You only get to know your mother when she leaves home. Which she did when Mike and I were in our late teens. Off she went to Wellington with Sam, Jeremy, Chris and Wendy. We stayed and went to Christchurch Art School.

In our twenties we both moved to Melbourne which is a long way away. So it took a while to get to know her better and the getting-to-know you was naturally intermittent given the distance and preoccupations. Correspondence was all too sparse. Knowledge was gained slowly

And of course as young children you are very self-centred and adults are a different race. When you have children of your own this becomes self-evident. Your children will have a different relationship with you than they have with anyone else until they leave home and then decide to come back and visit. Then it’s almost normal, almost, but not quite.

So early memories were all about me - and parents were peripheral. We existed in a more independent world when we went out to play after breakfast, returned briefly for lunch and then reappeared at dinner time.

And secondary school was six days a week and compulsory church on Sundays so there wasn’t too much free time especially if you were trying to simultaneously avoid and complete homework.

Mike and I were actually briefly taught by our mother when she was at the Normal School which the NZ Education Department maintained as a representative sample of children for young teachers to practise on. How representative the sample was is a matter of speculation if Mike and I are regarded as normal. The Normal School was near to Cranmer Square and was in the usual Gothic Revival style of Christchurch and the classroom equipped with long wooden tables and benches. Notable for three things; my embarrassment when on my birthday mother had the sliding dividers between the two classrooms drawn back and two classes sang happy birthday to me, and the second was Michael snogging some young girl behind the coats in the cloakroom. A precocious nine year old?

The third incident must have happened on a weekend when mum had to practise on the dreaded 16mm movie projector. She showed a black and white short movie of a couple climbing over a wooden style in the English countryside. Shot from quite a low angle with a dark sky. Novel but okay until she ran the movie backwards and the handsome young couple then executed the whole thing in reverse. Walked backwards over a style! Far too freaky! Too much for my fragile hold on reality and I ran out of the building across the road into the grassy square. Anyway Mike insists that we were both there, which is logical, even if I have totally excluded him from what is a much better story without him.

A few oddities.

In the spirit of the times that were a’changing and probably in defiance of Christ College rules she obligingly tailored our school pants to have 12 inch cuffs which was very stylish and a trial for our 14 inch feet. It was an experiment which failed as our sartorial elegance did not meet the bag of potatoes style that the school favoured. She had to let them out again but other College mothers would not have even contemplated such an act of insurrection

She took Mike and me to the Beatles, an expensive way to hear the world’s most famous group being drowned out by screaming teenagers as their 50 watt amps failed to compete with a wall of white noise.

She and I went to a lot of Art House movies together – I think that I was the only one who would accompany her to see dubbed black and white Italian or Czechoslovakian movies. It was educational

She was a damned fine cook, adventurous and multinational. I am still trying to work out how she made Béarnaise Sauce with no apparent tarragon available in New Zealand. On the other hand she did have a health kick regime at one stage which required one to drink olive oil with a raw egg. This was a brief flirtation as far as I was concerned.

On the other hand she did share in 1984 some of the soon to be auctioned wine cellar that she had obtained as half of as a divorce settlement and which at least got her a world trip for her considerable troubles. Most generously she shared a 1961 Chateau Laffite (a really great vintage ) – and, as Mary was pregnant with Elizabeth, she and I got to drink nearly all of it. A perfect moment with a perfect wine.

You may be surprised to know that she had a fine repertoire of rather off-colour jokes.

At other times she wandered off into spiritual realms, I think in search of some reason for the intermittently bad hand that life dealt her. Shirley MacLaine has a lot to answer for but mum eventually survived that, and the thoughts of Madame Blavatsky and came back to earth.

We know that mum was a good golfer and scored at least one hole in one. We know that she single-handed sailed her yacht from Coromandel to Auckland. She was adventurous and courageous…. and carried on.

But she grew up in a different world to us.

When mum grew up she had only one young companion on the 16,000 acres of Mendip Hills, Dick Steele’s son Pat. Who eventually looked and sounded like his father, bald , short and tanned to a rich brown patina, with a gravelly voice whilst his wife Pam, ended up looking like her mother in law Audrey. All the females ended up with the country woman’s voluminous bosom as if dirigibles were permanently moored under the blouse.

But mum didn’t assume that shape of the country dowager , she was a modern woman. Glamorous and very beautiful to the end.

She rode to primary school. Her secondary school (Amberley House) was chosen purely because it allowed her to take her horses.

And she brought the horses to Christchurch and she and I rode them when we could persuade them to be saddled. The horses were kept in a paddock at the foot of the Cashmere Hills and as soon as the horses saw us they took off to the top of the hill which was as steep as Everest and replete with gorse. Only food would entice them down. Which, when consumed made them placid and docile, and would pootle along the streets.

Thanks to her I won my first art prize at the age of four, second prize for a realistic pencil drawing done on easily-torn butcher’s paper with water colour highlights, of my mother hanging out the washing; indicating an early ability at representational art and the role of women in society.

She sent Mike and me to junior art school which was in the real Art School in the University.

She was of course creative, had creative friends and we were expected to be creative as well. She knew Louise Henderson, the sculptor Tom Taylor and other luminaries of the art world. There must have been some serious partying in her youth.

A little more on mum’s background?

As you know her parents were Mildred and Norman. Mildred was called Billy by her friends but Daye by the children. The Rutherfords had come from South Australia which accounted for the eucalypts on the Mendip - before that they had derived from Scotland where we have it that they were border cattle thieves. The Rutherford clan motto is "*Nec sorte nec fato*" which means "Neither by chance nor fate". Or perhaps more by stupidity or base connivance?

They had a lot of farms and bred like rabbits

In their earlier days her parents did not stay in Mendip for winter - my grandmother not having a liking for being snowed-in and frozen - so most years they took a boat to Queensland and then another boat through the tropics. Mum accompanied them at least once as I remember Mum’s photographs of pre-war Honolulu. There were only two hotels, on an island that was not then scarred by massive development, golf courses and multi-national tourists.

Though we spent a lot of time at Mendip mum is only shadowy presence there, my father, David, doesn’t exist as even a ghost - my parents had divorced/were divorcing for unexplained reasons (on the Cold Comfort Farm level of something evil in the woodshed) whilst we were very young. They had met in the NZ Air Force during the war and were a most handsome couple. Michael’s premature birth didn’t cause the marriage, but it certainly ensured it.

I was the second marital consequence – unintended or not.

Being present at her second wedding I can attest that Mike and I ate a lot of the strawberries off the pavlova before it made the table when it was left unattended on a window sill.

Finally.

What is lost is all mum’s memories - she was not exactly a great diarist nor was she the greatest talker about her own life, facts had to be prised out of her

Of course the moments of one’s life cannot be really communicated, we are a solitary multitude. We construct stories, fictions that have the form but not the substance of life. Mum’s life is now a story to be shared though of course far too much of it is unknown to us.

*I imagine in the dawn, I hear a worn*

*Murmur of multitudes, faltering, fading, away.*

*They are everyone that has loved me and forgotten;*

What was good that she got to know her grandchildren including Elizabeth and she also got to see, and be trampled by, her great grandson Lachlan.

She is loved and missed. And will not be forgotten.