



'IN THE SPOTLIGHT'

Each month we put a different person 'in the spotlight' and pose 12 wide-ranging questions to them. This month, we feature Diana Raphael, a hugely inspirational and much loved Evesham resident, known affectionately as 'Mrs Evesham'.

1. Tell us an interesting fact about yourself that not many people know.

Because we live so close to the river we were taught to swim at a very early age. When we could swim unaided across the river we could have anything we wanted. I was almost four years old, and asked for ... and got ... a piano. My sister who was six years older than me received the piano lessons. It was assumed she would teach me, but it never happened. I would still love to learn to play. I was good swimmer, not fast but could swim a long way.

2. What book made most impact on you as a child?

I enjoyed a book called "Treasures of the Snow", and was also I was an ardent fan of the Enid Blyton books. "The Magic Faraway Tree" and the "Adventures of the Wishing Chair" and, of course, Mr. Pinkwhistle, who always put wrong things right. I read these books to my children when they went to bed each night. They liked them too.

3. What is your favorite film, and why?

I'm not an ardent film fan, but enjoyed musicals. My husband was a fan of Dolly Parton and loved the film "The Greatest Little Whorehouse in the West", and we watched that frequently and in particular the scene in the State Capitol of the President singing and saying absolutely nothing that made sense. I became almost word perfect!

4. What are your main hobbies/interests, apart from reading, of course?

At the tender age of 11 I joined Avonbank Brass Band and played a Cornet for a while then a Tenor Horn and ended up playing a Baritone. I played for 27 years then, when I was married and had a family as well as business to look after, music took a back seat. I am still involved with Avonbank Band as their President. I am also President of the Wychavon Festival of Brass, now in its 32nd year, so my love of Brass Bands has not faded. Our business has been my whole life, and my love of Evesham has kept me involved with all sorts of things. In 1988 I became a Tour Guide for Evesham and still am, but, due to Covid, not doing much tour guiding at the moment. I was on Evesham Town Council for almost 35 years, during which we launched the Evesham in Bloom Competition and, later, Evesham entered the Britain in Bloom Competition. I was a Trustee for John Martins Charity for 23 years, which I enjoyed very much. I was on the Evesham Chamber of Commerce for a while until they decided that we needed a Tourism Association. I called the first meeting and then the Vale of Evesham Tourism Association was born. In later years it joined up again with the Chamber of Commerce and is now known as VECTA, Vale of Evesham Commerce and Tourism Association. I enjoy embroidering, and also love making Australian Icing flowers to decorate cakes. I paint and decorate eggs. I like cooking and I also followed in my father's footsteps and took up Fishing. I fished in the Ladies International Matches in Ireland for several years. I'm still very much



involved with the Evesham Angling Festival, held every year in Evesham over the August Bank Holiday weekend, and of course I am on the committee of the Evesham Festival of Words. My business, my family and my interests keep me busy.

5. What would be the three things you would like to have if you were stranded on a desert island?

Assuming that food and drink was available, three things I would like to have with me are a piano (I could learn to play), the Bible, and plenty of paper and ink to write about the many people and events that I can still recall about my life.

6. What would a look at your bookshelves tell us about you?

From my bookshelves you would be hard pushed to decide what sort of person I am. I read almost anything except horror and space stories. I read autobiographies, detective stories and I used to read a lot of historic novels because I love History. At the moment I am engrossed in Bill Bryson's travel book "Down Under". Seldom do I laugh out loud while reading, but I have already done so several times while reading his book about Australia. I read almost every night when I go to bed, and have frequently read and enjoyed books that I have read for the second and third time.

7. If you could invite any three people, dead or alive, to a dinner party, who would they be, and why?

I'm a person who enjoys a small party rather than a large one. I enjoy conversation and good food and, as a person who is teetotal, I do not enjoy drinking, but would encourage my guests to have whatever they wished. My first choice would perhaps be Winston Churchill, so he could relate some of the stories that have been told about him. My second choice would be Peter Ustinov - after seeing him in An Audience with Peter Ustinov I have been a great fan. I am sure he would be very entertaining, talking of the countries he has lived in and the work that he has done. My third guest would be Boris Johnson. I would love to hear him and Winston Churchill talking about this country of ours and what advice and views would be exchanged (for a change I would only listen!).

8. What kind of music do you like, and is there one favourite soundtrack?

My choice of music from an early age was either the Classics or Brass Band Music, but as I grew up my horizons were stretched to almost any sort of music except Heavy Metal (which my second son loves). I have a particular affection for two pieces of music. The first one was when I played in a contest with Avonbank Band and was awarded a medal for the youngest player (aged 11) and it was 'Rule Britannia'. I could hardly play up a scale, but I knew the 3rd cornet part all the way through. A piece of music I never tire of listening to is the Largo from the New World Symphony, which I find very relaxing and inspiring.



9. What are your favourite charities/good causes, and why?

I must admit that my charities over the years have nearly always been close to home in Evesham. Avonbank Brass Band Juniors, Wallace House, The Adventure Playground, St Johns Ambulance, and, in the very early days, VESPA (Vale of Evesham Swimming Pool Association). I was on the committee for the Bell Tower Restoration. When I was Mayor, my charities included the Evesham Splash Club and helping to put a lift in the Town Hall.

10. Who is the person who has influenced you the most, or you most admire?

I would have to say that the person who has had the most influence on my life is my mother. She was the fairest, most understanding, charitable and Christian person that I have ever known. When I was young and people used to tell me I was so like my Mother, I was not impressed. Now I am older I realise it was a great compliment. If I can be half the woman she was, I will have done well.

11. What is your connection to Evesham?

My sister traced the Huxley (my Maiden name) family tree back to the early sixteen hundreds, so I can say I am well and truly connected to Evesham. I was born in Hampton Ferry House, and lived there for most of my life. I met my husband on holiday in France. He was a Scotsman doing his National Service. We married two years later and I went to live in Scotland while my husband finished his apprenticeship as a Turner, and we returned to Evesham after eighteen months to see if he would like working in our family business. I am pleased to say he did and we were very happily married for 59 years and two months before sadly he died. We have three wonderful sons of whom we are both very proud. Our eldest son, John, now lives with me and gave me my grandson, Alexander, who will be 21 in October. John is also Evesham's Town Crier. Our middle son, James, is now living in Australia with his wife Joanne and their married daughter Lauren who, twelve months ago, made me a Great Grandmother, when she had a daughter called Remi. Our youngest son, Robert, has been the Chairman of Wychavon District Council since July 2020 and is doing very well, in spite of the Covid epidemic. He will finish his term of office in May 2022. I am his consort and enjoy visiting the various events he is invited to. Yes, my roots are firmly fixed in Evesham!



12. What would you list as your greatest achievement to date?

This is not an easy question to answer. I have tried to do so many things and I hope that I have made a little difference. Perhaps I consider my greatest achievement next to my wonderful family, is being the instigator of Evesham in Bloom. It has made a difference to the town that I love so much. I was particularly proud when, after several times of entering the Britain in Bloom Competition, we won our category. Not an easy task when we were in the same category as Stratford-on-Avon which had won 1st prize for several years. Mr Frank Green, Town Clerk at that time, and I were both really pleased that our efforts had been successful. I feel sure that Evesham has benefitted from the floral displays and continues to do so.