

Dorothy Cobb 27 July 1936 – 18 January 2021

Dorothy Cobb was a ball of energy and enthusiasm; her positive outlook saw her through forty odd years after having a kidney transplant and a life well lived into her mid eighties. It was my children in the choir at St Nics who met Dorothy long before I did. She welcomed them and was kind to them as they found their feet. Much, much later I found myself getting to know her through giving her lifts to church, when walking down from the High Road became an ordeal for her. But it wasn't until last year when chatting on the phone during Covid Lockdowns that I learnt about her life story. And what a story !

A casual remark that Francis and I had been on a bike ride to Wormwood Scrubs, to which she replied 'Oh, that's where John and I courted' prompted me to ask more. This is what I learnt from Dorothy herself, from John, and from Jan Vickers and Anne McBride:

Dorothy started life in Bramley Road, near Latimer Road Station, going to primary school in nearby Sirdar Road and then to secondary school in Shepherds Bush Road. She was one of eight children (four boys and four girls) and the eldest of the younger four. War time included a year in Wales when she was evacuated with one of her brothers to Aberystwyth where she said she had a lovely time. As a teenager, back in London, her days started early as she worked at the dairy next door before going on to school.

When schooldays were over, Dorothy wanted to go into bag making, but without opportunities locally to do this she worked in a Latimer Road factory making boxes for Cadbury's chocolates. John lived in nearby Portland Road. They'd known each other quite a while when they married, but even so Dorothy was still not quite 21 and had to get her parents' permission. And the month before that she had passed her driving test – 'I got my wheels,' she told me proudly. Hers were on a white Austin A40. Not many women got behind the wheel at that time. Years later when I, a very late driver, was having difficulty parking in Church St of a Sunday morning, Dorothy would tell me what to do to line up beside the curb !

Once married, Dorothy and John came to Chiswick, first to a couple of rooms in Whitehall Park Road, and then to various places in and near to the area, such as Earls Court for a while. Eventually they arrived at Merton Avenue where they lived in a house owned by Frank Field's family, a connection I heard about when Frank Field, who as a boy was in the choir at St Nics, was guest at a Conversational Evensong just before the Modern Slavery Bill, with which he had much to do, became law. Dorothy enjoyed a good chat with him that evening.

John worked for years for the Revelation Luggage company in Power Road, starting at £7 a week, he told me, and going on to become a key manager in the company. A bit further along the road was the Bush Co where Dorothy worked for ten years putting radios together. Spare times were spent seeing family and friends and going to see the grey hounds that John started buying. Dorothy introduced him to a trainer who kept a kennels, to which John and she would dash off on John's motor bike. After getting his first dog John couldn't resist buying more and at one point owned a hundred ! At one stage he had two dogs which between them won five graded races on the trot. No mean achievement. When he was working up in Scotland, sorting out a takeover

made by the Revelation company, he'd come back from Glasgow on a Thursday if the dogs were racing on the Friday.

The time came when Dorothy started training in her forties to be a State Enrolled Nurse but she was thwarted when her kidneys packed up and she was put on the transplant list. The outcome of the operation was one of the early success stories of kidney transplants. Instead of becoming a nurse she became a volunteer at the Hammersmith Renal Unit, which is where Jan Vickers worked for many years. Far from restricting her active life she went on to work with Pearl, the wife of her surgeon, Peter Gower. Pearl ran a catering service for charitable concerns related to the Renal Unit and for Macmillan Nurses. They laid on meals for the conferences of the team of medics who met at Charing Cross hospital to discuss kidney transplants and dialysis. 'We did real cooking', said Dorothy, 'proper roasts'. The doctors loved it and so did Dorothy. Pearl became a very close friend and when she later got cancer it was Dorothy and Macmillan Nurses who looked after her. Indeed Dorothy lived with Pearl and her husband at the end of Pearl's life. From the time of her transplant Dorothy spent hours knitting baby clothes and crocheting items for the shop at the hospital run to raise funds for research and went to the annual conferences about transplants, regarding these expeditions as little holidays.

Dorothy's connection with St Nics came about through her meeting with Betty Madden at the house of two sisters, friends of Dorothy's who lived further along Airedale Avenue from Betty. In no time at all Betty had recruited Dorothy for the church choir and so she became a part of the St Nics community, always lively, welcoming and chatty. Anne McBride remembers how Dorothy welcomed her into the choir in the late '70s as well as inviting her to join the Mothers Union. Apparently she always carried smelling salts in her cassock pocket, in case of need. They came in very handy when Anne fainted one day and woke up on the vestry floor with Dot looking down at her while the smelling salts wafted up her nose! More recently after moving with John to Whittingham Court, Dorothy enjoyed the companionship of the Monthly Lunches at St Denys's House and became a great supporter of Ruby Akhurst, taking her out for bus rides to Kingston, Hounslow and Hammersmith, entertaining her at the flat and sewing up her crochet squares. The two of them would sit together at Parish Mass after parking their wheelers in a side aisle.

As the years went by there were increasingly frequent trips to hospital, where, John told me, Dorothy was actually very happy and so well known. This past year she was unable to move about easily and couldn't manage the stairs so the confinement required by Lockdowns didn't impose further restrictions on her. Her death came when there was little prospect of renewed health for Dorothy. She had run her race; how well she had run it.

Dorothy, we shall miss you, for your friendship, your enthusiasm and your drive.

Christabel Ames-Lewis, February 2021