

EULOGY

**For Valerie Patricia Hooke
Friday, 26th January 2018**

1. EARLY YEARS

Valerie Patricia Buck was born in Strood, near Frinsbury, in March 1924. She was the 5th child to be born to Elizabeth and Benjamin Buck. Benjamin was a wheelwright in the Royal Navy, and was known for his temper and dogmatic views. Lizzie was a warm, generous mother and home maker who adored her latest offspring.

Valerie had 2 brothers and 2 sisters. By the age of 10, Bennie and Clarice had married brothers, and Valerie was bridesmaid to both of them. They had always attended church together: mother, girls and boyfriends. Valerie loved Sunday School, and especially enjoyed drawing pictures of the biblical flat roofed houses.

She was happy at school and did well in her work, supported by a teacher who she really liked. Her parents taught her good manners and polite behaviour, "We don't use a word like 'bum'. We're not common."

Now over 40, Lizzie became pregnant again – this time with Stuart who had Downs syndrome. He had to be taken to Great Ormond St Children's hospital regularly, and in February 1933 it was very cold with snow, and mother had a cold. After travelling to London on the train she caught pneumonia, and died in six days. Valerie didn't cry but had an awful feeling of emptiness. "God bless you Duckie," were her mother's last words to her. She was 10 years old.

2. NEW HOME

Fortunately, she had an Aunt, Lilian Elliott, her mother's sister, who lived in Bishop's Castle, Shropshire. Uncle Harold and Auntie Lilian had no children of their own, and had wanted to adopt her at birth. She had already spent many happy holidays with them, and so it was a natural transition to go to live with them. However, Auntie was strict and was very angry if Valerie broke anything, and she felt a failure – even though she tried hard to please and did very well at school. She was usually top of the class, and she enjoyed acting, singing and dancing. She also enjoyed an affectionate relationship with Uncle, who loved having discussions with his young niece. But Valerie felt cut off from her family. Auntie was very possessive, and so Valerie saw little of her sisters, and only saw her father once after her mother's death.

However, she continued going to church, now with her aunt and uncle, and was confirmed at the age of 15.

That same year, war broke out. Valerie's teachers had wanted her to go to university, but Auntie and Uncle couldn't afford to send her, so instead she started to work for Uncle, who was the billeting officer. She worked in his office, helping with ration cards and letters regarding evacuees who came from Liverpool. She also learnt to knit sea boot stockings, mittens and balaclavas for the troops and navy.

3. WAR TIME

Valerie wanted to help with the war effort and so she joined the WAAF at 17. She was excited at the new experience and the interesting people. Everybody had a purpose, and supported each other. She felt like a bird let out of a cage. For initial physical training she went to Morecambe for several weeks. It was November and very cold marching along the sea front to the pier where they did their exercises wearing 'black outs' – long shorts and top.

In 1941 she was sent to Harwell to serve Bomber Command 3 group, sending Wellingtons (aeroplanes) to the Middle East. She worked in the admin office, and was the stationery clerk, so she had to order anything that was necessary. On one occasion she had asked for a new roller (for a duplicating machine) and a phone call came through 'please tell us what you want this steam roller for...!'

In 1942 she was sent to Waterbeach, where she became a sergeant. Here she trained to become a clerk's special duty watch keeper. This involved recording all the orders for the squadrons i.e. target and bomb load for bombing raids. Previously this role had only been undertaken by male squadron leaders, but Valerie, at 18, despite being female and one of the youngest there, was given this job.

In 1943, now Leading Aircraft Woman LAC Buck, she was deployed to Witchford to work with 115 Lancaster Squadron, and she stayed there until the war ended in 1945.

Valerie remembers marking the end of the war with a Victory Parade, and a Thanksgiving service in Ely Cathedral where she sat in the stalls, soaking wet, as it had been pouring with rain.

4. AFTER THE WAR

With the end of the war came a terrible vacuum. She was sent to Husband's Bosworth to demobilise, to return her uniform, to collect her ration book and money for clothes – and then went home.

Fortunately, in due course she found a job at RAF Northolt.

At the end of 1947 Valerie found that she was expecting a baby. As an unmarried mother in this era, keeping the baby was not really an option, even if she had the means of support. She left her job at Northolt and for a while became a nanny to a lovely family, the MacKenzies. They were Catholics and were very kind to her.

As the time of birth drew near she went to live at Birdhurst Lodge, run by the Mission of Hope, where young women were looked after before and after the birth of their babies. Unlike other institutions, at Birdhurst she only encountered love, tenderness - and a genuine, living Christian faith which was completely new to her. Here she met extraordinary Christian people who supported her and arranged for her baby daughter to be adopted. With the help of a nurse, Dorothy, Valerie gave her life over to Jesus. She attended regular Bible studies and loved the hymn

singing. Special hymns from this time included, "Love Divine, all loves excelling" and "Oh love that wilt not let me go". These words say everything.

In recent years, a favourite song was one we sang earlier:

'like a rose, trampled in the ground, he took the fall, and thought of me above all'.
(NB the rose on the OOS)

So into this dark and painful time of her life were sown seeds of love, light and hope – which blossomed into full flower in the subsequent years.

