

Sheila is my mother-in-law ...

by Annie Wesley-Smith

Sheila is my mother-in-law. I still consider her that. And I love her to tiny bits'n'pieces.

The ties that bind as someone once said. First of all I have known her for 40 years and a few months, since not long after Easter in 1969 when I turned up, I remember, without shoes. She and Harry were having one of their dinner parties and some important people were there. It was not a good start, this flashy older woman with her precious baby of 23. Looking back I can understand completely.

Sheila is the grandmother of my three children - Jed, Olivia and Alice - and the one person in the world I could always ring with the latest small detail of their progress. "Alice has just got her first baby tooth," I would gush and she would squeal - you must all be familiar with Sheil's squeal, "Oh she hasn't has she? Clever girl!" she would answer satisfyingly. All mothers need someone who will gush as much as they do and she did that. So precious for me.

Thank you Sheila for being that person in my life.

There are so many precious memories in there too of so many holidays that Martin and I trekked across the Hay Plain to share with Harry and Sheila. With their busy bags (that Sheils had made for them) filled with paraphernalia, the children were kept occupied as we travelled to the oasis of our beloved 21 William Street.

At some point there would be the tour of the garden - that beautiful garden, if gone now, lives in all our hearts.

Often Sheila would play the piano in the music room to accompany someone - Jed, Olivia, or the boys. Where does the musical talent come from in the Wesley-Smith family you might ask? Probably from Sheila accompanying everyone.

By the way Sheila's rockbuns are legendary. And Mrs Niejalke's baked custard too.

She is just great to chat to, have you noticed that?

A classic doer, she loves to do, and does, and told me the other day it was very hard to accept help from others now. Her challenge is to accept some of the love back now. And what would we have done without all that doing too I cant even imagine. When I think of Sheila I think of her busy, simple as that, with great perseverance. How many times was Sheila still going into the wee hours of the next morning and this was up until very recently. And what about she and Keith driving over to Adelaide in one day and that wasn't so long ago!!!!!!

I cant explain her personality - that elusive Sheilanness - but whatever it is we love it so, cherish it.

She's done heaps, and among all that - the working at St Mary's with the children there, the regular tennis with the girls, the gardening of that big classic Adelaide garden, the dismantling of Harry's papers, which was huge - was the mosaic work. Most of the family have benefited from a mosaic table or a birdbowl. Sheila knows a bit about birds too. I could go on and on. Mostly though we have all benefitted from her hospitality which is one of the cornerstones of her personality. Always a cup of tea and a rockbun to be had.

One of my favourite memories is when she came to stay when Martin and I were in York. She and I would get into the sherry each evening for a while and had some riotous times - I remember Sheila's pink cheeks well. You all probably do: she gets very giggly when she's had a drop.

It has been my blessing to see a bit more of her over the last years and these have cemented our long relationship and I am very grateful for this. To share too the joy of grandchildren with their great grandma this time and all the other things we endlessly find to talk about is always a blessing.

These are a few memories of a million more and thank goodness for them. Thank you darling Sheils. You're irreplaceable.

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