

## **Elisa Mandarino**

Death came unexpectedly for Elisa. All of a sudden she was no longer taking her turn behind the coffee table after Parish Mass. She was in the midst of life: on the morning of Friday 9<sup>th</sup> January, she spoke to both her daughters, Maria and Tahira, on the phone, cleaned her house, and popped out to Chiswick to do some errands before expecting to go to meet Maria. She didn't leave the house again, but died quietly at home, in her hallway, after returning with her shopping. The shock of her death for her daughters and son could only be guessed at.

That Chiswick should become home to Elisa and the place where she brought her family up was also unexpected. Born in 1940 in the Calabrian town of Cerisano, one of a large family of maybe as many as twelve children, Elisa began her working life as young as 8, as a domestic servant, eventually becoming the nanny to a family in Cosenza. When she was 21 she made the break with Italy and, at her father's suggestion, came to England, hoping for greater opportunities than she had at home. Two of her sisters also made the journey to this country, while other siblings went to New York; and so the family spread out across the world.

For Elisa life in London included working in a button factory, living in the Kilburn area, achieving British citizenship and having her children. When they were still very young, in the early 70s, she moved to Chiswick, which became their permanent home. Here Elisa joined the local community, especially through her connection with St Nicholas.

We shall all remember her open smile, her friendliness and goodwill, and her willingness to help, be it behind the coffee urn in church, or with house-to-house collecting for Christian Aid – no one did this with more persistence or better results – or helping at the garden parties held at Heather Hay's. Elisa took pleasure in the company around her at St Nics and showed great kindness to us all. She also contributed greatly to Frank Malthouse's happiness in the latter part of his life. He and Elisa were near neighbours and for many years they enjoyed a mutually supportive companionship, helping each other in the daily round of doing the shopping, as well as going on expeditions together in Frank's nippy little car. Frank, who died three years earlier, became a very important figure in the lives of Elisa's children. In the words of her daughter, Tahira, he was the family's guardian angel.

In recent years Elisa's great joy was her grandchildren. She loved and watched over them, feeling for their parents when things were hard, rejoicing in the children's progress. She and I often exchanged news of our grandchildren on a Sunday morning. It was another measure of her outgoing nature that she always asked after my grandchildren as well as speaking about hers.

Elisa always maintained her links with her family in Italy. Not long after Frank's death, one of her brothers, who still lived there, also died, which distressed her very much. His passing was marked at St Nicholas by a mass said for him by Fr Patrick. It is good to know that as recently as last September Elisa paid a visit to her family in Calabria. Like them, we miss her very much, here in her adopted home of Chiswick, and her church community at St Nicholas.

Christabel Ames-Lewis