

Eulogy for my mum by Ruby Ireland

My mum had a relentless interest in the world and everyone who lived in it. She explored it with kindness, curiosity and a lot of fun. I was always in awe of my mum's ability to facilitate raucous chaotic fun, to fully embrace life and let go. And then restore calm and structure at just the right moment, packing away the ingredients of that chaotic fun into neat and tidy boxes ready for next time. As a child and into my adulthood, I always felt like my mum embraced me and supported me through life with this incredible sense of balance and guidance. This was so well embedded in our relationship, that it has not gone – even in death, she is there, wrapping her arms around me with warmth and kindness, gently guiding me to find my own way in life.

I know I am not alone in feeling the lasting impact of the wonderful privilege of having my mum, Mary / Maeve, in our lives. When people shared their thoughts and memories with me for this eulogy, the words that came up again and again were kind, caring, warm, welcoming, thoughtful, encouraging and fun. These are all words that often describe good people, but there is something extra behind them when describing my mum. The words somehow don't do it justice. A description that I think is very fitting: "she was so unintimidating for someone who really had superpowers and was so special". She went above and beyond, with a thousand tiny extra kindnesses she somehow found the time to bestow amid the usual demands of life. The capacity to love others came so naturally to my mum. Her love came from a deep and humble place of generosity, demonstrated by so many guerrilla acts of love that made the lives of those around her easier and more comfortable. Mum's kindness was infectious. We all carry with us a bit of the kindness she has shown us. She is with us every time we show the world an open heart.

Mum had a strong set of values and beliefs that she lived her life by – she was a proud socialist and a feminist. She listened with genuine interest and respect to ideas and opinions that differed from her own and articulated her own perspective with clarity and passion. She was well read, taking on board ideas and concepts and really understanding how they fit into the bigger picture. Her deep understanding allowed her to remember a great deal of what she had read and heard. During our family lockdown quizzes, Mum really was the star member of the team – when asked how she knew the name of the third wise man, or the author of the novella 'Breakfast at Tiffany's' or the winner of the nobel peace prize in 1976, she simply said, 'well, it's history isn't it!'

Her thirst for learning about the world, and the people in it, manifested in various ways. Mum studied theology, art history and psychology (much to my dismay when I was small and she couldn't give me every second of her attention because she was doing an Open University psychology degree). When I was doing my art A Level course work, mum helped me with such enthusiasm and dedication and I would say 'we' achieved an A grade together! She was passionate about art, not only because of the profound joy she found in experiencing the artistic product, but also because of the people and stories behind it. For many people who spent time with my mum, she is a central part of their experiences of London's rich cultural life – tours around St Paul's Cathedral and Chelsea Physic Garden, and visits to galleries. Mum shared her knowledge and infectious curiosity with those lucky

enough to experience these places with her, creating lasting memories of iconic London cultural venues, made unique by her personal touch.

Mum's love of people and stories extended also to trawling through charity shops, discovering pre-loved bargains and treasures that hold their own history. She was the most organised hoarder I have ever seen. She saved so many things, saying that they 'could be useful one day' – her archived items were carefully organised and filed, so that she was able to (mostly!) put her hands on them, if they were needed again – which they often were! Since she became a grandma, she saved things with her grandsons in mind - cardboard boxes, shiny paper, bottle tops, buttons, string, ribbons, so many bits and pieces, all carefully boxed, so they could be used to make 'a robot' or a 'car' or a 'house'. The most imaginative creations that were born from what most people would class a rubbish – Mum could see its potential in helping Jem and Jody develop their imaginations and creative output.

She was a pioneer of the recycle/reuse movement even before it was a thing. As a talented seamstress, she was able to take bits of found fabric and make curtains and cushion covers from them; she repurposed pieces of furniture into new improved articles and repaired almost irreparable items, giving them a new lease of life. She had one pair of trousers that had been repaired so much, that they were probably more patch than trouser – they still looked great on her!

Mum had a solution for everything. She was a problem-solver, a fixer, she made everything OK. Whether it was a dying plant, a broken zip or a broken heart, mum had the capacity and the means to help to fix it. If anyone ever had an ailment mum always had an answer, whether aloe for bites and stings, lavender pillows made from old socks and lavender from her garden, or something soothing to soak tired feet in, she always cared for and looked after everyone.

The extraordinary emotional capacity that my mum had is perhaps most clear to see in the strength of the relationships with those closest to her. I felt inspired and comforted by the love I could see between my mum and dad every single day. They taught me how to recognise love and how to practice it. I saw the strength of her love reflected also in her relationship with her grandsons. She took so much joy from being with them and nurturing their young lives. That joy was reciprocated, she will always hold a very special place in their hearts. She always took the time to keep in touch with family and friends, it was the foundation of her being.

So it is the end of one chapter, after almost 74 years, the physical presence of our dear mum, grandma, wife, sister, friend and life companion has gone. But this is not goodbye, instead it is an evolution to the next chapter – the next way of being with her. The strength of the relationships she formed and her influence on the world will last for generations to come. My mum's profound impact on so many lives and the seeds of kindness and strength she planted amongst family, friends, colleagues and probably quite a few complete strangers too, will continue to grow – she is here to stay.

