

Thinking of what to say today was far from easy.

Not because there are a lack of wonderful stories and memories that Cecilia, Dad and I share of Mum, but because Mum would have hated all this attention.

If she were here she would have given a roll of the eyes, a shrug of the shoulders and simply wondered what all this fuss was about.

But that was her way.

She refused to believe that what she did was extraordinary, but I think I speak for everyone here when I say she was just that - extraordinary.

To live a life as full as she did - both in years and in experience - despite her cruel illness was remarkable and is something that I am very thankful for.

Although on a personal and private level Mum never came to terms with her MS, the image she portrayed in public was never anything else but cheery.

Her sense of humour, cutting, dry and sarcastic - tinged with a bit of Irish mischief - stayed with her throughout her life and even into the final day.

During her last hours she knew she was dying and was fortunate enough to be at peace with what was happening to her.

However, that didn't stop her from delivering a priceless final one-liner

She was chatting away to Dad, myself and the wonderful ward sister who was taking such great care of her in Cheltenham General Hospital and with a trademark roll of the eyes, nod of the head and a grin she said of her then condition: "I've never done this before."

I can only hope that I'm still making jokes as and when I'm in the same position.

And the wit and humour didn't stop there.

A little later on in that same day while chatting away, she diverted attention from her condition and on to the state of my father's heels - after he had worn the skin off them while walking and pushing on a lovely holiday they had in Cornwall a few weeks earlier.

When she was told that they were healing nicely, she again looked relieved and said: "Oh that is good."

The fact that Dad injured himself while pushing her on another epic trek across country probably says a lot about the adventurous spirit they showed as part of a fantastic team.

Mum may have been in a wheelchair, but that didn't stop her and her faithful pusher from seeing and doing things that most able-bodied persons would think twice about.

In fact there were times as a surly teenager that I actually wished for less active parents.

For much of my childhood and teenage years, I used to dread the thought of a Sunday afternoon route-march up Cleeve Hill or down by the River Severn at Tewkesbury, as my little legs only moved so fast and were

scarcely able to keep pace with Mum and Dad as they paced and rolled forward for mile after mile.

It was the same when we went away on holiday.

Mum and Dad would revel in the possibility of achieving the virtual impossible on four wheels; with no hill too steep, path too narrow or ground too uneven for them to conquer.

Quite often they would get surprised looks from passers-by dressed to the nines in their expensive walking gear.

More often than not, these able bodied, fit, adventurous, outdoors types would reach the top of a steep hill or cliff path with a look of satisfaction mixed with exhaustion only to see Mum beaming that trademark smile back in their direction from her wheelchair.

In fact, one such walker took this sense of shock a step further at the top of a steep cliff path in Cornwall where Mum was sitting admiring the view out to sea with Cecilia as a youngster making a daisy chain at her feet.

Dad was at this stage presumably elsewhere watering the bushes after the long push, and the weary walker briefly appraised the situation he'd found himself in.

He looked down the hill, again at Cecilia and Mum and before he could stop himself uttered: and I'll have to paraphrase a little give where we are: "How on earth did you get here?"

But that was what they did together.

Whether it was in Cornwall, the Lake District, the North Yorkshire Moors, a rainy canal boat in Berkshire, The Scottish Isles, The Isle of Skye, Norway (Twice), countless places around home here in Gloucestershire or abseiling or canoeing on our countless holidays in Pembrokeshire - The wheelchair wasn't a hindrance but a challenge that more often than not they overcame.

And while those physical challenges had to be reined in a bit in recent years - due to them getting older and not for lack of adventure - Mum's mind remained as sharp as ever.

This had absolutely nothing to do with her obsession with the Archers on Radio 4 and everything to do with the fact that even at the age of 64 she was still required to attend school once a week.

She used to love going into St Gregory's - the Primary School Cecilia and I attended in the distant past - to listen to the Children read. So much so that she was going there up until this past July - 19 years after I was the last of the pair of us to leave to go to senior school.

Working it out, there will be over 600 Cheltonian children to have passed through that school in the past 25-years, who would have been taught two important things by my Mum.

Not only did they learn to properly enunciate their words, but also, and perhaps more importantly, that someone in a wheelchair is a normal person who can chat and joke with them like anyone else - even if she keep a wooden mouse in her lap to explain why one of the sides of the wheelchair has a squeak.

And while of course we will miss all of these things immensely, we can take great heart in the way Mum dealt with her final moments.

She was fortunate enough to be at peace with what was happening to her and I think she was relieved to finally be freed of any frustrations that her illness had given of her over the past 30years.

Of that last day, two things will forever stand out for me.

Firstly, after asking to see a priest and receiving the sacrament of the sick in her hospital bed, during which she shocked me a little by the way she belted out the prayers, a wonderful, beautiful, perfect and relieved smile washed over her face.

She knew that she had nothing more to do on this earth and that there was no longer anything to fear, be frustrated or be angry at.

And secondly and finally, there was something she said.

It's probably appropriate that the last word goes to her, as she can encapsulate in one line what I've been trying to say for the last five minutes.

We were reminiscing about some of the lovely and happy memories that we had together as a family.

A family that she was thrilled to see grow in the last few years with the addition of Dave; Cecilia's husband and Freya, her beautiful first grandchild.

She stopped thought for a moment and gave another beautiful smile and said: "James, It's been hard work, but it's also been a lot of fun."

I don't think anyone could ever put it better than that.