

Remembering Leonie Nestine Martensteyn - My Mum



A few weeks ago, I had to take Mum for her first covid test. She needed an ultrasound and could not have one until she had tested negative to covid. She took it a lot better than I did when I had one a few months before. On the way home she said, "I suppose I'll have to go into hospital," I assured her that it wasn't likely as she didn't have covid. After a while she said, "Well if I die, I'd like to be buried in the outfit I wore for your wedding." Taken aback I said, "But does it still fit you? She responded, "Well if it doesn't you can just lay it on top of me." I gasped but figured as we were on the topic, I may as well get more information. "So, what hymns would you like at the service?" "Ones from Elmar's funeral. "The only one that I could only think of at the time was Abide with Me. Little did I know that just a few weeks later I would be planning

her funeral.

Mum was the much-awaited child of Ernestine (known as Nesta) and Leonard Jonklaas, as Nesta's first pregnancy had ended in a miscarriage. She was named Leonie Nestine after her original names were changed a week after her registration. I think one of them was Yola. She was an unexpected birthday present for Nesta and as a family we celebrated their birthdays together, except for special ones. Her long-time friend Audrey recalls holding Mum hours after she was born – she had straight dark hair and dark eyes. Unfortunately, I haven't been able to locate any baby photos – maybe for the memorial service.

Mum lost her only child status at 5 when she was joined by a sister Delrine and 2 years later a brother, Hans. All 3 were very much spoiled by their Nanna and two aunts who lived with them.

Mum wanted to be a receptionist when she grew up. I remember her showing me a newspaper article where she was interviewed on her ambitions on leaving school. Instead she became engaged at 17 and was married by 18 and had a baby before she was 20. Mum met Dad through the church and Presbyterian Youth league. I know many PYL friends will be watching today. Dad was 16 years older and a friend of her parents. He was a university graduate who had worked as a journalist and then for the Department of Commerce and had travelled overseas for work. When Dad asked for Mum's hand in marriage, her parents were happy to give their permission as he was regarded as a good catch. Mum had enjoyed going out with friends and there was a particular boy that Grandpa would slam the phone down on when he recognised his voice so I think Nanna and Grandpa were relieved she had set her heart on someone they both liked. Dad was the love of Mum's life. She cared for him devotedly and refused to let him go into care after he had his stroke. She kept her favourite photo of him by her bed after he died and also took it with her when she went away or was in hospital or rehab. And it is on the program and in the photo tribute today.

Mum had been given a 'memories of our wedding' book by a friend called Iris and it has newspaper cuttings, the invitation and hymns sung at the church. This item was in the Times of Ceylon...

Mum hadn't filled in much of the book but under anniversaries it says...

I was that first child – Sharon Lenore Martenstyn born exactly 11 months after they married. Sharon was a mutual decision (from Song of Solomon). Mum had wanted Michelle and Dad Lenore (which came from a poem by Edgar Allan Poe). I had very blondish hair and blue eyes and Mum said the nursing staff at St Michael's kept making excuses to come into her room to see the unusual baby. Both Mum's and Dad's ancestors came to Ceylon with the Dutch East India company in the 1790s so the blonde hair pops up now and then.

When I was 6 months old Dad got a posting as Trade Commissioner to Australia and we moved to Sydney for three and a half years. Mum was allowed to have Aslyn Pieris travel with them to help her as she and dad were expected to attend official functions. Mum would wear a sari for these. I remember when I was older helping to dress mum in a sari and walking round her while she tucked it into her underskirt. My brothers Jeremy Leonard and Elmar Darren (known as Darren) were born in Sydney and Darren was a few months old when we returned to live with Nanna and Grandpa at De Saram Place. Mum remembered me answering the door soon after Jeremy was born and bringing in the postman to see my new brother. Mum was mortified as she was feeding him at the time and the postman was most embarrassed.

Mum grew up at Sunnyside, De Saram Place, Kollupitya and had lifelong friends on either side of her, Damayanthi and Winifred. Winifred's son Phillippe was Mum's pageboy and Winifred, her husband Roy, their own children Roger, Yolette and Phillippe were an important part of Mum's life. In later years when Mum would meet up with her old buddies, Winifred, Audrey, Babs, Rosie, and Sandra, Roger would drive Winifred and also pick up the others in the group so they could still meet, even after Winifred's death last year. Winifred's death hit Mum hard. There was only one meeting of the group this year thanks to Roger and I have offered to go in Mum's stead when they can meet up again.

Mum attended Regent St school and then Methodist College Colombo like her Mum before her. Auntie Delrine also went to Methodist College and I was the third generation to go there. Her old school friend Coral Barsenbeck told me that she and Mum had Eurythmics lessons with Timmy Ingleton (which I also did as well as ballet lessons). Coral and Mum were in a concert as Arabian dancers and Mum's costume was made out of an olive-green sari.

Mum knew that I longed to learn piano but we didn't have one. When I was 10, she spoke to our neighbours across the way (Maurice and Ginny Juriansz) and arranged for me to practise on their piano. When they had to cut my practice times back (due to their daughters exams) she spoke to another set of neighbours, the Bartolomeusz's who had a piano that wasn't getting much use and I was able to keep learning piano until we migrated to Australia. One of my most precious possessions is the piano Mum and Dad gave me for my 18th birthday.

We lived in a ground floor flat for a while where the menagerie of animals began-kittens, fish, tortoise and then in Dehiwela, a puppy and chickens. Mum did not allow animals in bed but I still remember finding Dandy our pup sleeping behind Mum's pillow on his first night as she couldn't get him to sleep any other way.

