

DAD Eulogy

Joe was born in Greenhithe, Kent, in 1936, to Joseph and Emma Arthur. He was the second eldest of his siblings Mary, Gordon, Roger and Bruce. When I asked Dad about growing up in Greenhithe, he'd repeat a couple of things: the family coping with being in a well targeted area for bomb dropping during WW2, and the family having to get into their shelter in the house when the alarms went off. Dad was sometimes impossible to wake, so they'd once or twice had to roll him into the shelter, still asleep! During the war, his dad was sent by the Navy to India and his mum was working as a nurse in a Mental Hospital. Life wasn't particularly easy, the kids were sent away for periods of the war (and weren't lucky with the company that kept them – so much so they preferred the idea of risking it back at home) and once the war was over – rather than things becoming more peaceful, it was made harder when on a trip back from the cinema, dad watched his brother Gordon run off the bus and straight into the path of a van. Gordon died, just short of 9 years old.

10 years later, their mum Emma died, and Dad was soon sent off to do his national service in the Royal Air Force, where he worked in Radar. He openly confessed, by this point, he was one of the most self serving, smug, unlikeable people you could ever meet. He wasn't short of female interest, and he was determined to show everyone how amazing he was. He literally cooked up an idea to put his RAF colleagues' boots in the oven as it made them gleam like no boot polish could ever achieve... which worked great until he discovered the threading had all disintegrated and the boots fell apart. Dad thought it was a worthy experiment, his peers and superiors disagreed. But, amidst all of that, he did horse guards parade, which he was very proud of, and he did make a point to help out a poor colleague in radar who was colour blind, to get him through his time there. The poor guy just couldn't face being moved out of the air force into the army, so dad rallied round and the team found ways and means to help him through.

After National Service, he started an evening course in Chemistry at Woolwich Poly, where he met his future wife, and Trevor and I's mum, Joan. Still full of himself, he rolled up to my mum (a sexy thing in a lab coat) and said he had tickets to the hottest show in town, West Side Story. She jumped at the chance to go. Dad jumped straight out to the ticket offices in a panic as he didn't have tickets at all. Fortunately, he blagged a couple and after their first date, he had fallen head over heels in love.

Mum and dad both fully qualified as chemists (my dad getting more marks than mum, purely because he guessed which question would come up from past papers, and only revised the one question. Mum was furious...). Mum worked at the United Glass Factory in Charlton and Dad worked for Burrows Welcome. He came up with a wonderful formula for something and the boss was delighted. Only thing was, dad hadn't written down what he'd put in the formula and couldn't replicate it. I can't help but think of Roald Dahl's book George's Marvellous Medicine when I think of dad in a lab...

In the early 1970s, after moving from Sidcup in Kent to Wycombe to start a family, dad just up and left his job. After one or two random jobs, he ended up selling insurance. His incapability of taking orders and towing the company line kind of meant he had to work for himself, or he'd end up in trouble, and becoming an insurance broker worked great for him. He had the chat, the charm and the confidence. So... that's what he kept doing until he retired. After working the streets for Pearl insurance, he ended up specialising in the building trade. He also worked with the Federation of Master Builders and the Guild of Master Craftsmen. He was always keen to get the best companies on board, coming up with idea after idea to improve safety and reward companies who passed health and safety visits. He worked hard, spent hours on the phone trying to get customers, spent

hours on the road visiting them, and often our friends and relatives would be landed with a surprise visit when he needed a stop over. If you were lucky, you'd get a couple of days notice. The upside to all this travelling is that dad became the family sat nav. There was no place he didn't have a map for, and he knew all the shortcuts when you got stuck in a traffic jam.

Dad was father to both Trevor and I so... what was dad like as a parent? Well, if you can handle a parent that wakes up bang on 7am every morning, singing and whistling to himself and stomping through the house, you'd have loved dad. If you can handle a parent that puts the old style whistling kettle on, and then goes down to the garden shed, leaving you to run down 2 flights of stairs to turn the whistle off before you went mad, you'd have loved dad. If the idea of being taken to a DIY shop to play with curtain rings while he gets lots of formica cut, every other week, fills you with glee, you'd be on a winner. Sitting in the reference library twiddling your thumbs while dad looked through tons of yellow pages, was another treat. But... dad always made it fun. His silly songs, his continual chat, meant there was never a dull moment. And he always made sure we had lifts to wherever we needed to go.

He was good at, and was continually doing DIY – making (sometimes not finishing) shelves, bookcases, you name it – he was very good at basic carpentry. He built me a Sindy House and cut up bits of old carpet, used bits of vinyl adhesive etc to kit it out and it really was amazing. Alongside Trevor the lego king building lego furniture for it, it was better than the real thing... We weren't well off, but if it couldn't be bought, it could be made...

He was very adept at fixing cars (good job as most of our cars needed lots of love and attention). He was a master of gluing things with araldite... our chevette's back window clip would regularly fall off and the dining area became the gluing area for it, much to mum's delight. Lots our possessions got the araldite treatment. Cups, saucers, ornaments... if it wasn't glued, it probably wasn't ours...

