

Eulogy for Dad

Dad was born in 1925, the same year as:

Actor Richard Burton

Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher

& a year before Queen Elizabeth II

In 1929, Dad's family moved from Ely, where his mother had sold sweets displayed in glass jars in the front window of their house, to Wells St. in Canton where his parents, Lily and William bought a corner shop with living accommodation above. This became the family's home including to dad's older siblings, Doris and Ken.

Dad's father also worked for Price's Bakery, based in Victoria Park, doing a regular bread delivery round on a horse and cart serving the shops in Cardiff town centre and beyond, sometimes accompanied by dad on his journey. Splott was about as far as they would go, and Dad always joked how quick their return journey to Canton would be once the horse knew they were heading back. Dad had a life-long affection for horses which may well have started here.

Although not a regular church goer, in his youth dad joined the Boys Brigade at Clare Road Methodist Church, where he probably first heard what became some of his favourite hymns. He also learned to play the accordion, taught by Miss Hilda Banwell in Romilly Road. By coincidence, almost 40 years later, a good friend of Miss Banwell, Muriel Harris, would give Bev and I piano lessons at her home most Saturday mornings when we visited the shop.

WWII broke out around the time dad left Kitchener Road School aged 14 or 15. In 1943, aged 18, Dad was duly called up and, after his initial training was completed in Brecon, he joined the 4th Battalion Welch Regiment who were training at Herne Bay in Kent ahead of the Normandy landings. In June 1944, not long after D-Day, 160th Infantry Brigade, of which his regiment were a part, crossed into Northern France and were soon involved in heavy fighting around the town of Caen. Further battles followed between 1944 – 45 as the brigade tracked eastwards across Northern France, the Netherlands and Germany with other Allied Forces. During one street battle, Dad was caught by an exploding German hand grenade resulting in shrapnel injuries to one of his legs. This led to a spell in hospital back in the UK, before re-joining his regiment. At end of the war, the 4th Battalion Welch Regiment were in Dusseldorf, Germany, remaining there beyond 1945 as part of the occupying forces. Dad had considered signing up as a regular in the Army after the war, but news from his father at home, who had broken his leg, made him think twice and he eventually returned to Cardiff and life in the shop.

In 2016, as a way of honouring and thanking those who fought and risked their lives to secure France's liberation during the Second World War, the French government awarded the Légion d'honneur to surviving D-Day veterans from many different countries. To

commemorate this, Dad was invited to a Buckingham Palace garden party to receive his medal, and I would be allowed to accompany him as his +1 other. However, unhappy that mum couldn't be with him, he declined the offer and with that, our opportunity to meet the corgis. His medal was sent to him instead.

BEV

How Mum and Dad met (check dates on photos)

Dad's Uncle Iddy worked with Mum in HMRC Cardiff Marine in Llantrisant Road in the 1950s and with a group of colleagues followed Cardiff City football team, at home and away. We think that Uncle Iddy had probably been doing a bit of 'matchmaking' between Mum and Dad behind the scenes, so Dad had been invited to a Cardiff City away game against Swindon.

During the game Dad offered Mum a sandwich of Miles' best home-boiled ham, uttering the memorable chat up line 'Would you like a ham sandwich?!' The story has become legendary in the family, particularly if the ham is particularly high quality! Mum obviously enjoyed her sandwich because they did start courting, Although Mum and Dad didn't talk about many of their 'dates' we think it probably involved trips to the cinema and perhaps an occasional musical show as Dad had an endless 'repertoire' of songs he hummed, whistled or crooned.

But they obviously enjoyed regular trips to the seaside Penarth, The Knap or countryside around Miskin, Cowbridge, and beauty spots in the Wye valley, with the obligatory picnic of, yes, you guessed it - ham sandwiches and washed down with a flask of tea. Although Mum's parents were initially uncertain about Dad's suitability for their daughter perhaps because they had previously hoped a young Baptist minister-in-training would propose to her, they did eventually accept Dad (though probably not his Conservative politics!) and Mum and Dad got engaged on a romantic outing to Symond's Yat in the Wye valley. Check date of engagement

Married life and Needs checking

They were married on 2nd June 1954? at (chk) Trinity Methodist Church on Newport Road as Roath Road Wesleyan, Mum's home church, had been bombed during the war and set up home in rented rooms where they shared a kitchen and bathroom in Penylan. Unusually for the time Mum continued working at the Tax Office to help with savings and eventually around 1956/57 (chk) they moved into their new Wimpey house at 100 Heol Gabriel with a few possessions and a mattress donated by a relative! (Bev/ I was born in 1959 and with my 'baptism' later in the year and Chris' 3 years later, our roots were planted within the St Andrew's family.

