

MEMORIES OF DOREEN HOLDEN

I can't compete with Terry's eulogy at Doreen's farewell 2 years ago, which set the bar in terms of send offs, but I'll do my best.

Doreen was so proud of her children and their partners, her grandchildren and then her great grandchildren and would be delighted to think that everyone's here today. Of course, Gerry was at the root of it all, solid and dependable behind the scenes.

My friendship with Doreen goes back over 40 years to the time when our children were young. I had a group of friends in the early 1980s living in what's now known as Brighton-le-Sands. We all had our children at the same time. It was a natural progression from a little playgroup run by Shirley Fairclough in the church hall to Sandford Playgroup, synonymous with Auntie Doreen. We were all very much in awe of her. She was a formidable character. All the children loved going to Sandford and we mums all trusted her implicitly. She had a natural gift for relating to young children and understanding what made each of them tick. She also had an amazing ability to run it all on a shoe string. All the mums supported the fundraising events Doreen organised, such as a cheese and wine evening in Canterbury Avenue. I remember it being a beautiful house full of interesting and tasteful things.

Doreen loved hanging out with us young mums and she used to park her bike outside whoever's house we'd met in and drop in for a cuppa – I can't remember if she had started drinking hot water by then! She loved the madness of the children, the conversation of the younger generation and keeping up to date with our lives. She was a free spirit, a breath of fresh air and we all loved her company in spite of the age difference.

Every school holiday she would organise excursions on a double decker bus taking picnics, buggies, bags, toddlers and babies over to Arrowe Park, Knowsley Safari Park and the Botanic Gardens, all for a couple of pounds. On one such outing to Chester Zoo she put red lipstick on our Michael's face to jolly him out of a sulk – I have the photos to prove it!

We kept in touch over the years, and she called in from time to time even after I went back to work. Eventually she retired from Sandford but filled her time doing all sorts of voluntary work across Sefton. Sadly, Gerry became ill and finally passed away and Doreen sold the house in Canterbury Avenue, moving to Somerford House.

Years later I became more involved at St Nicholas again. By then Doreen was beginning to have difficulties with her mobility and it took her ages to get over from her flat with her trolley so I started giving her a lift. There were various dramas over the years – hunting for scarves and jewellery, shoes that matched, the right glasses, the big black purse, her magnifier, the right shade of lippy, her keys, etc etc. After church there might be a little job to do with the phone, the clock, a book for one of our grandchildren – I think every child in Crosby must have a book signed by Auntie Doreen, all recycled from the charity shops.

During services she often relied on Terri Deery to help her find the hymns and operate the illuminating magnifier. She loved sharing the peace especially Peter Batey's handshake which she always commented on, along with his voice! And during the fellowship she would gravitate towards any youngsters and slip them a pound coin.

I don't need to remind anyone about the incident of her resurrection. She took it all in her stride and enjoyed the kudos it gave her. She and Ravi had a special bond after that.

Doreen came along to all the social events at church, and always sent a raffle prize to Steve Bailey. Woe betide him if her prize didn't appear at that event.

Considering the problems with her eyesight and mobility she coped incredibly well – she was a force to be reckoned with even in her 80s. She made no secret of the fact that she hated being old with all the frustrations and restrictions it brought. She refused to give in to it though and continued her Saturday afternoon routine of meeting Edna in Crosby Tea Rooms week after week. She was determined to keep her independence as long as possible. If they got a taxi, nine times out of ten the driver would be an ex Sandford boy!! A free ride home!

One of my favourite memories is of the lovely birthday lunch that Joyce Batey organised for Doreen's 89th birthday. Doreen was in her element, the queen bee, a position she relished, surrounded by friends.

Most of all I'll always picture her cycling along College Road wearing her red beret, ringing the bell and singing a happy song!

God bless her – one of life's greatest characters.

Lesley Utley, Churchwarden

26th July 2020 - Dedication of the Holden Memorial Bench