

# A September to Remember

Music can play such an important part in people's lives. Certain songs and melodies can link to significant times <sup>clique</sup> and events in your life; take you back to somewhere special and can give you a warm glow in the pit of your stomach. I am one of those people. In January when my mother was given the news, I took to seeking out for as many playlists of inspirational songs as I could. I have always seen myself as a 'half-full' person - I was certainly not planning to wallow self-pity and there was no way that I was taking my mum on that journey either. Music has always been a safe haven to draw strength. Many drives often brought tears as treasures played kept my hope and spirit alive. That was until Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> September 2011, the day the hope left and we all embarked on a September to remember... *fairly conventional opening*

Over the previous weekend, mum had been poorly and various medics had come and gone. As much as we all appreciated their help, we knew that mum's Macmillan nurse would be making the life changing decision: admitting mum to the hospice. Mum began by having day visits there through early 2011, and described the place as being 'wonderfully warm and caring'. It was full of people who understood, but never patronised. She asked us all to visit with her one day, to experience all the facilities and the care that was offered; *(in the respect)* that she couldn't believe such an amazing place existed. Everything and more that she had told us really does exist there.

My home to the hospice is a journey that lasts one hour twenty minutes and I arrived late in the afternoon on the sixth. I went to the main entrance only to be told that I could now use the inpatients door. A weight descended upon my shoulders almost instantly.

"Look at you with the room with the view!" I said bowling in, mum just turned and gave me the biggest smile that I had seen all year followed by the biggest kiss and cuddle.

There was one of those electric comfy chairs that you can adjust but never get comfortable in. This was to be my bed and gained recognition as 'the chair'. Mum paid for tea that night; a cheese and tomato platter, and she settled for her usual jelly and ice cream. We talked

about the past and occasionally about the future. We laughed about letting her cup of tea go cold and the nurses feeling guilty about not topping it up quickly enough. Little did they know that mum kept dozing off just after she ordered a fresh one only to wake up and find it stone cold! This night brought back memories of when my first child was born. How I used to sit by her cot listening to each breath, my chest expanding to take the next one for her. Only now it was for mum. I felt the irony that 44 years previous<sup>ly</sup> we were in opposite positions although perhaps she didn't have the luxury of 'the chair'!

Mum was excellent at knitting and could literally do it with her eyes closed! She was famed for making various children's characters. Her last project was to knit a meerkat. Desperate to find a pattern, I reverted to good old eBay and duly delivered it to mum. My aunt finished it and he took place on her bed in the hospice. In a strange way, he became part of the family, so much so that the nurses would tuck him in at night at the bottom of the bed! Mum would hold him and constantly make sure that his waistcoat was straight. Mum adjusted his waistcoat and dad is renowned for wearing his. I didn't ask about his significance until on Friday mum told me that she had told my dad that she would make him one as he found the 'Compare the Meerkat' advert hilarious. I could sense that this woollen guy was standing in for dad and allowing mum to wander off to times goneby.

Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> came by and mum was on top form. Her beloved grandson and granddaughter were so keen to see Grandma. She had visitors when we arrived but when she heard us, she summoned us in telling the others that their visiting time had ended! She was clearly calling on all of her remaining strength so that she could spend one last evening with her grandchildren. I watched with pride as they all sat on her bed, my children unknowingly obliging and laughing with Grandma. My son was drawing his Wacky Races picture and put Grandma in pole position driving car number seven. My daughter sat holding hands with her Grandma as they had done so often back at mum's house. Watching her hug and kiss my two children was the hardest thing I have done. She knew exactly what stage of her journey that she was on, my children didn't know that of course but that was mum all over.

When I arrived on the 11<sup>th</sup> mum was watching the memorial service to all those who had lost their lives in the twin towers tragedy. My mother and father in law were with her and once

again, I watched slightly different hugs taking place as they bid mum goodbye. We spoke about the night before and mum was troubled that there was a song missing in her arrangements. I knew what song had reminded me of mum the most and so I asked her permission to include it in the service, without question she said yes.

Before coming to the hospice, mum's last wish was to go back to Southend on Sea, which is where she would take us when we were younger. I have such wonderful memories of being there. Gritty sandwiches, cold winds, little sunshine and one time even losing my new bumper boots in the mud. I knew that I must take her back.

Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> came and I stayed again and when all the visitors had left, I told mum that we were off to Southend for the night. We ordered jelly and ice cream and some sandwiches albeit I am pleased to say without the grit!

"You didn't pick a very nice spot," said mum.

"What do you mean?"

"Well we are right outside the toilets!" she laughed nodding towards her en suite.

