

Maria is ready- She looks forward to meeting you at the table

*by Mathilde Griffin*

**Maria turned 81 in February of this year. This is not something many of us reading this article have any experience of ourselves.**

**Of course, many of us will have parents of grandparents that we've known, of this age or older. Hopefully, these older relatives have been healthy and mobile, able to enjoy various leisurely activities.**

**Maria's story is presented here to inspire and motivate us to follow in her (hard to keep up with!) footsteps.**

**It is worth sharing this story in an age of increasing obsession with youth and intense short term fitness results. Enjoying a high level of fitness which is maintained in the long term enables a high quality of life in the present and for the future. This is what we should all be striving for.**

*Maria you are the first 81 year old I've ever met who puts even the springiest 8 year old to shame. You are fast, agile, nimble and your reactions are spot on. What is this due to?*

Definitely to my lifelong routine of exercise. In my younger life, I used to swim every single day! I swam in an outdoor pool, every day of the year, come rain, ice, snow and occasionally sun. I swam in the outdoor lido in Kennington Park here in London. (Unfortunately, now shut down). I then swam in an indoor pool but caught an eye infection, and stopped.

I also practiced dancing ice skating. This was in Queensway ice rink. I was very good at that. It was not the time of YouTube videos, however, so I can't show off my skills to you.

I also walked a lot. My husband and I would do 10 mile round trips, walking around London, discovering new sights and exploring various areas. I remember a walk we did in the winter of 1963! The memory of this walk is as fresh as the white snow that blanketed London. It was cold, crisp and beautiful.

*Your main exercise is now Table Tennis?*

Yes. Several years ago now, I toned down my exercise routine and stopped walking like I used to. I took up table tennis at 75 years old. I play around 3 or 4 times a week, playing for 2-3 hour sessions at a time. It's been 6 years now and I am still learning! There is always something new to learn and practice. There is such a huge



variety of different players all with their own style. Every game and every ball that is played can be a surprise.

*How did you find table tennis and what drew you to it?*

I was walking along the Embankment and saw an outside table. I saw some people playing and asked them if I could have a go! I was really bad as I had never played before. But I had a good time, running after and picking up the balls. I then started to play just for fun. Little did I know that I was going to get hooked! And here I am still going strong, 6 years from the first play.

*Where do you play?*

I play twice a week at Moberly Table tennis club here in Hammersmith and twice at Talacre in Kentish town.

*How do these clubs compare?*

At Moberly, we have very good players. There is a high level of play taking place at every session. Talacre look like amateurs next to Moberly.

*What does table tennis bring to your life?*

It brings me some kind of relaxation. It is hard work and you have to work at it really actively. From there comes the relaxation.

It also allows me to put my troubles aside. All the troubles you have in your home life, you just forget them for the time that you are playing. The sport is so absorbing and you have to be so focused that it becomes all that you do.

It also has many health benefits. Since I've started playing, not too much has changed as I was already fit before. But it does keep me fit. I would not be the same without it. I would not have maintained this level of alertness and agility. It keeps me fit in a really enjoyable way.

*Do you think this lifelong love of exercise has led you to what you're achieving today?*

Yes I think so. If you lead a sedentary life, you become like a cabbage really. I don't think you can be as fit as I am at my age through diet alone. You need exercise.

*What about the diet you follow? How would you describe it?*

My diet is pretty healthy. I don't eat many fried foods. I don't often indulge in junk processed food or fatty foods like crisps or sausages. I mostly have a Mediterranean diet with a lot of vegetables and fruit. I do eat chocolates and sweets, I can't help myself from eating some. But it isn't too much.

*3 reasons to recommend table tennis to someone.*

You have to focus a lot whilst playing so it keeps your brain working. It keeps you fit. It is a great form of exercise, where you have to bend, twist, you use the all body, the brain, all of it. You can develop all your muscles, including your brain. And also have fun!

*Who is table tennis for?*

It is for everyone, regardless of your age, fitness level, young, old, fat, thin. As long as you can move, you can play. Even if you move just a little. Even if your focus is slow to start with, you can improve.

*What character traits does table tennis help develop?*

I think it helps make you more tolerant. If you want to play, you just need to get on with it, pick up the ball every time it falls and rolls away (which can be very often!) and keep putting the ball back in play. You get to play with stronger players and weaker players, players of all different styles and temperaments. All of this develops tolerance towards others.



*What can you tell us about Moberly TTC?*

I find everyone is very friendly here. More so than other places I have played. There is a big variety here, players from all ages and from many countries. People who have come to table tennis at very different times and through different routes, all in one large sports centre, playing and socialising together.

*What would you like to see happen in the sport of table tennis?*

I would love for table tennis to become more popular. We can do this by attracting more people to it, training them, developing their skills. Helping to produce better players who then want to commit to the sport and develop within it. They can get fully involved, join in for competitions and tournaments, if they want, which will help them develop even more.

**I hope Moberly TTC will expand and that more people will join us, to play table tennis together!**