Sybil Edith Elizabeth Butterfield (née Agnew)

Sybil Edith Elizabeth Butterfield (née Agnew) left the party after lunch on July 29 to be with husband James, daughter Joy, and baby Robin. To say the mould was broken after Sybil was born is a mistake; there was no mould. The phrase “never a dull moment” was coined to describe her life. If things got dull, there was something wrong, and she’d find a way to liven things up. The only time she stopped was for tea, preferably with a sticky bun and the newspaper. Her life was her children, and their children, and James, the ballast that kept her steady. Her passions included music (she was president of the Greater Victoria Performing Arts Festival for several years); the Maritime Museum of BC, whose search for a new home was close to her heart; and good form (no hats indoors, shoes polished, etc.). A lifelong member of the Anglican Church, she was also a fatalist: “willy-nilly” closed many complicated conversations—or, more simply, “Let’s change the subject.”

Born in Blackheath, UK, in 1927 while her father, Donald, was on a gunnery course at Woolwich, she came back to Canada with her parents in 1928. Her childhood years were spent in army camps around the country: Shiloh, Gagetown, and Kingston, where Donald became commandant of the Royal Military College after the war. She was in residence at St. Hilda’s College at the University of Toronto, when she met James, who conveniently lived next door at Trinity College. Their adventure together really began when they married in April 1950, James having been given a commission in the navy, thus an income. Four children—Christopher, Joy, Philip, and Peter appeared (as she would say). And then one more: Benjamin. The family moved to Victoria for James’s final naval posting in 1965, and this was to be her home for the rest of her life.

Sybil spent many years as a teacher, at Halifax School for the

Blind, Halifax Ladies College, Cedar Lodge (Skeleem Village Recovery Centre) in Cobble Hill, Camosun College, and Norfolk House School, among others. Her longest stint was at Belmont Secondary School in Langford, where she taught French to a generation of students. Nothing had prepared them for the discipline she used as the only way to keep order (as she saw it). We could go on . . . and so she did, self-publishing her memoir, "A Soldier's Daughter," in December 2022.

Sybil is predeceased by her parents Donald and Blossom Agnew, sister Patricia, brother John, husband James, infant daughter Robin, and daughter Joy and her husband Stefano. The party continues with sons Christopher (Merrie-Ellen Wilcox), Philip (Tracy O'Hara), Peter (Gurdeep Stephens), and Benjamin (Anne Grimm); grandchildren Marco and Sarah, Oonagh and Harry, Rosanna and Felix (mother Sarah Fryer), Claire and Julian, Robin and Marijn; and great-grandchildren Chloe, Olivia, and Thomas; Enzo, Matteo, and Stefano; and Lyra.

The family would like to thank Dr. Ted Rosenberg; the staff at Parkwood Place, especially Jason and Renée, for their caring support during the two years Sybil lived there; and to the marvellous staff at Sunrise Senior Living, too many to thank here, for making Mum comfortable in her last months.

A Celebration of Life will be held at Christ Church Cathedral, 930 Burdett Avenue, Victoria, BC on Tuesday, August 15, 2023, at 11:00 am.

In lieu of flowers, please make a donation to the Maritime Museum of British Columbia.

Day is done, gone the sun,

From the lake, from the hills, from the sky;

All is well, safely rest, God is nigh.

Condolences may be offered to the family below.

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