

Dora Leighton (born Richards) 1916 - 2015

'Dancing Dora' - Cannock's Golden Girl.

Dora Richards was born in 1916 in Bridgtown, Cannock. Life was hard as Dora's father died aged 29, leaving her mother to bring up Dora alone. She loved school and stayed until she was 16 years old, then got a job in a dress shop in Walsall. Dora loved dancing and paid for lessons, passing all her exams and began teaching dance in the 'Public rooms' in Cannock. Many people in Cannock were taught to dance by her. Dora married Jim Leighton in May 1941 and went on to have three children, five grandchildren and five great grandchildren.

Dora's long Soroptimist life began in January 1968 making her a Soroptimist for over 47 years. She was President in 1974/75 and again in 1981/82 and was made an honorary member in 2005. In the 1960's hats had to be worn to every meeting and at special events long dresses and long gloves always had to be worn. She showed a keen interest in International projects and often wrote to Soroptimists in Australia and the Philippines (friendship links of Cannock club), sharing ideas and friendship. Dora attended annual UK conferences and Midland Chase Regional quarterly meetings for many years, as well as Charter Dinners for other clubs within the area.

At club level she gave her total support to the President. She bought wrapping paper which she sold to club members for club funds, penned pantomimes which members performed at Christmas meetings, taught a line dancing routine which was performed at a Regional conference, even though she herself was unable to attend due to illness - this was at the ripe old age of 90 years and still able herself to do the splits!

She was always ready to distribute leaflets, sell raffle tickets, get petitions signed, write to her MP and regularly held group meetings at her home. She never shied away from tackling difficult or disturbing issues and was an active participant in all club discussions, putting forward her thoughts and views with care and eloquence. She had a fabulous sense of humour, always ready to laugh at herself, and with 3 other long serving members of the club became known as the "Golden Girls" where laughter and mischief abounded.

Dora's last meeting was on the 22nd September 2015. She sadly passed away on the 7th October that same year meaning she was 99 1/2 on her death. What a pity she didn't make her century! Club members formed a guard of honour as her coffin left the Chapel, which has now become a respectful ritual for all members of the Cannock club.

Soroptimist International has evolved in the fifty two years since Dora became a member, but the values and commitments that she held dear are still as important now as they were to her throughout her 47 years as a proud Soroptimist.

