

During a search of the internet recently, a member of the Norris family came across an opinion poll asking people to vote for the top ten most beautiful words in the English language. It perhaps comes as no surprise to hear that the word “mother” gained the most votes as the most beautiful word. Hilda Norris was a loving mother, grandmother and great grandmother and her family meant everything to her. She embodied all the qualities of this beautiful word. She doted on her five children and nine grandchildren and followed their lives and their achievements with pride. She was her happiest at family gatherings. When her great grandson, Charlie, arrived in September last year, she declared herself to be “the proudest woman in the world.” Hilda was also the treasured wife of Ted, with whom she shared 55 wonderful years of marriage.



Hilda Monica Norris was born in Myrtle Avenue, Leigh, Greater Manchester, on April 17, 1932, to Tom and Nellie Smith. Tom had worked as a stonemason in his native Merthyr Tydfil, but moved to Leigh in order to find new work as a tram driver. Sadly he died suddenly when Hilda was just seven. Hilda, the youngest of six girls, attended Leigh Parish School. After leaving at 14, she began work as a confectioner at a local bakery.



Hilda as a little girl

Although Ted lived only a few streets away, he did not get to know Hilda until after she left school, although he had met her older sister, Joan, at the parish youth club. The couple met on the Sunday evening “Monkey run” in Bradshawgate, Leigh. Ted is at a loss to explain why it was called the “Monkey Run,” but it centred on gangs of girls promenading along Bradshawgate, watched by appreciative gangs of boys. This was a favoured Sunday evening activity because the cinema was closed and the local pub was out of reach to anyone under the age of 21. That particular evening, as the gangs dispersed and made their way home, Ted noticed Hilda walking alone towards her house. Although the streets were relatively safe in those days, Ted, being a chivalrous chap, offered to take her home. This was the beginning of a lifetime of togetherness that was to span close on 60 years.





Hilda when she was 18

The courting couple kept in touch while Ted was doing his national service in Devizes, Wiltshire, and later in Manchester, where he spent his last six months working as a regimental police officer. After his demob, he decided to make a career of the police force, joining Lancashire Constabulary in 1952. Six months later, he and Hilda became engaged. They were married at St John's Church, Leigh, on March 13, 1954. But just before the ceremony, Hilda had the misfortune to break two fingers – including her ring finger – in a rolling machine at work. It was touch and go whether she would be able to wear her wedding ring on her big day. But Ted came up with an ingenious solution; he decided to apply some Vaseline to the inside of the wedding ring, so that it would be easier to slide on to his bride's finger. Unfortunately, in his haste he picked up a jar of Vick, instead of the intended Vaseline. The result was that Hilda's wedding vows were accompanied by a powerful and heady whiff of chest decongestant!



Ted's first posting as a police officer was in Ashton-under-Lyne. Initially the newly married couple lived apart, Ted in lodgings and Hilda staying at her childhood home, until a house could be found. Eventually they were offered a three-bedroomed terraced house behind the police station, with views over the railway line, and Hilda found work as a confectioner at the local UCP shop. In 1955, their eldest child, Elaine, was born, followed by a son, Keith, in 1956, and another daughter, Patsy, in 1957. It was during Patsy's home birth that Ted took on the role of midwife and rolled up his sleeves to deliver the child himself, helped by a neighbour. Fortunately for him, he had already been given instruction on dealing with emergency childbirth a few weeks earlier, as part of his police first aid training!



Hilda and Ted on their wedding day

Patsy's name is not the one her parents originally had in mind for her. Her intended name was to be Catherine, but Ted, assigned the task of registering his daughter's name, had a sudden change of heart as he made his way to the registry office, and decided to name the infant Patsy. When he came back and told Hilda what he had done, she was not surprisingly bemused. But she got used to it eventually!



In April 1958, Ted was posted to Swinton and the family re-located. Two more children, David and Gary arrived, bringing the Norris brood to five. After seven years, Ted, faced with the daunting possibility that he might have to spend the rest of his police career in Manchester, decided to consider other options. A senior colleague raised the idea of what was then known as a “detached beat” in Lancashire. Initially Ted was offered the opportunity of a beat near Hutton police headquarters, but this was later withdrawn after another police officer decided that it would be an ideal location for his son to attend Hutton Grammar School. A day later Ted received a telephone call to say that Pilling had been without a police incumbent for 12 months, and asking did he fancy that.

