

A CELEBRATION OF THE LIFE OF

Brian Attewell

29th May 1937 – 27th April 2019



**Tuesday 7th May 2019
Kingston Crematorium**

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READING

Afterglow, Helen Lowrie Marshall
Read by Amy

I'd like the memory of me
to be a happy one.
I'd like to leave an afterglow
of smiles when life is done.

I'd like to leave an echo
whispering softly down the ways,
Of happy times and laughing times
and bright and sunny days.

I'd like the tears of those who grieve,
to dry before the sun,
of happy memories I leave behind
– when day is done.

TRIBUTES

Lainey

Brian

My brother, Brian, was born in Bromley in 1937 to Bill & Marie. He had a happy early life in Hayes mostly with our mother as Dad was away for much of Brian's younger life on war time duties.

Brian went to Dulwich Prep as a young child and it always amused the family that when he started he required the same size cap as the sixth formers A family trait that has continued!!

I can hardly believe now that from the age of 8 in order to get to school with his big cap and heavy satchel, no doubt, he caught the bus from Hayes into Bromley and then the train to West Dulwich and back again in the evening all on his own!!!

After the war I came along and growing up I remember the happy times at our house in Sydenham where we lived with my grandmother during the 1950s. Brian was a great one for making people laugh. He would do really funny imitations of people and funny walks. I felt as if I had my own personal Goon Show in our front room.

But dark days were ahead as Brian was found to have cancerous growths on his leg when he was about 14 which entailed long stays in hospital. This of course caused deep anguish and 2 years later it all happened again – but he survived of course with no further consequences. My parents were always grateful to Kings College Hospital for the care he received.

This put Brian's education on hold and I often wonder if he was, at one point, the oldest schoolboy in England as he did not leave school until he was 19!!!

Brian then went on to the London School of Economics and began his more bohemian life or so it seemed to me. Jazz clubs, late night films and moving away from home to a wonderful garden flat in Redcliffe Gardens, Chelsea.

He joined the Chelsea Branch of the United Nations Association and brought friends from all countries home to meet our parents. But of course the most engaging person he met at that club was Mary Tandy.

From a young age Brian was intellectually curious, widely read and serious about the world we lived in. My parents were immensely proud, in an unaffected way, of all Brian's achievements. BUT what I remember most of all is the fun – the funny voices and funny walks across the room when you were least expecting it.

How lucky I have been to have had such a brother as my darling Brian

Alex

Dad

Dad's career as a diplomat can seem monolithic, but it was built on the values of the person who we know as Brian, Dad and Grandad.

He joined the civil service at the Board of Trade and studied for his degree at night at the LSE. Dad became PA to Lord Hervey Rhodes, a Labour peer who had a parliamentary role at the Board of Trade. Dad told me how much he enjoyed Rhodes' sense of humour, subtly taking the mickey out of the class system. This set Dad up to enter the FCO when I was still a toddler.

Dad was a socialist and member of the United Nations Association (which is where he met mum), and hardly complied with the Oxbridge image of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. As well as being an economist and a good user of English, Dad was a "super recogniser," that is he had an almost supernatural ability to name people, often out of context and after a gap of decades.

All of us children - Alexander Mark, Zoe Jane and Guy Nicolas Anthony - were born in the 1960s as Dad's career took off. Guy's third name was a tribute to Dad's childhood friend Tony Richardson. He was a high-flying Penguin poetry editor who died tragically young while we were in Washington.

Dad worked hard as a diplomat but he also balanced life well, making room for golf afternoons and tennis. Home life was always sacred, we were never dragged around the expat social circuit. At home I can remember clearly how Dad used to tell us off, often struggling to keep a straight face, as he had a particular love for Zoe's brand of naughtiness.

I accompanied Dad on golf outings, discovering he kept boiled apple flavour sweets, and when we went to see Charlton Athletic on the terraces we would stop first to buy some fine toffee. Charlton was a lifelong passion for Dad which started in 1947 when they won the FA cup that year... and sadly they never won anything else.

I can remember great holidays from the earliest times in the 1970s, the seaside at Pinamar in Argentina to the lake of petrified tree stumps in Bariloche, Archie Norman's estancia in the Pampas south of Buenos Aires to the cloud forest on the road to Tafi del Valle on the way to Humahuaca in northern Argentina – with Dad driving the precipitous roads nervously.

Dad was a liberal, he never foisted his beliefs on us, and at the same time he broke the mould, giving the family priceless experiences of other countries, languages and cultures which continue to enrich us children and grandchildren in remarkable ways. He also gave us a safe upbringing, we never lived anywhere dangerous. I had often clashed with Dad as a child - like many fathers and eldest sons – so it was particularly sweet to reach a profound peace with Dad in the final years. His last words to me a month before his death were “you too” in response to my “I love you.”

Zoë

My Dad

‘Ah Zo’ or ‘my Zon’ said Dad with a smile on his face. That’s how he has greeted me over the last year, when he has had a lucid moment.

