

**It is with much sadness that we announce the death of Falkner House's founder and principal, Mrs Flavia Nunes on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2017.**

Flavia Falkner was born on 1<sup>st</sup> March 1920. Whilst her parents were somewhat eccentric and unusual, (with Flavia recounting later that her mother had flown with the Wright brothers) they were outwardly conventional and Flavia was brought up in the country with her brother Michael. Horses were a key feature of her childhood and she learnt to ride on a mule which took her to Brownies when the creature felt so inclined. Her parents allowed her huge freedom as a child and this independence never left her. She always hated the confines of boarding school and felt her academic education had ultimately been very poor. Finishing school again left her short of a 'proper' education yet highly competent at all aspects of sewing and craft which she always loved. She hated home economics though and would make herself faint in order to avoid these classes. This disdain for cooking meant she was an atrocious cook and believed food could always be made more 'interesting' with the addition of unusual ingredients such as ginger as a default option (not always a guarantee of success). During the Munich crisis in 1938, she was in Italy learning Italian. Having enjoyed herself enormously she was reluctant to obey her parents' instructions to return home immediately. In later years, she recounted to her grandchildren that she subsequently found herself leaving Italy on a troop train with mobilised Italian troops. Married in 1940 to Humphrey Nunes, she spent the war in and around the UK following Humphrey's work as a barrister for the army whilst looking after their first son, Aubrey. Life encompassed living in Liverpool at a time when the docks were hit by a massive German bombing raid. Her resourcefulness came to the fore during the war as she was very much on her own with a small baby whilst Humphrey was away working. After the war, she worked as a secretary for the Foreign Office and went on to have two daughters: Jacina and Anita. She loved her work at the Foreign Office and was privy to some tumultuous moments of British history with the fallout from the revelations about the spies Philby and Maclean. Later she would develop her love of sailing which would stay with her until she was well into her 80s. Racing her 'X' one design boat every weekend at Itchenor Sailing Club was one of her passions in life and she was never phased by any weather – in fact the stormier the better! In January 1956, she crewed a small dingy (an Enterprise) across the Channel as part of a publicity stunt dreamt up by the designers of the boat. This made front page news in the News Chronicle newspaper.

Mrs Nunes was enormously accident prone her entire life, at one stage breaking three different bones in three different accidents all within a period of one month. It may not be entirely a surprise, given her character that she threw herself into every part of life with great gusto and broken bones or similar invariably followed. Swallowing a wasp whilst drinking from a can of coke, severing her femoral artery not once but twice, breaking her coccyx while tobogganing, breaking one of her vertebrae while cross country skiing and admiring the scenery at the same time, falling through a trap door in the pavement while looking in a shop window, breaking a thumb having slammed the car boot shut on herself and subsequently dropping the car keys out of reach – the list is almost limitless. Having heard her being described as uninsurable, someone once joked that this was technically not true as the frequency and extent of damage was entirely predictable.

Earlier, in 1946 whilst struggling to find a school for Aubrey, she decided to solve the problem herself by setting up a small school called The Cygnets in a room in her house in Wimbledon. She employed an extraordinary teacher, Miss Smith, who taught the 30 children together in one room. In 1954 and still needing to support the family, she founded Falkner House after buying 19 Brechin Place. Her market research consisted of calling other schools in the area on behalf of a mythical family in search of places. Despite the challenges of having

three children under 11 and being only 34, the creation of Falkner House was ultimately done on her own. Although her husband guaranteed the loan taken for the purchase of 19 Brechin Place, the risk was all hers. Humphrey was supportive but generally in the background. On opening, the school started with just four children and in the early days school pupils occupied only part of the building with the remainder being tenanted. As the school grew steadily, more rooms were used as part of the school and the family occupied the upper floors in place of the tenants. Today the school has 200 children at 19 and 17 Brechin Place and almost every inch of the building is used by the girls. Furthermore, in September boys are due to return to the Falkner House fold once more, albeit with rather more than four students! Flavia and Humphrey would have been delighted at this development of the Falkner House story.

Apart from the creation of the school itself and what this has given us, it is Mrs Nunes' indomitable personality that is her greatest legacy to the school. From sayings such as 'you're not made of sugar so you won't melt' or 'knees mend themselves but tights don't', her grit and determination continues to be at the very heart of Falkner House. She would have been enormously proud of what the school stands for today and what is achieved everyday by the staff and pupils. We owe everything we are and everything that we will continue to be, to Mrs Nunes.