

Dear Mam

It's quite ironic that we're all here today on your 74th birthday celebrating your life given that a few weeks ago you told me you'd just had your hair cut and you were 'all dressed up with nowhere to go'. I said when we got back we'd take you out and celebrate together although...this isn't quite what I had in mind.

I think all those who know you can say with sincerity that you've lived a colourful life in many respects yet I can only speak about the fraction of the time I've spent with you in my 28 years. You've been a nurse which I know you loved and were good at given your kind and caring nature, but for me it was your jobs as a lollipop lady and dinner lady that I remember most.

The children and teachers at both schools loved you - I've never seen so many Christmas cards up on our wall than the amount you used to receive when you were working but then, you always were a popular lady and there weren't many people who didn't know you. The amount of times when we were walking down the street and someone would say hello never ceased to amaze me. It's not surprising though because not only were you one of the friendliest people I've ever met, you were also one of the kindest, although woe betide anyone if they tried to pull one over you or any children on the estate were misbehaving; you certainly knew your own mind and would put them right. The funny thing was, you somehow managed to command a respect that was difficult for others to get, even the police. But then that's another thing; you knew the local bobbies...and the councillors...even the MP! You were someone to know alright and I'm really glad I did.

Writing this has to be one of the hardest things I've ever had to do. Not because I don't know what to say, but because there are so many things I want people to know about you; a character if ever there was one. You weren't perfect, but then none of us are. To me though mam you were pretty close. I adored your sense of humour and apart from the normal hiccups while growing up, we got on famously and shared an incredible mother-daughter friendship because of it, mainly because we could always be silly together. As for talking, we could talk for England and often used to joke that we were like two old washer women. The amount of time we spent laughing though is probably one of the things that comforts me the most right now.

You didn't have a particularly easy life by all accounts and there were times when sadness, accidents and illness darkened our lives, but we all got through it and it only ever served to show just how determined, stubborn and strong willed you were; it wouldn't beat you. I just think back to when you were convalescing from having cancer and you were in a wheelchair on a trip to Coronation Street - you just wouldn't sit still and insisted on

rocking yourself in the direction you wanted to go, hating the fact that we were pushing you and you couldn't dash around where you liked.

That's one thing you've passed on to all three of your daughters though and something you've always been proud of - we're strong like you and will do what we want, but that's what you get from a born and bred Northerner and Daryl the Southerner will definitely testify to that I'm sure.

The past few years have been interesting for you - you've become a nanna to Scarlet, you've watched me get married to the man you groped when you first met him - something I took as a sign of approval and I did warn him you were forward. And of course you've moved from your beloved Hull to Driffield and then finally to Chesham. Having said many times in the past that you'd never move from Hull, you did pretty well this past year at being an honorary Southerner and like they say, 'never say never' because you loved it...although all those pot holes you had to navigate on your scooter; they never did do something about them for you..

Although you were happy down here, the past few months have probably been some of the darkest too. Amongst the smiles and the good times, there was something that wasn't quite right. Deep down you knew it and tried to laugh it off, but I had a fair idea of what it was, I just didn't want to believe it. The amount of times you repeated or asked the same question in the space of a few minutes was getting worse and that was fine; you taught me patience so it never really bothered me. But when you started to forget my birthday, lost your way in town when meeting me and almost gave up on cleaning, I knew something was really wrong.

I grew up with one of the tidiest and house proud mothers around who insisted on shoes off at the door and slippers on, as well and who could spot a bit of fluff on the carpet a mile off so this wasn't the mam I knew. Having said that, whatever it was that was wrong; it didn't stop the playful, crafty side of your nature that's for sure.

I remember one time we'd come up to Hull to take you to Sue's one weekend thinking we'd have plenty of room in the car for you and two birds in one cage - only for you to say 'Oh no, there's four birds and two cages now isn't there - didn't I say?' Or the time last summer when we'd come over with Star one evening to watch Emmerdale and have a cuppa. You shuffled to the door as usual 'Come in - but mind the dog with the cat won't you..' 'What cat?' we asked...as we spotted a small ball of black fluff sitting on the bed. You'd only gone and bought a kitten and brought it home on your scooter wrapped in a towel in a carrier bag. This was Sooty you proudly informed us and although you'd never really liked cats in the past, he turned out to be your faithful companion who you adored - despite the constant scratches on the hands from those lethal claws of his.

The day we went to see the 'Memory Man' as you called him was until now probably the saddest day of my life. You were officially diagnosed as having Alzheimer's. I'd suspected as much, having seen you deteriorate in many ways and having read many things on the subject, but it broke my heart to watch you sit there taking a test and get the answers wrong to basic questions you'd known all your life, as well as being unable to do other things that were indicative of the illness.

What made it all the more strange was the fact that at times, despite having forgotten something you'd done earlier that day, when we were sat having a cup of tea with you, you'd suddenly have flashes of vivid memories of your wonderful days in Dunnington where you were evacuated. You always had a smile as you talked candidly about you standing on a stage as a young girl with a little white tag pinned on you next to your friend Betty Hall waiting to be picked by a family. You loved to talk about how strict the lady was and how you had to go to church three times a day on Sundays and read in the afternoon, but how lovely it was playing in the fields in the countryside. Clearly your mind was just flickering.

From that day on though mam, you almost became a different person. You were told you were in the early stages of dementia but to you, it seemed to bring relief. You weren't 'losing your way' as you always said, you were just on the blink a bit. You were going to be okay and like all the other times before when you were poorly, we'd get through it together which we did. Your eyes shined again. There was no more fear to be had and next month we were going to start the medication that would slow the decline of the illness, but we never got that far.

You'd obviously decided enough was enough. Your wiring was going to pot, your hip hurt, your back hurt and your feet were cold. You knew we were off having a ball travelling round the world, which you were excited about, you'd spoken to Sue and to Michelle and knew they were well and you'd practically won all the prizes there were to win at the Red Cross - what better time to leave?

Your passing away has left a hole in all of us that will never be filled by anyone as special as you mam, but for me I know in my heart it was the right time for you to leave and all I ever wanted was for you to not to be in pain anymore so I think you knew it was the right time too.

We'll all miss you so much. We'll miss the cards you used to send with messages of 'Don't get drunk HA HA'. We'll miss the mumbles of 'Ooh, its cawld' and 'Ooh, I'll have to have a wee' - because no matter who was around, you didn't care! There won't be a time goes by when we won't eat eggs or cucumber and we don't remember you saying 'Well, I like them, but

they don't like me' because they used to repeat on you. We'll miss the constant shuffle of your slippers tottering about the place. Most of all, I'll miss our cups of tea and chats we used to have - 28 years on and numerous cuppas later and you still liked to remind me 'Two sugars Yvonne...'

I know mam. 'Not much milk'.

I'm so proud to have been your 'little one' and will remember all the things you taught me, not least to be strong, be honest and do what I want with my life. I didn't get to give you grandchildren which breaks my heart because we'd been speaking about it recently and you would have been great but I know you'll be watching when I do and if they have beautiful blue eyes, I'll know exactly where they get them from.

Love you.

Night Night, God Bless, Sweet Dreams

Yvonne