I had my son's bingo machine and he had sneaked a note telling Grandma which card number to use because it would bring her luck in the game. Unsurprisingly he was right and mum won that the game that night. Something I had overlooked was a prize for the winner. Although mum won the game, on this occasion the loser actually won the prize. That prize was to have the honour of playing that very last game of bingo with her.

On September 18<sup>th</sup>, just twelve days after coming to the hospice, my dear mum passed away. The amazing grace that she displayed was inspiring and I feel honoured to have been with her as she dealt with this horrid disease. A few mentioned to me how sad it was that she had lost her battle, but the truth is she did not lose any battle because she didn't dignify this awful disease with a fight.

We gathered to say a final farewell on the 28<sup>th</sup> September. Previously, she told me she would only need a small chapel at the crematorium. I admit to disagreeing with her and this was the one thing I got right! 250+ packed into the large chapel to say goodbye to mum. All funeral details had been arranged except for the one song that mum granted me permission. As the opening notes rang out to our song, Amazing Grace, I was transported back to all the wonderful times spent with her at the hospice. Aside from all the tears, I was the one with a cheeky smile on my face!

January to September changed many people. I watched those around me react to our sadness in many different ways. I like to think that I did not take her for granted but I wish I gave her more time. In the end, I discovered that it is one another's time that people appreciate the most.

This is a fairly conventional narrative.  
It does seem to rely on cliché and  
is of course in some sense of violence  
and death is inevitable.  
It does seem to offer many of the  
requirements of level 3. Would accept  
from careful editing. See word count.

Genre?

# 'I'm going to be alright...'

Ann Sheridan, who died aged 51, was a singer and an American actress. She is best remembered for starring in films such as 'City for Conquest', 'The Man Who Came to Dinner', and 'One More Tomorrow' in the 1940's as well as working regularly between 1934 right until her death in 1967.

Sheridan was born on Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> February 1915 and was the youngest of five sisters. Her Christian name was officially 'Clara Lou Sheridan' which was then shortened to Ann. She was raised on a ranch and was remarkably good at horse riding and gun shooting.

After attending Robert E. Lee Grade School, she then began to pursue a new passion of hers which was acting. She enrolled in acting classes at Denton Junior High School where she also discovered her loved for singing.

*'I secretly wanted to be a bad singer. But that meant I thought I was pretty and vanity was bad'*

After leaving Texas for Hollywood, he shortened her name to Ann after being told that 'Clara Lou Sheridan' was too big to fit on the marquee for 'The Milky Way' a play she was performing in with a stock company in 1935. Her character's name was Ann and therefore she adopted the name also. Her first movie as 'Ann' was 'Behold My Wife' however, she only has two scenes in the movie as her character commits suicide.

Her first lead role in a movie was in 1935 for 'Car 99' with William Frawley and Fred MacMurray. 1935 also saw her in 'Mississippi' where she played a school girl alongside W.C. Fields, Bing Crosby and Joan Bennett.

On 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1936 she married her first husband, who was also a fellow actor, Edward Norris. In spite of this, they separated on 12<sup>th</sup> August 1937 and a divorce followed in 1939.

In late 1938, she starred in 'Angels with Dirty Faces'. Subsequent to this, Walter Winchell – a famed journalist – remarked on one of her photos that 'Ann Sheridan in this film has plenty of Umph.' Yet the studio changed the spelling of 'umph' to 'oomph' and continued to set up a contest to name Hollywood's 'Oomph Girl'. Ann won.

Uses convention of  
shortening name

Ann never did like the nick name of 'Oomph Girl'. She believed that if an actress was only called by a nickname then she is not thought of as a true actress. Similarly, if an actress was called by her looks or a reaction then that's all she'll ever be thought of as. Despite this, Ann admitted that she did not know what the word 'oomph' meant and she described it as 'what a fat man says when he leans over to tie his shoelace in a telephone booth'.

As a publicity stunt in November 1939, Warner Brothers arranged a date between Ann and George Brent (actor). Nevertheless, within six months, the couple were officially together. By 5<sup>th</sup> January 1942, George and Ann tied the knot and became Mr and Mrs, though exactly one year later, they were divorced.

*'With both men there was no honesty between us. And if two people living together can't be honest, then I don't want it'*

Sheridan carried out a six month strike in 1941 against Warner Brothers as she wanted to earn more than \$600 a week. In spite of this she lost and went back to work regardless.

The last movie that Ann starred in was 'The Woman and the Hunter' however it was sold directly to television companies and was never shown in theatres.

In 1966 she was diagnosed with advanced cancer of the oesophagus and liver before marrying actor Scott McKay. Her sister, Mrs Leo R. Kent, mentioned that although the family were close and all kept in touch, none of them had heard about Ann's illness.