BEV Family Life

As Chris and I were sharing our memories of childhood recently, we realised that as we grew older our family lifestyle had, increasingly, to fit around Dad running the shop mostly on his own as Grampy, his father, needed to spend more time caring for our disabled Nanny in the flat above the shop. Dad would often collect us from school and take us to the shop in Canton, Mum would catch the bus there from work and we spent most Saturdays there, helping to restock shelves, packing and sometimes delivering orders to local customers, slicing bacon on the slicing machine or weighing, cutting and wrapping cheese. Everything had to be done to Dad's (ahem) standards or we wouldn't qualify for our payment in chocolate bar or (Saturdays only) cream cake of choice. If news of our hard work reached Nanny and Grampy's ears upstairs we also qualified for pocket money! The corner shop brought the local community in and it was always fascinating to watch Dad interacting with the neighbours, many of whom had grown up with 'Raymond'! Some preferred to chat rather than shop; and even if they squeezed the Bloomer and said it was stale or that the mile was too warm or the ham looked a bit fatty (God forbid!) Dad operated on the maxim that 'The customer was always right' and would reply with a 'smiling' retort. (No surprise then that when Ronnie Barker played the crafty and cheeky grocer Arkwright in 'Open All Hours' – we laughed with great insight!).

- Even our family car had to be matched to the needs of the shop – ie it had to be a very big boot (cf Ford Zephyrs, Ford Consul, Rover) or it had to be an estate car (Vauxhall ?) which could hold a warehouse trolley of tinned food, or crates of fresh fruit and veg from the wholesalers or boxes of customers orders which were hand delivered on Friday or Saturday evenings to neighbours who had moved from Canton to Fairwater, Ely and Leckwith. This was not fun for us (even with a bag of boiled sweets to argue over) and drove Mum potty. And sadly it didn't increase the shop's income!

Hols

Holidays were a challenge too as they could only be booked once Dad had worked out a plan to ensure that a relative or good friend could pop in to check on his parents and that a reliable local could 'man' the shop, with Grampy Miles' hovering in the background whilst we were away. So the shop did not close whilst we had a week in a Guest House on the south coast in Devon or Dorset. Dad would insist on the South Wales Echo being 'redirected' (you could do that then) so that he could keep up with local news and he had to post back Devon clotted cream to his Mum as well as a postcard packed with reports of the Guest House meals and details of all our activities and outings to prove that we could have a fun-filled holiday in just a week. If Dad was satisfied that all was well in the shop on his brief weekly phone call, Mum would suggest a leisurely route home with an overnight stop in a B&B; if he agreed then he would somehow always 'sniff' out a farmhouse 'Vacancies' sign in the middle of the countryside which would provide a great full English breakfast but which often lacked decent mattresses and a modern bathroom.

Occasional bank holiday trips would take us to cousins in Gloucester, a rare visit or two to London, and a very long journey to see the Blackpool Illuminations armed with a generous picnic (the Disneyland Paris equivalent of the day!).

Fun at home

Dad had obviously developed some competitive skills during his youth and army days and he taught us to play darts down the hall (or in the 'annexe') and billiards (or was it snooker) on a small tabletop 'green'; and 'Rummy' became a standard family card game on cold rainy August holidays. Kite flying on Cowbridge Common combined with some early 'driving' lessons sat on Dad's lap!

Going out/ socialising

Mum and Dad didn't really have the time or energy for much of a social life but for a few special birthdays or wedding anniversaries, if an auntie would babysit us, they would venture out to see a musical show in Sophia Gardens and I remember them taking a few ballroom dancing lessons with Sybil Marks for a while which was something they had hoped to do for decades!