Valerie's little girl was christened Susan Patricia Buck at five weeks old. Her adoptive parents called her Rowena Hunnisett.

In the early '80s, when the law changed making it possible for mothers and adopted children to make contact, Mum left a message at Birdhirst indicating that she would be happy to meet her daughter, and leaving her phone number. In 1985, when Rowena's father was dead, and her mother very ill, she made the bold and even scary decision to trace her birth mother. It was now very easy to do and within a short space of time, Mum was contacting the five Hooke children to tell us that we had another sister. Imagine our surprise! It has been a delight for all of us to come to know Rowena, now Rowan, and her partner Ren over these last years and for her to be a part of our family.

But we have jumped over many years.

5. MARRIAGE

After the birth of her daughter, Valerie went to stay with her sister, Bennie, who suggested that she take up nursing. This resonated strongly with her, and so she went to Birmingham to train, and became a staff nurse in 1951. It was in January of that year that she met George at a ball. George and Valerie were married on 26 July 1952. The honeymoon was in Edale, Derbyshire, where George introduced Val to the delights of hillwalking, and bought her her first pair of walking boots. In the years to come, camping holidays became an annual event for the Hooke household, even when there were 7 of us, and we were travelling on public transport.

In 1953 twins Katherine and Graham were born – weighing in at over 14lbs! But the births weren't straightforward. Valerie had a severe haemorrhage and the placenta didn't come away. Valerie felt herself fading and cried "My babies, my babies." The doctor, aptly named Dr Love, did a manual evacuation, and her life was saved.

In 1958 another set of twins, Wendy and Andrew, were born. This time it was Wendy, being very tiny, that only just survived.

The family had been living in Cheadle Hulme, but the house had become too small, and George needed another job with more money. So it was that he found a job at English Electric (now Bae) in Warton, and the family moved to 26 Rossall Rd, Ansdell – next door to the Baptist Manse at no 24. The Baptist minister and his wife were very friendly, and so the family started going to the church. Within 2 years

they were baptised. A few years earlier they had gone to the Keswick Convention where they had both committed their lives afresh, and this time, together, to the Lord.

In 1964, Richard was born – thankfully this time not with a twin!

So what marked her life in Ansdell?

a. Caring: From being a little girl, Val had cared about the poor and needy. In addition she was challenged by the words of Dick Shepherd, speaking about the poor on the radio. So it was that 26 Rossall Road became a place of hospitality, always open to visitors, whether for a cup of tea, a meal or an overnight stay – or more! One series of meetings, run over several years, were called “Squashes”, and that is just what they were, when, on at least one occasion, more than 50 people were in the house with some sitting half way up the stairs!

It was only at the end of last year, 58 years on after moving into the house, and when the cell group moved from no 26 to the church, that Mum commented that it was sad to no longer have a group meeting in the house.

b. Banners: Lytham Club Day first gave Valerie an opportunity to use her creative gifts, when she helped make a banner saying, ‘The earth is the Lord’s’. Her banner-making skills were developed and put into use for March for Jesus in the 1970s, and then in creating banners for display all around Ansdell Baptist Church.

It was rare for her to do anything simply for her own personal enjoyment, but later, when all the family had left home, she started going to the Art Class at the church, and was able at last to develop a latent talent.

c. Books: George and Val enjoyed reading Christian literature, and wanted to encourage others to read. So they started with a book box and later became book agents providing book stalls at events around the Fylde for many years to come. This was one of the pieces in the jigsaw, which lead to the Christian bookshop, Stepping Stones, in Lytham.

d. Missionaries: Val’s concern for the poor, made her a committed supporter of many missionary organisations: (BMS, MAF, OM, UFM, Tear fund, Barnabus..) In fact, countless missionary mags still find their way through the letterbox of no 26! In those early years BMS missionaries came to the church on deputation and so Val decided to organise meetings, and have folk round for coffee after church, in order to hear what the missionaries had to say. Her missionary involvement and support continued into her 90s with her commitment to Sundar & Sarah’s mission in India, Fountain of Life Ministries.

e. Family: As Mum grew older, family became more and more important, and a great source of pride and joy. She has left behind 11 grandchildren (Sarah, Lydia, James, Beth, Joy, Becky, Sam, Rachel, Ruth, Charlotte and Jono) and 6 great-grandchildren (Timmy, Ethan, Isaac, Jack, Shona, Elisha)

f. Music: One of Val’s regrets, when she went to live with her aunt and uncle, was that she could no longer have piano lessons from her sister, Bennie. This

regret led her to ensure that each of her children had the opportunity to have piano lessons. She could never have imagined how important this would in our lives – and today, 3 of us will be playing the piano.

FINALLY

Recently Mum told me that she always had music going round her head. What kind of music I asked? All sorts – she replied – worship songs, classical music...

On her last weekend, which she spent in hospital, she told Sarah that she had a carol in her mind. '*God rest you merry gentleman*'. I was bemused, as this was 3 weeks after Christmas, until I called the next words to mind:

*Let nothing you dismay,
Remember Christ our Saviour
Was born on Christmas day
To save us all from satan's power
When we had gone astray.
O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy.
O tidings of comfort and joy.*

These words express the bedrock of my mother's life, and I know they would be the message she would want to leave with each one of us today.