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# Margaret Rose Williams

*A Life Story*

Born 1938

A memoir preserved for family

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# Childhood & Family Origins

I was born in 1938 in a small terraced house on Splott Road in Cardiff, the year before the war began, and I have only ever known the world to be a place that had to be rebuilt. My father, Thomas, worked the docks. He left the house before I was awake and came home when the lamps were lit, smelling of coal and sea salt, and he would lift me onto his lap and ask me, in his careful Welsh lilt, what I had learned that day. My mother, Eileen, baked bread every Friday so that the whole street knew it was Friday. I can still feel the warmth of the loaves on the table, and the way she would let me press my thumb into the soft top of one before it went into the oven. I had two sisters and a brother, and we all shared one bedroom, two to a bed, and the sound of the Taff river at night was the sound of my childhood, low and steady and always there. Summer days on Splott Road seemed to last forever. We kicked a ball made of rags against the gable end of the house, we played hopscotch in chalk on the pavement, we ran after the ice-cream van like small animals, and we did not see a television until I was nearly ten. The street was a community in a way that is hard to describe to people today — neighbours' doors were always open, and the aunts next door kept a closer eye on us than our own mother did, and our own mother kept a closer eye on them. We were poor, of course. Everyone was poor, in those days, in that street. But the door was open, and there was always a cup of tea, and that, I think, was a kind of wealth.

# Love & Relationships

I met my husband, David, at a dance at the Rialto Ballroom in 1959. I was wearing my mother's blue dress, taken in at the waist with safety pins, and I was so nervous I hardly spoke all evening. He asked me to dance twice. I said no the first time, out of pure shyness, and I have always been glad I did, because it gave him the chance to ask again, and that, I think, is what love often is — a second chance. We were married the following spring, in 1961, at St. Mary's Church, and the reception was held in the church hall with sandwiches and a small cake my mother had iced herself. We had fifty-four years together, which is a long time by any measure, and a miracle by the measure of those years. People think love has to be dramatic to be real. It is not. Sometimes it is just someone making you a cup of tea before you have asked for one, and leaving it on the table beside you without a word, and you know, in that small gesture, that you are not alone in the world. That is what David did, every morning, for fifty-four years. We had our disagreements, of course. We had the kind of disagreements that come from sharing a small life in a small house for a long time. But we had our habit, too, on the worst evenings, of sitting in the kitchen with a cup of tea between us, and just being there, and somehow that was always enough. He died in 2013, on a Tuesday, with my hand in his. I have not danced since.

## Career & Life's Work

I became a primary school teacher in 1961, at Roath Park Primary, the same year I was married, and I taught for thirty-seven years. I taught in almost every year group, but I was happiest with the older children, the ones who were just beginning to understand the world as a place with words in it. There was a boy in my class, Owen, who could not read at eight. He sat at the back and coloured in the margins of his books and refused, politely but absolutely, to look at the words. I sat with him, after school, three afternoons a week, for a year, and I never raised my voice, and I never gave up, and by the time he left my class he was reading novels. I heard from him, twenty years later. He had become a librarian. He sent me a copy of his favourite book, with a dedication I keep on the mantelpiece. I have letters like that from dozens of children, some of them now grandparents themselves. There is no prouder thing, in this life, than to know that you were useful. The work was exhausting, and I was paid almost nothing, and I came home most evenings too tired to cook, and there were years I wondered if I had done any good at all. But the letters, the photographs of grown men and women with their own children in their arms, those tell me something different. They tell me I was there, and that being there was enough. I retired in 1998, and for the first month I did not know what to do with the silence. Then I learned to love it, slowly, and to fill it with the people I loved.

# Wisdom & Advice for the Future

I have grandchildren now, four of them, and I think of them often, and I worry for them, the way all grandparents worry, because the world they are growing into is not the world I grew up in. But if I could leave them with a few small things, they would be these. Write letters, not texts. A letter is a thing someone can hold, and put in a drawer, and take out on a hard day, and that is worth more than a thousand messages. Most arguments, in this life, are not about the thing you are arguing about. They are about fear — yours, or theirs. When you remember that, it becomes easier to be gentle. A good life is not built from grand gestures. It is built from small ordinary days, done with care. A cup of tea made for someone. A door held open. A telephone call to a friend you have not spoken to in too long. I hope you find someone who makes you laugh. I hope you keep that person. I am proud of you, even for things you have not done yet. I am proud of you for who you are becoming, which is, I think, a great deal. Take a long walk, often, with no destination in mind. Read books, in your hands, with the weight of them in your lap. Be kind to the people who serve you, in shops and cafés, because the world is held together by their patience, and they are doing their best. And when you are old, like me, sit sometimes and remember the people who are gone, and be glad, be very glad, that you knew them.

*This memoir was created with EchoMind.*

*May these stories live on.*

*— June 19, 2026*