

Boudicca in a Cottage

“The reading chosen for Angie’s funeral, taken from Tennyson’s *Ulysses* reminds us of something Angie knew so well: that we are a part of all we have met. To draw on one of her favourite words, “*treasure*”, we have here among us a living treasury of Angie stories and we all knew her across a variety of roles.

As a gardener, Angie found solace in seasons and the cycles of nature. She devoted her life to roots and shoots – roots in the past, roots in the community, roots in tradition of all kinds – and shoots, in her restless curiosity, her lifelong learning, her thirst for knowledge and quest to seek out shiny and brilliant things. She could swiftly pull out the best fact from a history book, the best cake from the table, and the best bargain at the jumble sale.

Her ability to take any plant cutting and make it grow echoes her wider gift, to achieve anything she turned her hand to. A natural polymath, she was a determined self-starter with extensive knowledge of everything from the classics to sport, botany, architecture, current affairs, all eras of history, art, Latin and French.

She loved to share this knowledge with others and saw no hierarchy to culture or ideas; everything had a place - Iron Maiden alongside Elgar, Shakespeare next to the sports pages. She travelled alone to America and Europe; spent 12 years baking the best cricket teas; completed The Telegraph crossword every weekend, and never missed the Proms or the cricket.

But I knew her best as our grandmother.

Our Gran was wild and wicked, wise and difficult, hilarious and naughty, a colourful presence across so many lives. She was Boudicca in a cottage and there was no one quite like her.

She built communities, she built histories, she built archives. She believed in the power of storytelling, woven into the tapestry of every day. We never knew which of the stories were true; but we also learnt that that didn’t matter – stories are how we communicate, connect, and transform.

Growing up in her parents’ shop, she would play with the giant ice cream sign wondering what this thing called ice cream tasted like, when the war meant the real thing never arrived. She conjured up what it tasted like with a mix of fact and imagination and if there’s one thing Gran taught us, it’s exactly that - You don’t have to eat the ice cream to taste the ice cream. She’d transport you to a medieval battlefield or an Elizabethan court, to the kitchen table of your great-grandmother, or to a West Virginian diner. She made the past your present, other worlds your world.

Gran was practical and highly resourceful, able to rustle up something out of nothing. She wrote us instruction manuals for daunting experiences: how to get on a plane; how to make scrambled eggs in the microwave; how to navigate the Underground. When we were scared of vaccinations, she taught us to inject syringes into oranges.

She always spoke to us like adults, never patronising, no dumbing down, taking our young minds to castles, to London, to theatres, to her history evening class, teaching us aged four how to say *vini vidi vici*.

But mostly, Gran was pure fun and mischief. She was the naughtiest person we knew – contraband toys, smuggled treats, staying up all night, whispering anarchic things at the tensest moments, seeming to not give a monkeys what anyone thought. She called us Poddle, or Treasure; she had a mantra, “*Follow Your Nose*”; she would joyfully shout “*Snails For Jesus*” as we flung them over her garden wall.

She threw open the world to show us its depth, its magic and mysteries. The message was that everything out there is always greater than it currently seems, as well as everything within ourselves.

It is impossible to celebrate Gran without talking about post. She kept the postal service alive. A beautiful letter writer, she wrote to us at least once a week, sometimes more, for almost 30 years, and her devotion to letter-writing extended to friends and family in every corner of the globe. For those nearest to her who didn't require a stamp there would be handwritten notes and messages. Newspaper cuttings, recipes, gardening tips, bits for school or work projects, audio letters recorded on a Dictaphone, something from the jumble sale, animal doodles.

Letters written on medical rep. notepaper from the surgery where she worked. The loops and precision of her craftful handwriting, and for a while the secret picture alphabet we developed between us to decode at either end. Her post to South Africa came not just to me, but to the children I was teaching, who also called her Granny and devoured her weekly football magazines. In recent years, her great-grandchildren became another generation for whom her handwriting and illustrations would herald untold delight and discovery.

So if you want to pay quiet tribute to Angie, maybe take the time to write someone you love a letter. The last letter I sent to her, I sat and wrote just before her birthday, on the day of the Women's March. It felt a fitting way to mark the Women's Marches – celebrating the strength, magic and determined marching of a courageous and colourful, unique and learned woman.

She often talked of writing a book, and what a book that would have been. In the absence of a physical publication, however, her stories and words will live on in the hearts and minds of all us celebrating her here today. Angie Cooksley – mother, grandmother, great-grandmother – dear friend, colleague, villager - guide, speaker, community member – a doer, an artist, a writer - and a woman of wonderful stories.

Lift your hearts to wish Angie well, as the vessel puffs her sail.”