He was a master teller of terrible jokes. When close family friends the Highleys lived in Downley, Brian and my dad would continually share new jokes they'd heard. And delighted in trying them out on us. If you see my daughter Diann later, asking you for a terrible joke, she'd very much like you to write down any you might know, as she's collecting them in memory of the best rotten joke teller of all, second to Brian Highley of course. She's lost her lifetime supply from grandad, so we'd much appreciate some to keep the memories alive! I've already told her about the one to do with the shark and the six quid/sick squid... a regularly repeated classic... if you want to see it, it's in her book.

Dad was also a musician, albeit in a beginners capacity. He studied violin (to get the girls he said) and got a better grade 1 mark than I did. He could play basic piano – and loved practising his christmas carols to play at a yearly concert at church. He knew swan lake (the music we came in to) and blue bells of scotland by heart. When he moved into his flat, and I took the piano to save him space, we swapped so he had my keyboard. Dad was not happy without the ability to play music, no matter how simple, in his house.

But on top of all that, you may well already know, he was a chess whizz. His own father had played chess and Dad took to it like a duck to water. He was a member of Bourne End chess club for many years – he'd regularly play for the county, and general club matches, and it was a passion that continued in later years with him playing matches and competitions online. He even organised a few charity events where a grandmaster would play several players at once, and any winners got certificates. Chess was a passion that lasted all of his life. And he passed that passion onto Trevor, (who was determined to beat him when he was offered money if he did) and in turn, Trevor's son Owen.

Dad always supported those close to him, especially mum. He supported mum through her journey from joining St James' Church in the late 1960s, through to her becoming a priest in 2002, and beyond. They stayed strong when they said goodbye to their daughter Rachel in August 1972, a day after she was born. He was so very proud of mum, and never once complained about the multitude of meetings that happened in our house, or how many times she had to go out to church. Mum kept many of his mad ideas at arms length, but he still managed to get involved in organising events at the church and was very much in attendance at all the socials. One year he organised a pancake day fun run through the town which saw the priest at the time, running around, flipping pancakes in a french maids outfit, and my dad dressed up as a nanny, pushing around a grown up baby in a pram. Another event saw him get a later priest at St James', along with him and some friends, dressed up in ballet gear, dancing to the Nutcracker Suite music. He really was quite the entertainer – and knew how to have fun.

After mum died, Dad rarely spoke about his loss. Instead, he went into default survival mode to keep himself occupied. He upped his attendances at All Saints church, where his faith deepened and he eventually got confirmed a few years ago. He joined a local walking group – Simply Walk, and became their official backmarker, and one of the first aiders. With his friends, he set up a scrabble club for people who wanted to get out more and socialise with like-minded folk. With his friend Myra, and with help from numerous others, he organised coach trips with church to take people to the beach, or the zoo, or to various cathedrals, and although he'd always panic that not enough people would sign up, they always proved a great success, and all profits went to charity, one of his favourites being the Wycombe Homeless Connection. We won't go into the fact that for each of these fabulous ideas, there were at least 100 alongside that were doomed to failure before they'd exited dad's mouth...! But that's what people loved about my dad. He always had an idea. He always wanted to help. He always wanted to challenge. He couldn't stop.

One of his closest friends is my age, he couldn't be here today, but he knew dad just from the random fact my dad asked why he looked miserable when he was walking past the house one day. Jon said he was going to lose his job and he had no CV. So, my dad wrote his CV and got him a job. They've been close friends ever since. Jon asked me to tell you *I would not be where I am or who I am today without the legend that was to me 'uncle Joe'. Not related by blood but a stronger bond, we met when I was at one of life's lows a quarter of a century ago, he became part of the family and helped mould me into the man I am today, many funny stories along the way and only Joe could tell them in his usual entertaining way so I won't even attempt to. I'm a man of few words so it only leaves me to say 'I will miss you Unc'.* One of the most defining things I'd say of my dad is, he didn't see age, and he never seemed to age himself, until mum died. He'd be your best friend if you were 20 or 80. If you were up for a laugh, you were in. He loved his grandchildren, Niamh, Owen and Diann very much. He was proud of them and would have done anything for them. And I know they especially will miss him very much. We've already had to start up 'Sausage Saturday' for Diann at ours, now Granddad can no longer be the host! And Diann just doesn't know anyone else to make her laugh with the terrible dancing the pair of them did together!

So, Joe, you will be much missed, as a parent, a grandparent, and a friend. We will miss the random phonecalls and visits, the laughs, the hugs, the unwavering support, the never-ending chit-chat, the gossip, the 'world-saving' ideas you always had, the bad jokes, the cups of tea... you were a warm-hearted character who just by your presence alone filled all the holes in an empty room. We will have to learn to accept those holes now, and find the strength to fill them ourselves. I know I'll personally be forever grateful for the thousands of lifts I had, the chats, the madness, and the love.

And knowing wherever we were, what ever time, day or night, whether guilty or innocent – you were only just a phonecall away, and resolute in your support.

I know many of you here who know what happened at the end of dad's life will have many questions about it. That will never go away. There are no answers. Well, as my dad would say, whenever I'd ask endless questions, that could possibly never be answered 'The Answer's a Lemon'. He loved us, we loved him. Everything else will teach us no more, or less than that. And that's what we should be blessed and thankful for. May you rest in peace, Dad.