Mum had a habit of taking off her rings before she went to bed. One night when I was 14 a burglar pulled out a bar from my bedroom window and went thru to my parents' room. Mum woke just as he was grabbing things off the dressing table and screamed and he ran out a door which he had left open. I was a very heavy sleeper and woke after it was all over. Mum was so upset as she had lost her engagement ring and Dad had one remade but it didn't look quite the same as the old one.

Mum was a great seamstress. She would look at pictures in magazines and make dresses for herself and me. I always had a new dress for every birthday and Christmas and she also made my confirmation dress in white lace. She was upset she couldn't bring her old Singer machine to Australia.

When Mum married Dad she became an instant auntie to 5 nephews and a niece as dad was the youngest of his family and married late. Dickie the oldest was Dad's godson and he and his wife Annabelle would come stay with Mum and Dad regularly. My other cousins Johan, Bertie, Remy and David have also kept in contact with Mum and she was always glad to hear from them.

Mum also loved spending time with her niece Michelle and nephew Graeme and their families whenever they were in Melbourne. I became the sole rep of this generation of Mum's family in Melbourne as first my brothers and then cousins moved interstate or overseas.

When Mum and Dad decided to immigrate to Australia along with a lot of their contemporaries, it was for the sake of us kids. The 3 of us had gone through school in English and Dad knew we would not cope with going to uni and studying in Sinhalese. Mum was the last of her family to emigrate though Dad was the only one of his. It was hard for them as Dad had to try various jobs and Mum had to go to work for the first time and run a household without any help. However, she was a very good cook and an efficient housewife. For the first time the 3 of us would come home to an empty house, watch tv and raid the pantry until Mum and Dad got home

When I became engaged to Russell, Mum threw herself into the preparations with enthusiasm despite also having to care for Dad. I realized I was fighting a battle to get more of Russ's and my friends to the wedding as Mum wanted to invite so many of hers. In the end I was inviting our friends as mum's advised that they couldn't come. Mum made the cakes for wrapping and cutting at our wedding and it was decorated by Mum's and Dad's good friend Louise.

Mum and Dad were thrilled to become grandparents when Jeremy and Savoy's son Jordan was born in 1997. As Dad was in poor health, they brough Jordie down to meet the family when he was a few months old. Reilly my older son was born next in 2001, and Jake came along in 2009. Mum used to pick them up twice a week after school and feed them royally. She was always asking why I didn't give them more food after school.

Mum's Christmas cake was legendary, very moist and always beautifully wrapped. She also made a great love cake, milk toffee and of course rice and curry. Mum in later years would have me go over to help mix all the ingredients together for the Xmas cake. Last year I suddenly realised I hadn't been asked to help. She had made the whole thing by herself so I only helped with the icing and the wrapping of the cake. I was planning this year to try and be there from beginning to end so I could learn how to do it properly as she was always saying this might be her last year of making Xmas cake.

Mum and Dad loved to entertain their friends and Mum liked her house just so. However, we had several cats and 2 dogs in Dina and Kim whose fur stuck to everything. Kim was Mum's constant companion after Dad's death and I am sorry I could not persuade her to get another dog for company when he passed away.

Mum and Dad had a series of dinners for their 40th anniversary so that they could fit their many friends in. Mum organised the venue for her 80th birthday with meticulous detail and enthusiasm – she included as many of her friends as possible and had a wonderful time. Mum and Dad started a tradition of inviting relatives and friends over for dinner on the 1st of January, and though the numbers dwindled over the years, Mum kept the tradition alive and we would go over every year for dinner and light sparklers afterwards.

This year was hard on Mum and it was sad to see her finding it harder to manage as the year went on. After a fall on Australia Day she lost confidence about walking outside on her own and eventually began using a walker. I used to try and take her for walks so at least she would see and talk to some of her neighbours, and I have to say a special thank you to Jenny and Richard, Sonya and Honnie and the kids for checking up on her and taking food over to her as well. Mum's many friends still kept in contact by phone but mostly she would see me, and as I also had to supervise her physio exercises, I don't think she enjoyed some of my visits. Russell has always got a smile and in many ways has been a great help – he did most of her shopping and the boys would go over to get her paper and mail and check on her when I was working from home. After she went into hospital the plan was for her to go into rehab for 2-3 weeks but her condition worsened and on the Sunday the specialist rang to say that the family should come in and the 4 of us, Delrine and Hans raced to the hospital. It was bittersweet watching her respond to my cousins facetimeing and talking to her that afternoon. Jake made her happy talking about Collingwood's win. Reilly and I stayed the night and we got some beautiful smiles each time she woke and realised we were still there. The next evening she deteriorated again and my Auntie Delrine came in and Jake. She passed away peacefully that night ironically at the same hospital as Dad did and at the same age of 81.

Mum was 82 yesterday and we had rice and curry just as she would have liked and sang Happy Birthday to her and Nanna with the cake Sonya and Honnie brought over. I'd like to thank everyone who supported us and Mum this year, including my close friends and Mothers group friends who also welcomed Mum, her neighbours, my workmates who filled in for me when I had to go to Mum, the doctors and staff at Bellbird and Knox who cared for her, friends who kept in touch with her and all the many people who have sent flowers, messages and cards, rung and supported us in any way since she passed away. I know many people would have liked to attend today so I will be organising a memorial service for her when things get better.

Mum you have left a hole in all our hearts but I know you are in God's care and are happy with Dad, Nanna and Grandpa and all the friends who went before you. And I know you are watching over us.

Sharon