Mike retired, in May 1997, Philip, Catherine and Nicholas had each married and Alex, the first grandchild was a year old. Over the next five years the five granddaughters appeared, adding to Sheena's joy. Sheena and Mike set about seeing the world, inspired by some of their children's own intrepid adventures. They visited Philip & Judith in New Zealand twice, met up with Janet in Australia and, all in all, visited every continent - Antarctica not excluded! They were several times on Vancouver Island where Sheena had many cousins.

Sheena was interested in and curious about many things in life. In addition to Scottish dancing, Sheena had a lifelong passion for photography and studied geology at night school. She regularly went to art exhibitions in London with Catherine or Janet. And she was interested in all types of architecture, from the buildings of central London to quiet, old churches in the English countryside. She loved roses and looking at the sunset over the field from the house in Bushey, which she pointed out with pleasure even in the last few weeks of her life.

In 2003, Mike and Sheena's trip to China had to be cancelled when Sheena was diagnosed with Non-Hodgkins Lymphoma. She got through that very well and the next serious incident was in October 2011 when she tripped as she was on her way out to a healing prayer group and fractured her femur. In hospital situations of that sort, she was careful to let them know that they were dealing with an ex-colleague, not least by showing her knowledge of all the Latin names!

Sheena's heart troubles first became apparent on a trip to Croatia in May 2015 and gradually she had to depend on more and more pills. Her increasing infirmity meant

she could no longer help Mike and others as she had always done, and she lost some of her zest for life in the last few months. (However, she was still able to teach Scottish dancing to two of her granddaughters just a few weeks ago.) In the end, a cold turned to pneumonia, which she did not have the resources to resist. She died at the Hospital very early on 19th March, the four children having maintained a vigil at her bedside from the previous day right to the end.

After a life of endless service and love for others, Sheena has left the world a better place.

Possible material for Guy's address

Because of her parents' own faith Sheena was a cradle Christian. Although she confessed to spending half her Sunday School collection money on sweets en route (unsupervised) home each Sunday from Wooler Presbyterian Chapel (where her father was an official), she grew up to have a keen sense of right and wrong. As a young woman she regularly attended chapels wherever she was living, and she hoped to continue to do so despite marrying a keen Anglican. In the end, as the children reached Sunday School age, she resigned herself to struggling through the then rather byzantine C of E services. Thus she followed her mother, who had moved the other way, from C of E to her husband's Presbyterianism. However, she refused to consider Confirmation, as she maintained that her status was perfectly adequate even if not every vicar was sympathetic in those days.

Sunday mornings in Mirfield were a balance between everyone getting themselves ready to be smart for church service and some preparation for Sunday dinner. We almost never got to church on time, despite living only about 100 metres away! Perhaps the distraction of four children was one of the causes of overcooked vegetables so 'beloved' by the family.

Over the years she threw herself into church life. In Mirfield she was an instigator of 'ladies evening' (feeling simultaneously too old for young wives group and too young for the Mothers Union). And the children have fond memories of helping her clean the brasses during school holidays, especially the big golden eagle lectern.

Arriving in Bushey, she and Mike at first had a low profile at St James as 8 a.m. communicants and sometimes Evensong - she always liked more contemplative services. But in 1999, when Mike was suddenly elevated to the post of Parish Warden, Sheena went with him to each of the three churches on a regular basis, as well as signing up for the Emmaus house groups that were so successful at that time. Even when Mike, relinquishing his Parish role, offered to become Secretary of the St Paul's Committee, they both continued to help to keep St James Church clean, run a monthly prayer session there and several other tasks, as well as joining the jumble sale and Christmas Fair teams at St Paul's. She was a sidesperson, read lessons and was an intercessor almost to the end. And if you asked, "Where's Sheena?", the answer usually had something to do with a dishcloth or tea towel.