

My name is Sylvia. I've had quite an interesting life really. In 1939, when the war started, I was 9. All the teachers suddenly left, they were called up. At that early age, we were asked if we could teach the junior girls. I can honestly say, that was my first attempt at teaching, which is quite unusual!

My father bought a restaurant for me when I was 18. Unfortunately we sold it and I went to go and work for Fry's chocolates. That's where I met my husband. We wanted to get married, but back then, they wouldn't employ married women so I would have to leave. After we got married, that's when I started to get really interested in art. I ran and taught at a sort of art school. I wasn't qualified but had a lot of experience painting. We put on lots of exhibitions and events in Bristol.

When I got to 80, I didn't want to travel around that much. I stopped driving. I run goldwork classes with students at my home, where I take on six or so students. They produce the most gorgeous work.

### **Meeting Stuart, my husband**

I was friends with George who was one of the top men or boys in the village. However, nobody wanted to marry him! There was just something about him, he just wanted to marry everyone he met, and it became my turn. Once I told him I didn't want to marry him, he told me that he had a friend who would be perfect for me. In my head, I thought, "Any friend of George, no, he's probably not going to be for me!"

Meanwhile, George was telling Stuart about me and how much he'd like me. The one evening, after they'd been out for a drink, George said that he needed to drop something to my house. He knocked on the door. I was painting at the time and I put a paintbrush in my mouth which I quite often did and opened the door. And there was Stuart.

It really was love at first sight. I remember after they had left, I walked back in and looked into the mirror. I was absolutely sparkling. My parents knew it and didn't like it, because they thought it wouldn't last. Just before Stuart met my parents, I told him that my mother was a bit of a snob and that he should tell her that his father is the Mayor of Coventry. As soon as he told her, it was ok after that. They thought he was marvellous!

### **Stuart passed away**

My husband died five years ago and I completely stopped painting. It was a really difficult time. That's why I really needed something like my chats with Susan to get me going again.

Stuart had a terrific sense of humour. He would always look after me when I was ill. When he died, there were so many things I kept thinking of that I wish I'd have done when he was alive. One thing that I did do... He was very poorly and went into hospital. I remember him turning to me and saying "Thank you so much." I said, "There's no need to thank me. I'm doing it because I love you."

It took me two years to finally admit that Stuart had died. It's so strange. Even now, if something goes wrong or something is quite difficult, I automatically turn to his chair.

I felt a lot of loneliness after Stuart died. I have a lot of friends, but over the years, things have worn away. And now, with the current situation, I don't get to see them but do get phone calls every now and again. It's not easy for me to go out much anymore. I had a big cancer operation which left me with quite an unsociable system so to speak.

### **Support from Age UK**

I've had lots of support from Age UK. I've been talking to Susan for a couple of months or so. We'd been talking lots on the phone and then she came over one afternoon and we spent some time in the garden. She brought her painting along and a lovely selection of watercolours for me.

Susan's phone calls and visits are so enjoyable. They liven me up and I think they liven her up too. She's had a really interesting life so I love talking to her about that. We get on so well and have the same interests, that's the beauty of it.