

No regrets

Those are two of the last words our Mum mouthed to us on earth and, to be honest, if those are two of the last words you utter as you're leaving this earth, then you've lucked out in the lottery of life.

And our Mum absolutely loved her life.

The first daughter to be born to Sid and May, a younger sister for Robert, followed a couple of years later by Brenda.

Her best friend – a friendship which has endured unflinchingly. Ying and yang.

They couldn't look less like each other – Aunt Brenda with her jet black hair – our Mum with her white blonde hair.



We were often told of stories of the Harris family idyllic childhood. From going home at lunch hour during school for their three course lunch to the famous five star holidays down south with her father's family.

Put shortly, our Mum loved her childhood and always felt blessed to have had such loving parents and supportive siblings.

Although, Aunt Brenda does recount stories of our Mum ignoring her at school and pretending they weren't related, like the time Aunt Brenda managed to be selected for the 1st eleven hockey team in first year, Mum a fifth year student, aghast at the prospect of playing with her sister, hung up her hockey stick and boots and refused to ever lift them again as long as Aunt Brenda was in the team.

Even at a young age our Mum showed the determination which was to be her hallmark throughout life. She told us that when she was very young, almost 5, her father was tying her shoelaces. She was absolutely determined that she would learn how to do it herself. When her dad tried to help her she said no I want to do it myself, I want to learn to do it myself.

And so she did. A pattern she repeated for decades to come.

Not only was our Mum blessed with a loving and supportive family but she managed to find a vocation that she was absolutely made for in lecturing.

Our Mum's determination was such that she secured her qualifications to become a lecturer before she reached the age limit to apply to become one. So off she went to London in the swinging sixties for a year.

Now I have to confess, there's a bit of a lacuna in the stories from London. But recently when we were both in London she pointed out where she stayed in Kensington and seemed to love every second of her time there.

But sadly all good things come to an end and it was back to Glasgow to take up her first teaching post at Barmulloch College. That was the start of a lifelong passion.

Mum was patient, tolerant, respectful, gracious and utterly committed. All attributes which made her the amazing teacher she proved to be.

It wasn't long before Mum got a promotion to Cardonald College, where she remained until her retirement.

I'd love to say she just loved Cardonald. I'm sure she did but in truth, our Mum was the most appalling driver and it was the only college she could get to from our house, without having to do a right hand turn across oncoming traffic.

So it was an absolute winner and where she spent three happy decades of her life.

She made many lifelong friendships along the way and I witnessed that when I went to Cardonald College before university.

I always remember Mum's battery was flat so she asked her colleague at Cardonald, Derek Nutley to jump start the car. Not a problem Mags he said - where's the car? To which she replied "Don't worry Derek I'll drive it round to you just now"

My brother and I were lucky enough to attend our Mum's retirement celebrations and it became clear how highly thought of our Mum was by all the staff.

Teaching was made for our Mum and that's why she achieved the status of faculty head, well before her retirement.

And the miracle of that is that she did all of this whilst James and I were causing her no end of misery in the background.

You see, I like to think the best day of my Mum's life was 29th November 1974. The day I was born. And I'm sure it was – until James appeared on 12th June 1980. I was filled with horror at his arrival and regularly asked my Mum why she had to have him.

She used to say you'll thank me one day. Yet again I thought "Yeah right".

Until first January this year and Mum was critically unwell, when I understood exactly what Mum meant.

Put simply, I could not have survived the last three months without my brother's support and I was able to tell Mum that. I was able to tell her that yet again she was right.

So with that in mind, what was life like at home for our Mum?

Well, I'm sure many of you will remember Herries Road. The home we shared with Aunt Brenda and Uncle Robert. A bit like Walton Mountain on acid.

Mum was teaching late three nights a week to pay for our private education. Aunt Brenda was tearing her hair out trying to make us do our homework and Uncle Robert daren't even open his mouth.

But, it was undoubtedly one of the happiest times in our lives. I mean pretty much every window was broken at one time or another by my brother and his pals and we really didn't have much.

But we were all happy.

