

Remembering Connie Sharman, my mum

by Judy Sharman Harrelson

Connie Sharman, my mother, celebrated her 100th birthday in April this year with richly deserved messages of congratulations from Princess Anne's office, the White House, the CEO of Save the Children and the staff in their Manila office. She died peacefully at her Leamington Spa, England home on October 2.

My mother was a modest lady who never quite felt worthy of all the accolades, others knew she was a generous and big-hearted person. A founding member of the local branch of Save the Children in 1959, she continued to be an active fundraiser for the charity for over 50 years.

Her contribution to her adopted communities of Leamington Spa and Warwickshire didn't stop there. In the 70's she taught English to Punjabi women, worked with the Conservation Society to educate on population and the environment; and in the last 20 years was an active member of OWL (One World Link), Oddfellows and United Nations. Gian Clare, the Chairman of the local UNA commented that "Connie was a source of strength and encouragement in keeping the branch alive."

As a mother, she was a best friend, a teacher, a healer, a coach who always had time for me. She taught me to be loving and happy, and to help others. She would remind me that "When you do something good, you feel good too." Relax, have fun; sometimes you can just walk down the street and smile" she said.

Many friends have recently commented to me that Connie inspired them to do better in their lives and to make a difference. One of them, Chris Philpott, said "I felt I was in the presence of a wise woman who had lived a long life with a clear and sharp mind. She had dedication and great compassion for the suffering of others."

The local LETS (Local Exchange and Trading System) allows people to exchange time and skills to benefit others in the community. Connie was one of the founding members, so a natural offshoot was that the group provided catering for her when she became less able to do so herself. They said they benefited as



much as she did. "The seven of us from LETS who have been providing weekend dinners for Connie have all looked forward to our chats over shared meals," said Dave Steele. "She's always happy and a real inspiration. It's been a privilege to know Connie."

Born in New Jersey, USA, Connie's college years were spent in Saratoga Springs, NY at Skidmore College where she studied Math - pretty impressive for a girl in the 1930's. The photo shows her at her 70th Reunion at age 93 in 2007, pointing at herself in 1936 as she campaigned for Roosevelt's re-election.

Connie met my father, Eric Sharman, a chemist sent over from England to work, at the Textile Research Institute in Princeton, NJ. They returned to England to marry in 1954, and Connie has lived and been part of the Leamington Spa community ever since.

Connie lived a full life, with a sharp mind, embracing a century of change. She recounted tales of her father in the 1920's rigging up an automatic timer for their coal furnace in the cellar. He used an alarm clock, one of those old ticking kinds, and some string attached to a door that opened the furnace vent, to start heating up the house early in the morning. She went on to embrace all of modern technology, Googling things she wanted to research and sending emails around the world.

What was her secret to a long and

healthy life? She was happy. She embraced change, and was constantly learning new things. She ate whatever she wanted, in moderation, and adhered to her natural vitamin program, which helped her to avoid many medications. Perhaps another secret was her bedtime cocoa or even the

glass of scotch she enjoyed before dinner.

In lieu of a funeral, there was a Celebration of Life for Connie in both England and New Jersey. She left her body to medical science at Leicester University for the education of future doctors in Great Britain. Connie set herself a target to raise £5k for Save the Children in her centenary year and it is hoped that this target will be met with donations in lieu of flowers which can be made via www.justgiving.com/

connie-sharman.

All we know is, if a well lived life is about how many people you love and how many love you, then Connie, my Mum, lived the best example, with a smile on her face.

Judy Sharman Harrelson is a Siler City resident. Along with husband Mike, she owns and operates Glass and Window Warehouse.

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