

# Bon voyage, Mum

*After a years of putting everyone else first, my beloved mum was finally going to see some of the world – then tragedy struck. But I had an idea to make her dreams come true. By Cara Melia, 25*

## Dear Mum,

I'll never forget the first time you took us camping on one of our annual beach holidays when I was eight.

'Let's do something a bit different and stay in a tent this year,' you cheerily suggested as you loaded up the car.

I looked at my siblings Rachel, Marshall, Kai and Callan, and we all grinned.

Although you went above and beyond throughout the year, showering us with gifts on our birthdays and at Christmas, never missing a school assembly, sports day or Christmas play, our annual beach holiday was the highlight of our year.

You were a single mum, but you worked hard to save every penny where you could, so we could escape Oldham, Greater Manchester, and get some much-needed

fresh air on the coast.

Even though you couldn't afford to take us abroad, inspired by your own childhood holidays with your mum and dad, Audrey and Cliff, you showed us all that the British seaside had to offer.

Whether it was Devon, north Wales, or Butlin's in Skegness, we always had the best time, come rain or shine. So when you brought along a 10-person tent for our summer trip to Colwyn Bay, we were up for the adventure.

Just putting it up had us all in stitches.

'Oh no, this pole is the wrong way,' you chuckled.

Then, 'I think your brother is caught in the lining.

Someone go help him out!'

Nothing ever fazed you and you always saw the funny side in any situation.

With our tent finally up



and sleeping bags unrolled, we headed straight to the beach where you were the first one to roll up your jeans and run in.

'Don't be shy!' you called to us. 'The water's lovely!'

It was actually quite chilly, but you didn't care – and neither did we. We ran in and splashed away, taking in the beauty of the coast.

And when you weren't paddling in the sea, you were helping us collect shells and build huge sandcastles.

'Kids, come and look. There's some starfish in this rock pool,' you said, excitedly.

You always managed to make our beach holidays the most fun thing in the world, filling our lives with amazing memories.

As we got older, you dreamt of spreading your wings and venturing abroad.

'Look at this place, love,'

you'd say, handing me your phone with a photo of a gorgeous sandy white beach under a clear blue sky.

'Wouldn't you just love to be there right now, soaking up the sun?' you'd say, smiling wistfully.

I knew how much time you spent scrolling through exotic holiday destinations and dreaming – and I understood why.

You'd spent your life putting others first. It wasn't just us kids, you'd cared for your mum Audrey

before she'd passed away and then your brother Richard before he'd died from cancer.

With them gone, you kept a close eye on our grandad Cliff, who lived nearby.

And as we all began settling down and having kids of our own, you became the world's best nanny too.

All the grandkids, including my son Reagan, adored their

Nanny Wendy.

'Mum, you're always putting others first,' I told you over and over. 'You need to book

yourself a holiday and relax on a white, sandy beach!'

And once you finally realised we were all settled and doing fine, you started to think more seriously about having some adventures yourself.

'Now I've got more time, I'd love to travel,' you told me one day, as we chatted over a cuppa.

'Amazing, it's about time!' I chuckled. 'Anywhere in particular?'

'As long as it's sunny and on a beach, I don't care,' you replied.

The world was your oyster. But then you started feeling poorly and doctors diagnosed you with fibromyalgia.

The fatigue in particular hit you hard and you had to slow down. Yet still you had your heart set on a trip somewhere warm and sunny.

I've been looking into getting my passport,' you told me one day. 'Marshall and I are going to look at holidays

once it's come through. We were thinking maybe Spain or Portugal.'

I was so ecstatic for you. 'You really deserve this, Mum,' I said.

I didn't live far from you so I'd pop over every couple of days for a cuppa or to help around the house and in between visits, we'd chat on the phone.

But one day, I couldn't get hold of you.

I messaged my siblings saying, *Has anyone heard from Mum?*

They hadn't spoken to you either and when we still hadn't heard from you the following day, Kai said he'd pop over to check on you.

Rachel went with him and I was on the phone to her as they arrived.

Your door was locked and they didn't have a spare key, so Kai ended up breaking a window and climbing in. I was still talking to Rachel as he let her into the house.

Moments later, she began to scream and my heart plummeted.

In that moment, I knew

you were gone.

They'd found you in bed, with your dogs, Nala and Luna, and your cats, Chan and Sky, loyally waiting nearby.

We were all shocked.

Your death was so sudden and so cruel.

You were just 51 and you had so much to look forward to.

As I tried to come to terms with the grief and loss, I just kept thinking about how you'd never got to apply for your passport or book that holiday you so deserved.

Tests showed you'd passed away from undiagnosed heart disease.

After you were cremated, I planned to scatter some of your ashes on the beach at Skegness, which held so many happy memories from our childhood.

But on the journey there, I was chatting with my pals and I had another idea.

'I'm going to throw the ashes into the sea, so that Mum can travel the world at last,' I decided.

So when we arrived, I found a shop and bought a glass bottle with a cork.

I poured some of your ashes inside then wrote a note to go with them that read, *This is my mum. Throw her back in, she's travelling the world.*

With the note and the ashes safely sealed in a bottle, I ran into the waves, with my jeans rolled up like you

always did, and threw the bottle as far as I could.

'I miss you, Mum, I hope you end up somewhere sunny,' I whispered.

That final goodbye was so emotional. The tears streamed down my face as I watched the bottle get carried away on the waves. Yet it felt like the right thing to do.

It was the closest you'd get to seeing the world.

The next day, my friend sent me a Facebook post from someone who'd already found you.

Less than 12 hours into your journey, you'd had an unscheduled stopover back at the same beach.

Luckily, the people who found you had thrown you back in, to continue your journey.

Soon your story went viral. People all over the world were messaging me, promising to look out for you and help you on your way.

Let's hope you finally make it to somewhere sunny like Spain – or maybe somewhere even further like the Caribbean.

You never got to travel during your life. But hopefully you're bobbing around somewhere warm, enjoying the sun and the sea, so you can achieve your dream at last.

**Love always, Cara x**