Next stop was our flat in Pollokshields, back to Mum, James and me. Our poor Mum had to put up with us. We were not easy but James and I struggle to remember her ever shouting and we don't ever remember even being smacked as children. She just used to use the immortal words "You have really disappointed me" and that was enough to make even us reign it in.

That chapter saw many happy events:

- Confirmations
- Graduations
- Weddings
- Milestone birthdays for everyone

But, the greatest life event for our Mum was the birth of her first grand-child, Dominic. I don't think she ever thought she would see a grandchild from me and even less so from James, so she was absolutely in her element. And she devoted her life to Dominic. By providing unfettered childcare for Dominic and allowing me to return to work .

And then there followed another move, this time her final one to Newlands. I think Mum would say that this chapter of her life was absolutely her most treasured because the best day of her life was matched when Samuel, her second grandson arrived and she was over the moon. Looking after her two boys, James and I would get sent pictures of the boys all day from Mum.

You see our Mum lived her life for her family. Walking about Newlands, with Dominic firstly and then Samuel in the family Silvercross pram. In fact, one of the last texts Mum sent was that she had seen the latest addition to the neighbourhood, Rosie Montgomery, being ferried about in my Mum's beloved silver cross pram. And it made her so happy

She had her amateur dramatics, forcing us to go to the panto every year (Sorry Joyce). It was very good. James managed to body swerve it for the last ten years.

And her Dairsie granny nights out. They have more fun than the Dairsie Mummies and wreaked havoc with my babysitting plans.

She lived life absolutely to the full.

But then things changed late on last year when our Mum was admitted to hospital.

Having a loved one with serious illness is totally and utterly devastating and paralysing but true to form our Mum fought every day to get home to her family and, most importantly, her beloved grandchildren.

And everyone in the hospital from the cleaners to the consultants said how charming our Mum was. Despite everything, she still had a smile for everyone and a glint in her eye.

It was so, so hard for Mum. Yet, even when we would say “you’ve suffered so much”, she would say “No I haven’t” with surprise on her face.

Pretty much every day, my brother and I were up fighting to get information, to get treatment to save our Mum. And as people who ask questions for a living, the doctors didn’t get an easy time.

You know you’re going slowly round the twist when you start asking doctors when your Mum will be liberated from custody.

But in the end of the day, the dear Lord had greater plans for our Mum. And she was liberated to appear before a higher court. And one where, thankfully for her, James and I cannot represent her.

But we’re sure she’ll do just fine on her own.

On the night we were told that the doctors could do no more, she sat my brother and I down and said “It is time for me to go”. And then gave us her instructions

1. Look after Aunt Brenda
2. Support the pantomime (No more can you avoid it James)
3. And number three, in the most important things to tell us, was that the locking wheel nuts for my car are in the back bedroom wardrobe, with the full service history.

So if anyone is interested in a 10 year old fiat Punto that has only done 20 thousand miles, one female owner, with locking wheel nuts, full service history and has only ever turned left, then please speak to James or myself at the Carnbooth.

It is only right that I should mention the final piece of the jigsaw of our Mum’s life: her faith. She was a very important member of this church and never once wavered in that faith. Even when she was facing illness and pain. And her last days our Mum fought every day of her life, quietly, calmly, with determination and courage.

Put simply, they broke the mould with her. She achieved exceptional status in the workplace:

- Head of faculty at FE College
- Brought us up on her own
- Paid to educate us privately on her own

- Paid to educate us at university on her own (and that included James's 85 false starts and my failure of an entire year at university).
- A few return to sender by the police (of James, not me)

It is fair to say that things were tight. In fact, I remember in first year I received a post card from Mum, with a stony bridge on the front. It read:

"To my darling daughter Louise, I hope you like the picture of the stony bridge. But let me tell you this, if you don't hurry up and get your student loan, I'll be throwing myself off the stony bridge. All my love Mum".

She put up with all of this, so that we could go on to achieve. James and I are ordinary people. Who are the products of an extraordinary mother. She never gave up. Ever.

It therefore seems so fitting that our beloved mother should pass away on international woman's day. A day to celebrate the achievements of women, through determination and courage.

We pray that she is now at peace, with her beloved mother and father and her big brother.

And so, all that remains for us to say to our Mum is this:

No regrets

'Til we meet again

God speed