“Where the bloody hell is Pilling?” was Hilda’s bemused response!

After discussion, the couple decided to accept the posting, before actually visiting the place. But they did manage to have a look round before they moved in. Ted recalls that first visit in January 1965: “Work had just started on the sewers and it was pitch black. I remember saying to Hilda ‘I don’t know what we’ve let ourselves in for here’. But we decided to give it until Easter and if we weren’t happy I would ask for a transfer.

“In the end it was the kids who decided it for us. They were happy at school and they made friends and children were always coming round to this house, so the decision was made.”



Hilda on a family picnic with children Elaine, Patsy, David and Gary



It was a decision they never regretted. Home was the police house in Lancaster Road. Ted's role as "village bobby" meant that he was well known in the village and he and Hilda were also quick to make friends in the farming community. Hilda found a job as a "dinner lady" at Pilling C.E. School and later at St William's RC School. She later worked at Sea Spray Roses, in Duck Street, Pilling, where she was involved in pruning roses.

But it was as wife of the village policeman, that Hilda took on an unpaid and vital support role, answering the telephone while Ted was on his visits to outlying farms, and making sure that messages for her husband were relayed to the central police station in Garstang, where they were then transferred to his radio (these were pre-mobile phone days). It was during the Pilling flood disaster of 1977 that Hilda went beyond the bounds of duty and, with daughter Patsy, worked through the night to make sure villagers, whose homes had been flooded, had vital hot drinks to keep them warm, along with words of comfort. Hilda's efforts were recognised when she received a letter of commendation from the Chief Constable of Lancashire.



Hilda plays bowls at the Golden Ball, Pilling



When Ted took early retirement from the police in 1979, after 14 years as village policeman, the couple moved to St John's Avenue. As a keen bowler, Hilda made many friends while playing for the Golden Ball and the Reading Room ladies' teams, and only hung up her woods just two years ago. She loved to watch Ted play bowls and accompanied him to matches across the district, always sure to find someone to chat to.

Hilda also enjoyed going to bingo and made lots of friends through her weekly visits to Barney's Bingo in Fleetwood and, when that closed, to the Orion in Cleveleys. When both bingo halls closed she was devastated at the loss of social contact this spelled for her. She was delighted when she discovered a new bingo centre, at Fleetwood Football Club, in the weeks prior to her death.



Hilda with Ted on Busselton Jetty, Australia

With Ted, she loved travelling and visiting different places. They visited Australia three times, staying with their youngest son, Gary and his wife, Mary, at their home in Busselton, Western Australia.

Hilda enjoyed the sunshine and the Australian way of life. She saved diligently for each trip and had pinned her hopes on making a fourth visit next year. Nearer to home, Hilda and Ted enjoyed regular days out in Morecambe, where they regularly parked near the Eric Morecambe statue, lunched in a nearby café and then walked along the Prom.



But it was within her family that Hilda derived her greatest pleasure and joy in life. With each new grandchild, she eagerly knitted jackets, hats and bootees, and she proudly produced photographs to show off the latest addition to anyone who might be around, whether that be on the bowling green or in the bingo hall. She loved family events and beamed with pride at the weddings of her granddaughters, Helen and Aime, and grandson, Gavin, and at the recent first birthday party of her great grandson, Charlie. When she and Ted celebrated their Golden Wedding anniversary with a family party at the home of her son, Keith and his wife, Angela, in 2004, she was thrilled to be surrounded by all her grandchildren. She enjoyed baking and kept her family supplied with cakes – flapjacks, sponge buns, carrot cake, and coconut slice, enjoying experimenting with different recipes. No family occasion was complete without Hilda's appetising array of home-made sausage rolls and savoury pies, and, at Christmas, her moist and flavoursome sage and onion stuffing, could not be rivalled.



Ted and Hilda pictured with their nine grandchildren on their Golden Wedding Anniversary



Hilda will be greatly missed by her husband, Ted, children, Elaine, Keith, Patsy, David and Gary; grandchildren, Helen, Robert, Gavin, Darren, John, Paul, Aime, Tom and Jake; great grandson, Charlie, and surviving sister, Pat.



Hilda and Ted celebrate their Golden Wedding anniversary

The final word comes from Ted:

“We’ve had 55 years of happy marriage and we’ve never really fallen out. We were together all the time. She was always the boss, but she was my best mate and we didn’t do anything without each other.”



