

Mum's Eulogy

On behalf of my brother David, sister Louise, myself and our families I'd like to thank you for coming today.

We loved our mum and we always will.

Her family was the most important thing in her life.

She was born in a small town called Newcastleton, in the border country in Scotland, to her beloved mum Christina and dad William. While she was named Jessie, to us she was always Jess. In fact if you called her Jessie, which was a nickname for someone not so bright, she would in fact refuse to speak to you.

She was the eldest of four sisters, and was followed by Nell, Anne and Tina. Theirs was a simple and happy childhood, and mum recalled their dad, who was a clogger, often catching trout and rabbits for dinner. While mum would have loved to study music since she was a great pianist, she instead went to teachers college in Edinburgh. Mum lost her mother when only in her early 20s, and named our sister after her. The way she spoke of her always made us wish we had met her. She sounded kind and loving, just as our mum was.

It was in Edinburgh where she met our dad, at a dance, and of course the rest is history. They married in 1957 when mum was 25. By 1967, we were all off to Brisbane on a long boat trip to start a new life. It must have been hard for mum since dad worked long hours. She had to wrangle three kids, all very different – a brainy one, a wild one, a goody goody shy one.

Mum loved Brisbane, and as we grew older, she became a teachers' aide at our primary school in Indooroopilly. She became friends with many of the doctors' wives, and was very sociable, and I remember her hosting many dinner parties. In 1979 we moved to Melbourne, and I think she found it harder to fit into here, although she did make some good friends. She worked as a kindie assistant, for many years which she absolutely loved. Only when she finally admitted she shouldn't be driving because of her eyesight, did she have to give it up.

Mum, just like our dad, made it clear to us that we could be anything that we wanted and that is exactly what we did, all training in different fields. Just like our dad, she never pushed us along any specific track – although there were the not so subtle hints that we should try and be successful pianists, which had been her dream. Just like our dad she taught us that we were no lesser or no better than anyone and that all we needed to do was try our hardest and be proud of our best.

Mum would do absolutely anything to support and help us. She was the most generous person I've ever known. Often in conversation, she's say 'I'll pay for that'. Once when Craig was talking about how he'd test driven a Maserati, mum of course said 'I'll pay for that'.

She wouldn't allow Lou and I to have long hair, because of her memories of nits. So began many years of having Bob Hawke hairstyles, and being mistaken for boys. Lou remembers us when we went back to Scotland for a year in 1974, and a boy asking her if she was a laddie or a lassie. Naturally she punched him. Mum loved to dress Lou and I in matching trousers and skirts, which were not the most attractive sights. She could also be very strict. So David and I would spend many hours gazing at our congealed cold vegies trying to work out where to hide them since we couldn't leave the table until we were finished. Or the time I was sent to my room at my own birthday party – now being a mother I can imagine how awful I must have been for such a punishment.

Mum had many quirky habits. She loved a good toilet, and we often joked over the years how she should write a book about toilets of Australia. She had a tissue fetish, folding and stashing them all over the place. She loved African violets and used to talk to them all.

She loved cleaning. When Lou would go away on a trip, mum would sneak over and clean her house and dad will fill the fridge up with food. One on particular occasion, much to Lou's horror, Mum vacuumed up her 2000 year old scarab.

I know mum was very proud of us all – her kids, her grandkids and our partners. I know she was at peace that we had all found the right ones – some of us taking much, much, longer than the others... and that means me of course. I certainly put her through the ringer with my tortuous love life, until I found my Kev, who she loved.

I will remember all the lovely things she used to make. Her peasant girl with veil desert that we'd have once a year at Xmas. Her wonderful roast potatoes, gypsy creams and spice cake, which my friend at school would beg me for.

Mum helped us so much with our three girls. She looked after them, and spent real time with them, making play doh, playing games, reading books and playing piano. They all remember her sneaking into their rooms in the middle of the night with her torch, just making sure they were still alive. Even when we were adults, she would still do this... In the mornings she'd tell the girls that they couldn't get up until the birds started chirping. Stell remembers combing mum's hair and pretending to colour her hair with coloured blocks.

Eleanor met our mum for the first time at her wedding to our brother in New York. El was a bit nervous, but straight away realised our mum was lovely and kind, and she felt blessed to have her as her mother-in-law. David and Ellie felt grateful to share many holidays with mum and dad, and mum would always say to her 'I wonder what the poor people are doing', just her way of saying how thankful she was for the experience.

Our mum had many difficult years because of her health. The deterioration of her eyesight because of macular degeneration began to shrink her life, many years ago and she lost touch with friends. She persisted with a magnifying glass and lighting to read for as long as she possibly could. Once she was no longer able to read, this had a big effect on her. Coupled with her major back operation, the first signs of dementia began to escalate.

The loved ones of people with dementia have to go on a difficult journey with them. You have to learn how to cope with it, how to handle it the best you can, and to make it as good as you possibly can for the sufferer. Mum did indeed suffer greatly, since she was partially aware of reality, year after year. It was really frightening for her. We learnt the does and don't. We tried to be positive, distract her and be patient, although I am sure we weren't always perfect in how we handled things, but we tried our best and definitely got better over time. You have to laugh with the happy delusions. Once she believed that she had inherited lots of money from Monty Davenport, a distant relative who went off to Canada to find gold. Another time she thought she'd gone for a beautiful trip in the country. Luckily, most of the time she remembered who we were and she was comforted by our presence. In recent times, mum had settled, and was much calmer within herself.

We are incredibly grateful to Bupa Greensborough where mum lived for 3 and a half long years. I'd like to believe that mum was special to some of the carers, and I know many of them enjoyed having a chat with her. They gave her company, something she craved, since we weren't able to be there all the time, and I know she was lonely.

I've been reflecting on how you measure a life. For dad, he achieved so much in his career and was very well respected. I think the saying 'Behind every great man there is a great woman' is true in our family's case. Mum supported dad in everything he did. She was the glue that held our family together, and she nurtured three kids who turned out ok. I believe that many people who knew mum over her life appreciated what a good woman she was and loved her too.

When I think of our mum, I simply think of a beautiful soul. A kind hearted, sweet, considerate, and loving woman. She was smart, she was funny, she was beautiful inside and out. I couldn't count the times our mum told us she loved us. Or the times we told our mum we loved her. Her love was clear, consistent and complete and we felt enveloped in her love. Could you ever want anything more of a mother?

We loved our mum and we always will.