

## REMEMBERING MIRIAM

### SIR EVELYN DE ROTHSCHILD

Welcome to this great occasion, I'd like everyone to realise that this is a celebration of a very remarkable woman, where we can share some of the wonderful memories she has given us over the years. I know many of you will agree with me that Miriam would have wanted us to enjoy ourselves.

Although there are some stories about Miri that are too naughty to be repeated here, I am going to talk about Miriam, the family and the way we used to discuss various matters.

My grandfather and Miriam's grandfather were brothers. I first met her when I was about 16 and she brought her husband-to-be to meet my parents. She spent her early years at Tring with her uncle Walter, which, as we all know from her book about him, greatly influenced her. Of course, uncle Walter was a very extraordinary character, who was very involved with the Galapagos Islands and kept zebras in a mews house, which he drove two in hand down Piccadilly.

One of the amazing things about Miri was that she never went to school, but that didn't mean she wasn't able to learn a great deal from people around her. For example, she spent many hours at the Tring museum and worked very hard on all the ideas uncle Walter endorsed, particularly concerning animals and insects, whether they were moths, fleas or dragonflies. I used to love to hear stories from her youthful years, and would always try to elicit more details, to get her views about certain things and people she had met.

We were also bonded on a very sad subject; it was very personal to both of us. She had a sister, Liberty, who suffered from schizophrenia and I had a sister, Anne, who was also schizophrenic. It was a time when schizophrenia was not talked about. Together we formed the Schizophrenia Research Fund, and, like many illnesses it is only now that people are beginning to be more open about schizophrenia. We often discussed how and when illnesses could be made more public and where people could be more open with the problems they face. She was very direct about this, almost clinical about the subject. I think that came from her scientific mind, she was highly intellectual and was interested in many, many areas - not just scientific ones. We had quite a lot of discussions related to the future, where she thought the opportunities lay for development of various things and the opportunities for further research.

As we were both 'chocoholics', we often used to meet in a funny little restaurant, opposite the Royal Academy, called Richoux and discuss and reminisce as we drank our chocolate. One never failed to listen and remember her words of wisdom and I always remember one time when we were there, looking across the room and who should we see, but Isaiah Berlin! A great friend of Miri's and she was quite startled to think that he could see we were consuming a great deal of chocolate, which must have amused him. It certainly amused us!

I would now like to move towards Ashton and say a few words about that. Of course, many of you have been to Ashton and understand what it stands for. Her father helped save the village and added many more houses, it was a very old village but really very extraordinary. Extraordinary in so many ways, not least because Ashton is the imprint of

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Miriam. I had to be there last Friday. Although it was empty, as we went from room to room, I felt she was watching me. What existed in Ashton is immense - the corridors, filled with her files, the books dating back to her grandfather's time, the photographs on the piano and the various bits and pieces in the ballroom. It all came back to me, the extraordinary parties that were given in the summer, the mix of all sorts and kinds of people, discussing how life could be lived, either scientifically or politically and above all her love of animals.

I think her love of animals was as great, if not more, than her love of humans. We all know her eccentricities, her kerchief and the moonboots, at times she even kept foxes under the bed. When Rosie was born, for example, Miri's owl, which lived in her wastepaper basket created a lot of jealous problems and had to be moved. From then on, Miri had to use her old gas mask to protect her from her formerly loving pet. Also, the luncheon table in the dining room, which was always set for at least 12 people, even if you were only two. And the mountain of food, always available. And then the peculiarity of the telephone. She never said goodbye to people. I was fortunate, perhaps, because she did say goodbye to me, but more often than not the phone used to be plonked down suddenly. It's fair to say, I suppose, that sometimes she could be direct to the point of abruptness, there was always an intriguing question that you knew was going to come at some point, where have you come from?, what are you doing?, I'm about to do this and so on. And there was always something new happening in her life, an intrigue, a new interest or friends that she kept up with, her love of Israel, her desire to follow up on any new method that could be opportunistic for conservation. Conservation was the key word, one, that she always used when she spoke. Of course her love of flowers is famous and I remember sitting next to Lady Bird Johnson as she explained to me that she and Miri had worked hard on beautification in America, planting wild flowers on either side of the motorways, which she also introduced here. On the other hand, one didn't always agree with her, such as the matter of the deer park at Ashton, where she wouldn't cull any of the deer. I found it rather difficult to explain to her that sometimes culling is necessary, but then you couldn't really argue with Miri, because you usually lost!

She was really a very remarkable woman with a uniquely inquiring mind and a person hugely interested in other people, always interested in their quirks too. So there it is, the light has gone out at Ashton, but the spirit of Miri will go on forever.

Thank you