

Memories of Dad

Some of my earliest memories in childhood are being away with Mom, Dad, and David in the caravan. Dad loved caravanning. He often told stories of the caravan his parents had in Ross on Wye. And we would hear about the first caravan Mom and Dad bought 45 years ago, where after only a few months, on its second trip, the axle collapsed! Fortunately our caravanning trips after that were more successful, and we would go away several times per year. I loved being away in the caravan with them.

Throughout our childhood we had dogs. Mom and Dad were puppy walkers and breeders for the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association. In total I think we had over 100 labrador dogs and puppies over 20 years. The dogs, and the voluntary work for Guide Dogs, gave us a lot of pleasure. Although, Dad often got the job of walking them!

When I was 16 my parents said we would go on our first foreign holiday, to the USA! But, of course, Dad didn't do things in half measure. So the holiday turned into a 3 ½ week road trip taking in Florida, California and Nevada! Dad was in his element driving across the USA, exploring new places each day. We were fortunate to do 2 more road trips in different parts of America and Dad would often retell stories of our journeys.

Those trips taught me to be inquisitive of other countries and cultures. They inspired me to travel for several years. I focused my career on collaborating with people in other countries and, through that, I even met my fiancée Roberta, who unfortunately cannot be here today. Those trips Dad organised gave me more than just travel memories, they changed my life. But I could not have been able to do any of that without the support of my parents back in the UK. Dad was always there when I needed him. I could call him from wherever I was, and in whatever predicament, and he would solve it.

This was Dad's way. He would always offer help and be happy to do it. He liked helping people and he liked fixing problems. He was dependable too; if he said he was going to do something then he would. He even sat in the hospital a few weeks ago updating the church website because he said he would do it.

He brought that attitude and professionalism into everything he did. He was Church Warden here for many years and was involved in organising many things at the church. He was successful in business too, using those same skills and attributes with his business partner Martin to run Tankgas Equipment for 25 years. He worked long hours and was proud of what he and Martin achieved. He instilled a positive work ethic and 'fix-it' attitude into me and David. His 'fix-it' attitude also extended to DIY and other woodwork projects. He worked extensively on their house, but also on my house and my brother's houses. He enjoyed working with his hands on projects like that. When my brother and I were babies, and he was doing the nightshift, he would build model airfix kits and intricately paint them. Amongst other toys, he made wooden drills painted to look like the real thing, with a cable and miniature plug even, for my brother and I when we were toddlers. In primary school he made a wooden recorder case

for me. In secondary school, he built the giant 'Audrey 2' plant for our production of Little Shop of Horrors, for me to puppeteer inside. He built all of the light boxes and equipment for my brother's mobile disco company 30 years ago and supported David by driving him to every gig and helping him do the discos. He built an intricate model Christmas Village for the house. And, of course, he created many grottos for the church Christmas Fairs. These were, quite frankly, amazing! The amount of hours Dad would put into creating the grottos was astounding. All that to put a smile on the faces of children and adults for only a few hours. He was an artist; his paintings of fairytale and TV characters for the grottos were perfect. And he hadn't stopped. This year, before he got sick, he was planning to build a full-size sleigh!

Dad was one of Santa's chief helpers for 40 years. He performed the role here at St Michaels and at several other schools and churches over the years. He respected the role and took it very seriously; even being critical if he saw another helper wearing trainers or a wristwatch! He understood the origins and tradition of Santa Claus. He even drafted a book about Santa Claus and Christmas! He took a lot of care with his costume, mannerisms, and what he could and couldn't say. And, whilst Santa receives less physical letters these days, Dad would spend many hours individually replying to each child on behalf of Santa. He loved the magic of Christmas and worked hard to preserve it.

Dad also exhibited his artistic side with the Inn Crowd. I know that he enjoyed contributing to the productions immensely. It brought him alive being involved in them.

One of Dad's biggest passions, throughout his life, was magic. He loved the art and science of magic since he was a child. He studied it deeply, although he rarely performed; only typically to Mom or to the family at Christmas. He was a moderator for an online forum for magicians. He spent a lot of his time on that forum, interacting with and making friends with magicians around the world. Over the last almost 20 years he posted 27,000 times on the forum! The famous magician, Teller, once said, *"Sometimes magic is just someone spending more time on something than anyone else might reasonably expect."* Therefore Dad was the ultimate magician!

The connections he made through the forum resulted in him travelling to the Blackpool Magic Convention every year, and many other conventions and events. I was fortunate to be able to go with him to many of these over the years. We loved going to see various magicians performing and would discuss the show and each effect in detail in the car on the way home. Dad even managed to go to Quebec in July this year for the World Championship of Magic. Even though he'd had surgery on his spine 3 months earlier, and 5 days of radiotherapy the previous week!, he still got on a plane and flew to Canada because he was determined to do it!

That was Dad. If he said he was going to do something then he did it.

Dad was compassionate, helpful, knowledgeable, loving, funny, inquisitive, hard-working, passionate.... He was all of these things and so much more and I will miss him every day.

I love you Dad.