*'I'm going to be alright...'* were her last words to her husband before she died on 21<sup>st</sup> January 1967.

**Ann Sheridan, born February 21 1915, died January 21 1967**

*It is not clear why the candidate  
has chosen this particular topic.  
The general features are well-handled,  
and the writing is accurate.*

# Commentary

I have written an extract of a short story called 'A September to Remember' exploring the themes of memory, with an intended audience of those embarking on a similar journey to Chris. I imagine it being published in an anthology of other short stories all being written to the same theme of memory. It has been written in a 1<sup>st</sup> person narrative to develop Chris' feelings in a similar way to 'The Kite Runner'.

*Clear sense of audience*

My non-fiction piece also explores the theme of memory in the style of a newspaper article to appear in a broadsheet for an educated audience with an interest in my topic. I modelled this on online obituaries in the style of Tom Vulture and other similar styles which can also be seen in 'Cupcakes and Kalashnikovs'.

*Clear rationale & research*

In 'A September to Remember', Chris' idiolect is evident through his level of elevated lexis. ('duly delivered'). Despite not knowing his childhood, the level of elevated lexis gives the readers the impression that Chris grew up to be very educated and had a high level of school teaching. This gives the effect of the educated audience being able to relate to him and understand where he is coming from and able to empathise with the lexis used.

*Sense of voice*

Real dates and references to songs have been used in the extract to give the piece authenticity and to make it more connecting to the readers. As the extract is set in 2011, the reference to the memorial service for the twin towers tragedy is a relatively recent event where most people who are a similar age to Chris may be able to remember exactly where they were on the day of the actual event. Therefore, readers are given the opportunity to think back to what they were doing on that particular day as it is a key moment in history. This is also a generic convention of a short story and it has the effect of creating a pragmatic tone, which makes the readers more empathetic towards Chris. Full dates ('Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> September 2011') give the readers the impression that even though it is not a significant date in terms of British history, it is a significant date in his life and he will never forget it. The use of the noun 'Tuesday' also reinforces that not only is the date important, so is the day, a thing that many people often forget. Similarly to 'A September to Remember', in the obituary, real dates are used and this is conform to generic conventions. To create authenticity, dates are used in almost every paragraph, which is due to the chronological nature of the piece. As one

*Sense of audience*

*Discusses effect of language*

of the main purposes of the piece is to inform readers of the life of Ann Sheridan, real dates are a key component to quickly giving the readers of the newspaper this information. At the end of the text, the dates of her life are in bold with no other context about them (born February 21 1915, died January 21 1967). This is also a generic convention of an obituary and are structurally at the end of the piece. As a result of this, the readers are left with the most vital information.

*Relates language to effect.*

Syndetic listing is also used to emphasise the key memories that Chris has, ('gritty sandwiches, cold winds, little sunshine and one time even losing my new bumper boots in the mud'). His clear memories of his childhood at Southend are clear in his memory. This gives the impression that the small things in life can have the biggest impact on someone when something solemn happens. This is also reinforced by the use of detail when describing his son's picture. As he remembers that his son put his Grandma in car number 7, this suggests that in their family, there was either a significance to this number or Chris was taking in every moment as it was his children's last time ever being with their Grandma. This is also similar to 'The Kite Runner' when Baba gives the details about what he sees on the streets in Chapter 3. In contrast, in the obituary, no one had heard about Ann's illness therefore implying that their family was not as close as her sister thought they were. This is evident by the reported speech in the article. The sequential positioning of the reported speech in the article illuminates what the next event could be and as, structurally, Ann's illness is not mentioned until the penultimate paragraph of the piece, this also represents how her family were the last people to know about her illness until after her death. This is also apparent in Cupcakes and Kalashnikovs in Bridget Jones' Diary when reported speech is used when Bridget is describing her conversations.

Following the generic features of an obituary, examples of setbacks and how the problems were overcome are also included. This helps to give a realistic impression of Ann's life and to not show her off through rose tinted glasses due to her passing. Both of her marriages are mentioned in her life despite both 'failing'. However, due to being seen as a key moment in somebody's life, if these were not mentioned it would cause the obituary to be incorrect. This also helps to keep the obituary in chronological order which is another generic convention of an obituary as it is a documentation of Ann's life. As the readers of the piece are not likely to know details about her life, by structuring the piece chronologically helps to



give the reader ease when writing. This is also evident in 'Justice at Night' in Cupcakes and Kalashnikovs as a chronological order is kept here in order to report the events of the lynching effectively.

There is a lot to admire here and the candidate has focused on the shaping of the texts ~~at~~ at sentence as well as whole text level.

The influence of the stimulus texts is evident. There is discussion of the reader and the effect of specific language choices.

J.E. ...