

Yvonne Daoud

Yvonne was born in the homesteads just outside Stanford-le-Hope in Essex. The homesteads had lots of land and the family grew all their own vegetables and fruit, and kept chickens, rabbits and geese for food, and goats for milk, so they never went without during the War. She has one sister, 6 years younger than her.



Yvonne went to the village school where there were 53 children in a class, but nearly all of them passed to go to grammar school or technical college. She learned to write initially on sand trays, then on slates with a slate pencil, and only then was she allowed paper, as paper was scarce.

Yvonne got into Palmers Endowed Grammar School for Girls at Grays, but was initially only there for a term because her father, an analytical chemist for Shell Haven, was fed up with England and moved the whole family to Melbourne in Australia.

They travelled first class on the maiden voyage of the Orcades with the Australian Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, on board. However her father could not cope with life in Australia and had a mental breakdown. So the family returned to England after only 6 months.

Yvonne returned to the same school but then had

to re-do a year. She finished school just before her 17th birthday and desperately wanted to be a nurse, but her father was against this, so instead she became a nursery nurse. Yvonne's first post was at a Church of England children's home in Lowestoft, for children up to the age of 5, where she lived in. Although it was a beautiful old house with lovely grounds, it was a horrible place and she hated it.

Yvonne left after three months and, with the help of her cousin, got a placement in a London County Council day nursery in Cheyne Walk in Chelsea, which she loved. It was there, at a dance in Chelsea Town Hall, that she met David. He was a student engineer at the Automobile and Aeronautical College in Chelsea. They had met in September and were married 4 months later.

Yvonne's mother had since died and her father had remarried, but his new wife made it clear that she was unwelcome, so she had no home to



Yvonne and David in 1956

go back to. In the following September, Yvonne and David went back to Iraq via Marseilles to Beirut, and then from Beirut to Baghdad by taxi.

She had not met any of David's relations (he had three brothers, the youngest of which was 4, and a sister), and he was being lined up to marry a second cousin, but they all turned out to greet them and were very welcoming. They taught Yvonne Arabic, as none of them spoke English (she became fluent) and they really looked after her. Culturally, it was a huge change.

On leaving the station, Yvonne was swept away by taxi with the women, and David was taken in a taxi by the men. They met at the road at the bottom of the alleyway where they lived and walked up to the house with the women all chanting and ululating. When they got to the steps, a man threw down a sheep and cut its throat. Yvonne then, aged 18 or 19, had to walk through the blood to symbolise leaving the old life behind and starting a new life.

After a year, Yvonne worked for the British Institute as a librarian. She enjoyed the work – it was very social – and she met a lot of interesting people, the most famous being Agatha Christie and her husband, an archaeologist. At that time, every day, a Chaldean Roman Catholic priest would visit and say to her you are not properly married, you cannot sleep with David, so after a few months they married for a second time in a Catholic Church. Yvonne had two children, Mazin and Karen, while living in Iraq.

After three years in Baghdad, where David was head of transport for the north of Iraq, he got a job with the Iraq Petroleum Company and they moved to Ain Zaylah, north of Mosul, which had a lot of English speakers, which they enjoyed.



Iraq Petroleum Company social event, Ain Zaylah 1962

However, during their time in Iraq, King Faisal was assassinated and there were two revolutions. Gunmen would frequently start firing on the corner under their kitchen window. On the night before their son's third birthday and a big planned party for the children, the Kurds invaded the camp, shot the chief of police and took many

of the American men hostage, so they had to quickly be flown out of Ain Zaylah back to Baghdad. Then, one day in Mosul, the Landrover driver brought David back and told them all to hide. Soldiers had taken all David's workforce into a field and had shot them dead. Yvonne and David then moved from Ain Zaylah to K2 for a year where Yvonne was the only English-speaker.

Eventually they both decided that they wanted to move back to England. Yvonne saw how girls were treated in Iraq, and feared for her daughter, although she knew her son would be fine. As they were not allowed to leave, Yvonne, who was pregnant with her third child, said that she was going on holiday to England, which was allowed.

However, first she had to get married for a third time, as there was no stamp on their original marriage certificate and they could not get passports as a result. David got out of Iraq by saying he was going to collect them and bring

them back, but in order to keep up the pretence, he had to leave all their possessions behind.

They initially settled in Westcliffe-on-Sea where they had their third child, Fiona, and David worked as a piping draughtsman for oil companies. When he got a job in New Malden in 1966, the family moved to Worcester Park. In the very first year there, Yvonne found St. Mary's and became a member of the Mother's Union, led the Young Wives and ran the coffee bar for the youth group. She also ran a Sunday school group of about 20 children with Iris Hillyer, and a Bible study group for older children.

David died in 2017 after nearly 63 years of married life. Not many women can say that they have married the same man three times.