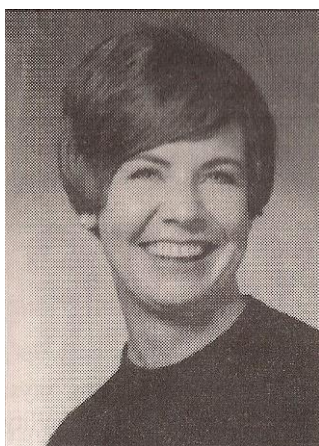


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YOUNG ELEANOR REMEMBERED

Article published in the Hammersmith Hospital Newspaper?

By: Vera Hanwright



Eleanor was no stranger to the Hammersmith. As a child her mother Nancy Lloyd was secretary to Prof Gray of O&G and her stepfather Geoff Lloyd was the PGMS librarian.

Eleanor started in 1955 as a student technician in Cardiology but her tendency to faint at patients' bedsides led her to O&G, which then had its own Haematology lab.

She was working there when I first met her at the end of 1956. I had just started at the PGMS as clerk in Dr Dacie's Haematology Department and Eleanor often popped up the corridor to visit her friend Beryl Bun. They attended night school together and compared homework.

I got to know her on the No. 7 bus. I thought she must be an animal lover as she was always hauling wicker baskets on board, but she whispered one evening she had a thyroid nodule and was making 24-hour collections!

She had a mop of curly auburn hair, an awful limp from a congenital dislocated hip for which she'd had major surgery, big blue eyes and long lashes which got her out of and into many scrapes, a great zest for life and a temper to match her hair. She gravitated to my husband and I and, although only five years her senior, she filled the painful gap that only childless couples know; or maybe she was the younger sister we never had. Whatever, she was now part of our lives and nothing ever changed that.

Her intermediate exam was looming and she attended lectures at Paddington Tech (no day release in those days). We did question her and Beryl Bun, who should have been attending chemistry lectures but came to work singing all the songs from Carmen Jones which happened to be showing at a cinema near the Tech.

Joe Hanwright, another fiery-tempered redhead, very forcibly pointed out that more attention to the books and a few less visits to the Cats Whiskers, Two Eyes and

Ronnie Scotts might not come amiss. She'd queued for hours at Hammersmith Odeon for tickets for Ella Fitzgerald, Count Basie, Oscar Peterson et al.

In those days the salary of a student technician was minuscule and Eleanor was always overspent. In the bad winter of 1957 we all had 'flu and during my time at home she turned up with a Mars Bar.

Precious

In later, more affluent years I've received many expensive presents from her worldwide travels, but nothing was more precious than that Mars Bar.

One of the jobs of the student techs was to collect the dirty laundry and pack it into big wicker baskets for collection. The boys in Bacteriology would sit Eleanor on top of a basket and push it toboggan-wise along the 'Bacty' corridor heading for Blood Transfusion. The baskets were then hurled down the stairs and woe betide anyone walking up. All this of course accompanied by much laughter, screaming and shouting. By the time Prof Lord Stamp came out of his room to reprimand them they were long gone and it was always me who caught his wrath.

In the summer of 1960 a senior member of staff moved to St Mary's Praed Street and persuaded Eleanor to go with her. We bought her an overnight case as a leaving present and Dr J.C. White presented it saying he couldn't understand why she wanted to go, it must be the rugby players! But conditions in her basement lab were dire and her time at St Mary's was short lived. One morning found me in Mr Leon Wallett's room telling him how unhappy she was and could we get her back. About a month later a vacancy occurred and she returned to Hammersmith.

Her final exams for her AIMLT weren't far off and George Garratty took her under his wing BT-wise and Sue Harrison in Haematology was her mentor. Her love for blood group serology was surfacing and, although she was on the rotating staff, the plausible excuses she always found to stay in Blood Transfusion at change over time never failed to amaze me.

The return of Dr Sheila Worlledge from Nigeria to be our Consultant changed our lives. She and George Garratty turned BT from a routine service department into an exciting research unit.

She recognised Eleanor's potential and pushed and encouraged her. When Eleanor passed her exam in 1961, plans were afoot to build a new cantilever building over the old medical corridor (now Prof Goldman's Unit). Dr Worlledge, affectionately known as 'madam', George, Eleanor and I would spend hours of our own time drawing plans for the bright new labs that were to replace our corridor.

The new building was completed in September 1963 and we took up residence in grand style. Eleanor and I pulled pints of beer from a barrel on my lovely new desk and meat pies were served at the party by 'madam'.

A while later, Eleanor asked me to have supper with her as she had something to ask me. I wondered if I was going to be asked to be matron of honour at her wedding but no, quiet Dr Larry Petz had asked her to go back to San Francisco with him as a research worker in his lab.

We sat in a fish & chip shop in Acton High Street mulling over such a move. Her fellowship would have to wait, but the excitement of San Francisco in the 60s was a great pull and after a succession of leaving parties - the last, noisy one in my house at Agnes Rd - Beryl Bun and I took her to Heathrow one very misty November morning. We never did see the plane take off, it just taxied into the fog and 'Bun' and me had a good cry.

She was soon sharing an apartment with a stunning blonde nurse called Mary Alice, but I'll throw a veil over the reported exploits of these two. Eleanor developed a love for gambling and she couldn't wait to get to Las Vegas where she slept all day and gambled all night.

Halfway through her four-year stay, she came home at Christmas and Joe Hanwright and I went to meet her. I couldn't believe my eyes - her lovely curly hair,

long and straightened and tied up in two bunches, thin as a rake and the most awful American accent.

Party season

We had six weeks to feed her, cut her hair and teach her to speak English again. It was of course the height of the party season and we gave one for her at Agnes Rd. Friends from far and wide came to see her and the little bedroom that was always hers was now full of luggage, presents, but best of all Eleanor. Our 'madam', of course, didn't let her get lazy on her vacation. Eleanor would be in the lab for a social visit (usually just before the bar opened) and would find herself sitting at the bench doing dozens of coombs tests.

She finally returned in 1967. The best thing that had happened to her while in BT at the National Heart Hospital was to meet the registrar Moira Gordon-Smith. Moira remained a close friend and propped me up and supported Eleanor literally on the very day she died. Eleanor then moved to the North London Blood Transfusion Service, but I knew she was hankering to come back to 'madam's' lab, which she did in late 1968.

Her climb up the professional ladder from then till September 1980 when she became Principal MLSO has been documented. She was dogged by bad health but never let it interfere with an active social life and intense professional one.

She'd moved from the lab bench that she loved so much to the world of administration, finance, and management - very uncomfortable areas. But she gave it her all, for Eleanor there was no other way. In this new role she so often had to grasp the nettle, but her close friends knew she was always looking for the dock leaf.

She loved good food, gin and tonic, jazz, travel, clothes, the omnibus edition of the Archers and cut and thrust conversation with friends who were brave.

Footnote

Ruth, a friend from Portugal, wrote to Eleanor while she was ill and ended saying, "Tell that bloody cancer to sod off so you can come out and play with your friends." Oh Ruth, if only.