

Sonia Wakely, born Christmas Day 1934, died 29th January 2026

As we three children were growing up, our mother would complain to us every year that she spent her birthday in the kitchen cooking a delicious turkey meal for her family, but we were quick to point out that we were not to blame! Our grandmother, also present for the Christmas celebrations, certainly was more in a position to shoulder that blame than us. Feeling guilty and responsible, one August, when we were all holidaying in South Carolina, a surprise birthday cake appeared to celebrate my mother's summer birthday so she could no longer say that we never celebrated her birthday.

Her cooking is one thing I remember from my childhood. She was an excellent cook. She prepared a cooked breakfast for Melanie and me every morning, I always had a poached egg without the white, with toast and marmite. Then she had to produce a packed lunch for both of us as we turned our noses up at school meals. And then of course a cooked supper for the family. That was a lot of time in the kitchen. Something I don't think any of us (including my father) really appreciated.

Mother was born in Redhill Surrey, in 1934, so she was only 5 when war broke out. She and her elder sister, Stephanie, aged 9 were evacuated to the west country. That was an extremely painful period for her, the two little girls were not well treated. She was so young and missed her parents. Her father died during the war while up in Scotland on the Isle of Lewis. She always said that nobody mentioned her father's death when she went back to school, it was business as usual, mental health issues had not been invented.

She was bright, a good student but there was no money for her to stay in school. She did a secretarial course and got a job in London. That was where she met my father. She was flat-sharing with some girlfriends, and he was flat-sharing with some male friends in the flat upstairs. They married late 1955 just before my mother's 21st birthday and honeymooned in the South of France which was extremely exotic at this time. The young couple set off for the States in 1956 where Stephanie was already living, and lived in Ohio for a couple of years but came back when Sonia was pregnant with Melanie.

Then followed 3 beautiful children and a life in Whitchurch. She enjoyed playing bridge, and tennis until she injured her back and couldn't play anymore. She was an avid reader, a keen scrabble player and she loved travelling. For a long time, she organised a travel club in Whitchurch and took groups to visit cities in the UK and abroad. Her love of tennis prompted her to get a job as a Wimbledon driver during the tournament fortnight, and she drove players from their hotels in London to Wimbledon.

The biggest tragedy of her life was the loss of Melanie, I don't think either of my parents ever really got over this. Melanie's three children brought her great joy, as do my 2, Andrew's 3 and now the great grandchildren. She was a loving mother, grandmother and great grandmother and will be much missed.

Susanne Wakely, her daughter