

BRENDA CHRISTINE LEROY (née Daniel)



Ryllis and Brenda Daniel, Trimmingham 1949

I'm Ryllis Eleanor, née Daniel and I'm 22 months older than the twins, Brenda and Deirdre. I remember that when they were born I told our home-help lady "Mummy got two", and I fetched in two bottles of milk from the front doorstep and dropped them both. I remember little else of their early days except that I sat at one end of the pram and they were both at the other end.

They rapidly grew taller than me but did not seem to me to differ much in personality or achievement. Both were clever girls and biddable. They did not seem to need outside friends, whether from within the family or from outside, as they formed a self-contained unit. They often thought the same thoughts, spoke the same sentences; they truly seemed like one person in two bodies. This changed, though, when they were in their teens and especially once they decided to go to separate universities. From then on they were recognisable as different people. I became especially and increasingly close to Brenda after Deirdre and her family went to live in Australia.

Brenda had an adventurous streak, as do I. She went horse-riding in the south of Spain, she went to Sweden to teach and there met the man who became her husband. My parents were aghast to learn that he was French, but once they met Albert they became devoted to him. He had great warmth, a huge sense of humour and was as equally at home in both English and French as was Brenda. I loved to be around them. They would switch from French to English and vice versa, even in mid-sentence. The rapport between them was of great love; they were always hugging and kissing and laughing.

Brenda loved children and desperately wanted a family but this didn't happen. She was a devoted Auntie, frequently visiting us, to pass happy days cuddling my children and caring for them. I think she particularly loved my youngest child, Juliet. I was staying with her in Paris once and she was

energetically trotting me around, showing me "Quartiers" she thought I might not know. Her knowledge of architecture and history always astounded me. But on one occasion, a young woman came towards us, holding a toddler by the hand. As they passed, Brenda burst into tears and stared after them. This was when I really realised how deeply she longed for her own family, and when, eventually, she was diagnosed with cancer, I was not surprised: I felt it was the consequence of this profound sorrow.

Even in her illness she lost none of her fine, energetic spirit. She continued to work, convinced that by living her life to the full she would defeat the illness. When I went to stay with her in Paris, in her charming little home that was tucked away down a street which went nowhere, sheltered behind a high wall and gate and quite invisible, she whispered, "I want to show you something." She led me to a substantial outbuilding and told me she was going to do it up for Albert to use as a study and she showed me wall-paper she'd bought and material for soft furnishings. I could see that she would never do these things, but her spirit was indomitable. She even came over to England to see me and the children when she was too weak to stand and had to sit on the pavement when she alighted from the bus.



Right until the day of her death she believed that Jesus would save her, that she might testify to his healing powers. My mother told me that on the morning of the day she died, a young priest came to pray with her and read the Bible. Afterwards, when he went into the kitchen he was very pale. My mother made him a cup of tea. He told her that when he had finished praying at Brenda's bedside, he had looked up to see Jesus standing there beside Brenda's bed, holding her hand. He went out to my mother in a state of shock.

She had a generous spirit; a lively intelligence; a gentle manner. She had huge energy. She studied endlessly and gained a fistful of qualifications. She was always rushing around doing interesting things, travelling to interesting places, striding along cliff-tops; examining people's gardens, visiting family. She was a whirlwind. But at home she became a superb cook and loved to entertain. She had French nieces and nephews to visit, and endless funny stories to relate about them. She filled her life; she found joy in children, in family, in the outdoors, trees and leaves and flowers and sunshine.

My grief that she is no longer with us is still raw.

May 2005