Other possible story

When our daughters (N&R) were born Mum and Dad took to grandparenting brilliantly. Dad would sing, hum and rock them to sleep endlessly (from his wide repertoire) and if they just needed calming rather than sleep he'd take them to the window and point out birds sitting on trees, in the garden or flying past but only later did he confess that he didn't always see the birds as he tried to distract them. 'Gramps' as they called him, turned out to be a good bedtime story-teller too and loved the silliness of nursery rhymes with his own actions too. And he could even multi-task by singing and skipping as he pushed their double-buggy or gave piggy-back rides. Mum would often admonish Dad that he would wear himself out but his incredible ability to relax into a 20 minute 'doze' once his feet were up and often more than once day as he got older, was, *undoubtedly*, the superpower that kept him going through life and into his 90s!

CHRIS

Bev has already mentioned the Saturdays we spent at the shop and the role a Miles' ham sandwich played in Mum & Dad's past. The ham, which was boiled on the premises, was something of a local favourite often bought by any number of eager customers in a bread roll freshly delivered that morning. Occasionally, I was given one of the less enjoyable preparation tasks, rolling up my sleeves before sliding my arms into many gallons of cold water, on top of which sat a thick layer of greasy fat. This wasn't in some pot on a stove, but a large floor-standing boiler sitting in the shop kitchen. Only when the cold, fatty water was up past my elbows could I finally reach and lift out the heavy ball of meat beneath it that had slowly cooked overnight. It was worth the effort though as, once the first mouthful of fresh bread roll, a thick spread of butter and the wonderfully tasty boiled ham had hit the spot, it all seemed worthwhile. Miles' boiled ham was always one of our firm favourites, especially enjoyed at our family Christmas gatherings over many years.

By 1979, his parents no longer with us, and with business pressures increasing, Dad felt the time had come to sell W.D. Miles & Son some 50 years after Lily and Bill had bought it. He continued to work in retail for many more years, at Ferrari's Bakery, Howells, David Morgan, B&Q and, after his retirement, as a volunteer at Siopa Teg Fairtrade shop in Canton and Oxfam in Whitchurch. He enjoyed the social aspect of shop work, had a tremendous work ethic, and only gave up in his 80s when his eyesight started to fail.

One particular year when Mum & Dad came to ours for Christmas, we treated ourselves to a turkey from Marks & Spencers. To save room in the fridge, we stored it in the chilly old concrete bomb shelter at the bottom of our garden. Christmas Eve arrived and it was time to start preparing for Christmas lunch. Like an eager Labrador, I was duly despatched by Carol to the bomb shelter to retrieve our fine bird, only to find the overly mild weather had turned it, quite literally, into a stinking mess, guaranteed to turn your stomach at 20 paces. Initially, we tried to hide this embarrassment from all our guests and frantically called local supermarkets to try to find another bird. However, on hearing of our major gaff, Dad erupted into fits of raucous laughter, followed throughout their Christmas stay with regular jokes about our expensive mistake. One bird down and with only an hour or so before all supermarkets would close for Christmas, a mercy mission to our local Waitrose was hurriedly made to buy one of the few remaining turkeys available...

When Josh was a toddler, one of the things that excited him most when we'd visit his Nanna and Bampy for a weekend was when "Bampy" showed him the small collection of watches and clocks, some working, but many not, which lived in their bedroom. Bampy always had a story or two to tell him about them which his eager grandson loved to hear, before he'd start to explore what other interesting things he could find in their house that he hadn't come across before. Bampy could always be relied upon to play with, amuse and intrigue Josh, despite or maybe because of their 80-year age difference. Long may those wonderful memories last.

We'd like to say some thank yous to those who helped look after dad, and mum, in their latter years:

- To the charity, Blind Veterans UK, to whom all donations today will be given. They were previously known as St Dunstan's and provide support to ex-servicemen who suffer sight loss at some point in their lives, as well as to their partners. Thanks also to our cousin Gill who put Blind Veterans in touch with Mum & Dad
- To Ty Draw Residential Care Home in Penylan – who looked after both Mum and then Dad when they could no longer do this for themselves. Thanks also to Derek

Boyce, their neighbour in Whitchurch, for regularly taking dad to visit mum at Ty Draw when Dad was struggling to make the journey himself.

Finally, thanks to all of you who attended today and to St Andrews Church and Rev Kofi Amissah for this Thanksgiving service.

Everyone here is very welcome to join us after the service in the church hall for some refreshments.