

# A Life in the Day



## WORDS OF WISDOM

### BEST ADVICE I WAS GIVEN

I can't remember anyone giving me any good advice!

### ADVICE I'D GIVE

Stick to your guns

### WHAT I WISH I'D KNOWN

That it sometimes pays to ignore the advice you're given

# Vera Lynn

The original "forces' sweetheart" on surviving the Blitz and topping the charts

**D**ame Vera, 102, was born in East Ham, London. She made her name singing the wartime classic *We'll Meet Again* in 1939 and performing for the troops, for which she became known as the forces' sweetheart. In 1952 she became the first British artist to top the US charts with *Auf Wiederseh'n, Sweetheart*, and in 2009, aged 92, became the oldest living artist to have a No 1 album in the UK. She lives in Sussex with her daughter, Virginia, and son-in-law, Tom.

“ I might be of a certain vintage, but every morning when I get up around 8.30 I look forward to the day ahead. I've always been a glass-half-full person, and still am. When I was born [in 1917], King George V was on the throne, Lloyd George was prime minister, the

Great War was still raging and women hadn't even got the vote.

I never thought I'd live to such a grand old age, and driving through the darkened streets of London in the Blitz, when bombs were falling all around, I sometimes wondered whether I'd make it through the war. I was one of the lucky ones. I've also been blessed with good genes: my dear brother, Roger, died on the eve of his 103rd birthday.

After doing my morning stretches, I'll have cereal, toast and a cup of tea for breakfast before adjourning to the living room. It looks out onto our lovely back garden with its still-green lawn, swimming pool and brightly coloured flowers. I love to breathe in the sights and sounds of nature: the little things in life give you so much pleasure in your latter years.

Time is a funny thing and I sometimes find it hard to believe that it was really me who topped

the charts all those years ago with *We'll Meet Again*, became the forces' sweetheart — though I never thought myself particularly good-looking — and travelled to the mosquito-infested jungles of Burma to entertain the troops fighting the Japanese. Was I really that brave? I wonder.

Then I look around at all the mementoes of my life dotted around the room: the pictures of my late musician husband, Harry [who died in 1998], the honorary Burma Star I was awarded and the photographs of the Queen Mother and me — and it all comes flooding back. I remember our simple, 1941 wartime wedding, the way my lipstick ran in the tropical heat, and the jokes that Her Majesty and I shared at events we attended together. Having lived through the war, we formed a special bond.

I've never had a big appetite, as you can see from my slender figure in old photographs, and I usually have a light lunch. In the summer I'll have cheese and crackers, and in the winter a homemade soup.

In the afternoon I might relax by watching *Antiques Roadshow* or a whodunnit like *Midsomer Murders* or *Agatha Raisin* or a repeat of *Morse*. I've always loved a good murder-mystery. One of the day's highlights is afternoon tea with Virginia, Tom, any visiting friends and our cheeky little Jack Russell terrier, Digby, who likes lemon drizzle cake almost as much as I do. "Sit," I tell him, and he waits patiently until he gets his ration.

The three of us usually sit down for dinner at about 7.30pm. I cut out meat from my diet several years ago, but still love the occasional Dover sole. The one thing I miss is a glass of bubbly, but that had to go — doctor's orders. Occasionally we'll play music in the evening, perhaps even some of my old hits. I gave up performing publicly some years ago — every singer needs to know when to bow out gracefully — but I'll still hum along. When you've been a singer all your life, your love of music never dies. I'm usually tucked up in bed by 10.30pm and very often drift off thinking about Harry. I still miss him, even after all these years. ■ ”

**Interview by York Membery**

To donate to the Dame Vera Lynn Children's Charity, visit [dvlcc.org.uk](http://dvlcc.org.uk). Her book *Keep Smiling Through* is out now (Arrow £7.99)



**STAR OF THE CENTURY** Dame Vera on her 100th birthday