Towards the end of WW1, on the 31st May 1918 a bouncing baby girl was born to Ethel and William Sutcliffe of East Perth. She was to be their only child and they named her Osra Marjorie, a moniker that was to become the bane of her life. But perhaps this is where her love of literature was spawned as research has shown that Osra is the feminine form of Osric, that foolish courtier from Hamlet, and the novel “The Heart of Princess Osra” is part of a trilogy from the pen of the Victorian novelist Anthony Hope, set in the mythical land of Ruritania. Little is known of Osra’s very early years as sadly her father died when she was just 4 and her mother when she was 8. Her mother Ethel had worked as a housekeeper for Ida and Harry Eves on their farm in Walkaway, just south of Geraldton and as they were unable to have children of their own, they gladly adopted Osra who grew up on the farm and attended the local primary school. She had quite an austere and often lonely childhood and would find solace in her beloved books devouring whatever she could find, including the complete works of Shakespeare by the age of 12.

In 1929, Osra was sent to board in Geraldton to attend the district High School where she excelled academically, gaining a scholarship to Perth Modern School. Unfortunately she was unable to accept the scholarship as there was no suitable boarding accommodation available in the city. Osra passed her Leaving Certificate in 6 subjects with a distinction in English in 1934 but being only 16, was too young to attend university so she spent a year helping out on the farm and concentrating on her other passion; music. She passed her A.mus. A. on piano which was quite a remarkable feat for such a young girl.

In 1936, Osra was finally able to take up a place at UWA, but once again the hand of fate intervened when her mum Ida died, forcing her to return to
Walkaway to care for her dad Harry and to assist on the farm, where she quickly became adept at driving a tractor, a truck and cooking for the various workmen. At this time she also began giving piano lessons to local children and concentrating on her own musical career gaining her LRSM in 1939.

The following year Osra married Jack Wisbey who was stationed in Walkaway working for the Midland Railway Co. For a short time they lived in a cottage in town welcoming their two sons, Peter and John. Towards the end of WW 2, due to the failing health of Harry, Osra and Jack returned to work the farm. In 1949, two major events occurred in Osra’s life; her adored dad Harry died and I, her longed for daughter was born. Both our parents were extraordinarily hard workers and as well as coping with the demands of the farm, 2 small boys and an infant daughter, for 6 months Osra also took on the care of the newborn daughter of a dear friend who had tragically died in childbirth.

A close and lasting bond was formed with this child and so we have an honorary sister called Janet. All this and Osra was only 33 years old.

In 1957, due to my father’s ill health, the farm was sold and our family moved to Perth. Adapting to city life was a huge challenge for Osra and one of the first things she did was to install a wood fired stove into the kitchen of our home in Nedlands as she couldn’t cope with the new-fangled electric one. Many a delicious roast dinner, pudding and cake came out of that oven. Osra continued to give piano lessons at home and at last was able to enrol part time at UWA as a mature age student where she studied music, French and Italian. She completed her BA and in 1971 she and I attended the same graduation ceremony having both successfully completed our Diploma of Education. From memory, her grades were a whole lot better than mine!
Osra taught at Hamilton Senior High School for one year before moving to St Hilda’s in 1973 where she at first taught French and Italian eventually becoming Head of Department and Head of House then later moving into the Development Office. Osra remained at St Hilda’s for 25 years, retiring a few months shy of her 80th Birthday. These were some of the happiest years of her life marred only by the death of our father Jack in 1987. Osra was loved and respected by staff and students alike, making many firm friends, some of whom are here today. Retirement did not sit comfortably with Osra so she busied herself with voluntary work for Meals on Wheels, KEMH and the UWA Visitors’ Centre working well into her 90s. In April of last year, despite our best endeavours it became obvious that Rob and I could no longer provide the care in our home that Osra required, so the reluctant decision was made to move her to permanent residential care. We were fortunate indeed to find a place at Mont Clare where she was taken care of with the utmost kindness, love and respect. By necessity, this is a very abridged biography of a remarkable life spanning almost a century and I am sure that my brothers would be keen to share some of their memories of Osra with you, after the service. 

But what of the essence of Osra?

She was one of life’s thoroughly good human beings; warm, humble, with a generosity of spirit second to none and a beautiful smile. Apart from Communion wine she never drank alcohol, nor smoked a cigarette, she gave generously to various charities and rarely spoke ill of anyone; her favourite motto being “if you can’t say something good about a person, say nothing at all”. Osra did not have so much as a parking or speeding fine despite having driven for 80 years and I have already mentioned her voluntary work.
She was also fiercely independent even to her own detriment at times and was one of the strongest women that I have known. She had a sharp, enquiring and intelligent mind, an enormous zest for life and a particular fondness for the arts especially the theatre, music and ballet and in quieter moments was never without a book in her hands. But lest it be thought that Osra was some sort of saint she could at times be feisty, outspoken, strong willed, stubborn and opinionated; some might be tempted to suggest, a strong familial trait! Osra also liked to have the last word as you will shortly hear when her granddaughter Kate reads a letter from Osra that she left to be read today.

To her family, Osra was a wonderfully warm, caring, loving and much loved wife, mother, mother in law, grandmother and great grandmother, immensely proud of each one of us; delighting in our achievements and forgiving of our many failings. She was also a strict disciplinarian on occasions and we all learnt very early not to “mess” with Osra as there was never any doubt as to who would come off second best. In her heyday, Osra was a wonderful cook and family Christmases were not complete without her cream puffs with chocolate sauce. My brother John holds the record for the most consumed at one sitting.

To her friends, Osra was unfailingly loyal and interested in every aspect of their lives, always ready to lend a helping hand, sharing in their joys and sorrows. She never forgot a Birthday or a significant occasion usually penning a beautifully crafted letter.

To her students, Osra was a wise, dedicated and compassionate teacher who always gave freely of her time and knowledge and took great pride in their achievements in and out of the classroom. Osra also had a particularly soft spot for the more challenging students. On one occasion she took care of a
girl who had a drink or two before the school ball, keeping her out of harm’s way and more importantly that of the principal’s until the girl was sufficiently sober to return to the ball. We have been deeply touched by the many beautiful tributes from former students, especially from some of the so called, naughty girls! Facebook is a medium that was completely foreign to Osra so she would have been totally bemused to know that there have been over 11,000 “hits” on the post of the St Hilda’s Old Scholar’s page with literally hundreds of “likes” and “comments”. There were also many on the Christ Church page surely an indication of how many lives Osra had touched.

A lifelong, deep, abiding and unwavering faith which together with an indomitable spirit helped Osra to cope with various adversities in life. This was never more obvious than in the last few months which in so many ways were extremely challenging for her.

She never complained, merely accepted her lot with her usual patience, grace and stoicism, grateful for the kindness of so many and secure in the sure and certain knowledge that she was soon to meet her maker.

We always used to tease Osra that she loved nothing better than attending a good funeral and I am fairly confident that she would have approved of this one, at this church, where she worshipped faithfully and regularly for the last 60 years. Now it is time to send Osra to her God, who surely with the Angels and Archangels and all the company of heaven will be waiting with open arms to welcome a truly beautiful soul.

Until we meet again darling Osra, may you rest in peace.