

Hespet (eulogy) at the shiva of Dora Cramer, August 2004

- written by Simon Walters

When I sat down to write these words, the ones I used when grandpa died kept coming back to me, but perhaps it is no surprise, because they were a couple so closely entwined as to be almost as one.

At grandpa's shiva, grandma was the most composed of the entire family. She told me that she had no regrets, having spent nearly seventy years together, the perfect partner, with barely a cross word between them.

They say that time is a great healer, but for grandma it wasn't so. As the years went on, she missed him more and more, and yearned for them to be reunited.

Grandma was born into the Karbatznic family, one of eight brothers and sisters, a generation whose lives spanned the entire 20th century and (in her case) beyond, and whose values of integrity, hard work and love were passed to their children. With her death – the last of the eight - mum & auntie Lilian and their cousins all move up a generation.

This sad event does leave a job vacancy for which I'll be seeking volunteers: someone who'll tell me – *every* time they see me – how handsome I am! And how good-looking *all* her grandchildren are.

And she didn't just love us. She loved people: her brothers & sisters, her nieces & nephews, their families; all kinds of people. And she had a special quality, which was her ability to make you feel loved – she would make you feel as though you were more important than anything else in the world.

That was because she was genuinely interested in everyone. Whether you called her mum, grandma, Auntie Dora, or just Dora, she was just as happy to hear from you and see you.

For the past year or two I used to tease grandma that she had achieved the ultimate status symbol, as she was living in a home in The Bishops Avenue. But the joke was lost on grandma, as to her she had achieved ultimate riches a long time ago. For hers was a world in which wealth was measured in family warmth, the devotion of your spouse, and the health & happiness of her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. She considered herself very rich indeed. A mansion in Hampstead meant nothing to her – all she valued was that the food on her plate was kosher.

When Alexander married Laura, Grandma proudly announced her life's work done - she knew that she was truly blessed to have seen all four grandchildren married. And she and grandpa lived to see six great-grandchildren born, with grandma having the further delight of seeing Estie's arrival.

My memories of childhood are heavily imprinted with happy days playing football in her garden, the food she would lovingly cook specially for me, and the hours we would spend playing noughts & crosses. I wonder whether I would ever have mastered that game's complexities if it weren't for her! But above all else, she was just there, and even when we kids grew up and had other distractions, it was no surprise that we gathered at their flat every Saturday afternoon.

She and grandpa spent over 67 years together, with an especially happy marriage. Even up to the day he died, they were mad about each other, making that long journey from twenty-something sweethearts to doting great-grandparents, most of it side by side – literally – and in their retirement they were content to travel little further than their two trusty armchairs. But they travelled the world too, in their own way, through the trips that their family took. They loved to hear of our holidays abroad, though for them the highlight was hearing that we were safely home.

She was happy with her quiet life, and never wanted to be a burden. If a typhoon had raised the roof of her flat, and a bomb landed in her lap, she'd have insisted that no-one makes a fuss.

Mind you, she made a fuss of others when appropriate, in her own modest way. There was the little old dear, Sarah, who lived in the old peoples' home near Calthorpe Gardens. Grandma visited her every *erev shabbos*. Only after several years did any of us meet Sarah, when we discovered that she was younger and more mobile than her visitor! But what Sarah needed, and grandma dispensed in boundless quantities, was companionship.

That wasn't all she dispensed. There was the money too.....

There was the time 25 years ago when grandma & grandpa won £15 on the premium bonds, and proudly gave £5 to each of their grandchildren – of whom they had *four*! Do the maths! And when we persuaded grandpa to give up driving –making London's roads safer than they had been for half a century – it was grandma who decided that the proceeds of sale of that Morris Marina would be split between the four of us. Sadly they hadn't anticipated that the car dealer would charge *them* to take it away!

In 1997, for grandma's 90th birthday, Louisa and I intended to honour a longstanding promise by taking grandma & grandpa to the Ritz for tea. We duly booked a table, but grandpa was unable to make the trip and grandma wouldn't even consider going without him – despite him imploring her to - so at the 11th hour we didn't go. Anyway, to her, the preferred opulence was a shabbos table at home, laden with bridge rolls, strudel and kichels, so we settled for the warmth and familiarity of an afternoon in their dining room.

Almost 20 years ago grandma suffered an accident so horrific that it left her hospitalised for months, with a series of operations & skin grafts that might have finished off people half her age. But with a steely resolve and fortitude that showed

an inner strength beyond her diminutive stature, grandma fought back, never complaining and only rarely giving an insight to the constant pain that never left her.

In this fast-moving and ever-changing world, grandma was a “constant”, a source of steady advice, who was ideally qualified to dispense her two recurring pieces of advice: (1) work hard – *“shoulder to the wheel”*, she used to say; and (2) always make sure your shoes are polished!

The months and years that followed grandpa’s death were increasingly difficult for grandma, and even the regular visits from her family couldn’t shield her from loneliness that we can barely comprehend. She was unimaginably lonely, however many people were at her side. However much we will miss her, it cannot compare to how much she missed him.

They were tougher than they looked, people like grandma, that generation, built to survive anything. But time eventually withered her, and infirmity started to win over strength. We can’t have any complaints about a life that lasted almost a century (I know that **she** had no complaints). Over the past couple of days, people have said, *“it’s a happy release”*, *“it’s what she wanted”*, *“they’re reunited”*, and *“her time had come”*, but - to me – she was 96 and went too soon.