Family has always been important to Dad, holidays, gatherings, celebrations he was always there. He and my lovely Mum planned the most fantastic holidays wherever they happened to be living; in Argentina great expeditions up into the Andes with us three kids, all under eight. Dad would drive for hour after hour, stopping in clouds at the roadside to have his obligatory half hour nap. All car journeys were punctuated by Mum with ‘don’t disturb Dad, he’s driving’ or ‘let him sleep, he’s been driving’! On one holiday in Argentina, Dad was filming me and Alex riding bare back, when a snake at my horse’s legs made it rear up and bolt. The filming goes all jerky as Dad was heard to shout ‘Jesus Christ’.

We had great holidays in the UK too, mostly walking in the Scottish Highlands, Lake District or Snowdonia or chilling on the beach in Tenby or working on the land at Wenalt. I remember on Scafell Alex and Guy would frequently walk to a steep drop and pretend to fall, jumping down to a lower edge as Dad would

shout 'oh Cripes' and beg them to get away from the edge or approach slowly from a distance of 20 feet on his belly! He never had a head for heights...

Dad loved nothing more than spending all day in the sunshine, trimming a hedge to perfection at Wenalt, up a ladder, pipe in mouth, radio on... cricket, football or jazz playing. Or painting the woodwork in Wimbledon very, very slowly but always to an exceptionally high standard, again with pipe and radio.

Dad was loyal, maintaining friendships with Old Alleynians and university friends Derek, Robin, Neville and Gerry amongst others over many years. He was also loyal to his favourite coffee shops wherever he happened to be living; the tearooms with a Chelsea bun in Monmouth, Centre Court in Wimbledon, Saponara's in Islington, Fortunella's in Kingston. I am happy to have his old coffee machine to brew the best coffee in Bristol.

Dad had an ability to remember a face, handy in his job but also quite amazing, an old school acquaintance, a friend of his mother's or a famous face passing in the street, 'ah there's Douglas Henshall'.

He never remembered colours though! He was colour blind through and through, wearing bright clashing colours on the golf course (or maybe that was deliberate!), writing letters to his secretary on pink paper thinking it was blue Basildon Bond, mismatching shirts and ties...

Dad always loved a laugh. He once livened up a formal and rather dull dinner party by telling the naughtily rude lobster thermidor joke. He often pretended to trip, he did this to my horror whilst walking me down the aisle and nearly took me with him! He loved a prank phone call too. He once did a fantastic Australian accent pretending to be a house buyer over with his wife Charleen. He kept poor Rex, an Estate Agent at the time, going for over 20 minutes till Rex realised who he was talking to, told him to 'fuck off' and slammed the phone down, only for Rex to then look up and see two shocked potential house buyers leaving his office!

Dad did have a serious side and always stood by his principles. When asked to become President of the Royal Yacht Club in the Bahamas, he graciously refused, adding that he would reconsider when they abolished their white people only policy. He never shied away from controversy, enthusiastically

supporting World Aids Day celebrations in the Bahamas which had only recently made homosexuality legal.

Dad loved his jazz, it was the sound track of our childhood, always there, accompanying him reading the paper, sorting his papers, on the stereo on the radio... so we are now going to hear one of Dad's favourites, Miles Davis with Blue in Green

Guy

A tribute to my dad

In this tribute, I'd like to talk about just a few of my dad's many qualities which stand out as I look back now on his life, and how we connected with each other: his decency, wit and acceptance.

Malvika, Jalin and Ameya are here in spirit today to celebrate dad's life, and I speak for them. Before leaving, I asked Jalin and Ameya what comes to mind when they think back to the times they shared with Nanath (their version of 'grandad'), before his illness diminished him. For Jalin, the immediate response - reading Tintin with him. They both loved immersing themselves in the adventures of Tintin, Snowy and Captain Haddock.

For Ameya, what came to mind first was an incident. There we all were, one balmy evening at home in early summer Tamil Nadu, clearing away the debris from a light salad and bread meal, when a bottle of olive oil tipped over. A slick of greenish oil appeared on the table. "Olive oil is good for the skin."

Angelika remarked. Then what happened? Nanath/dad/Brian/, half-naked in the heat, sprawled himself over the table and rubbed his ample belly and chest in the oil. He slathered himself with its aromatic stickiness, to whoops and squeals of laughter from us looking on. Even dad's expression seemed to be of surprise at himself. Why the surprise? I think this moment stayed with Ameya because she knew, we all knew, that really he was proper. He just didn't do that. He was about decorum: "Stop all that horsing around", he would bark at us when we were kids, and similarly to our kids. He did the right thing, and he played by the rules.

And that's the first quality which stands out as I think about him now – what a decent person he was; how conscientious and fastidious he was in everything he did. How carefully he stepped to make sure he did the right thing by others. He loved a touch of naughtiness, but he balked at incivility and pomposity – like when, one day, navigating the tightly packed Vineyard Hill in his small Citroen, he was confronted by a flashy Mercedes that forced him to the side. He imitated the accent of the driver who had said, as justification for his action: 'My car is bigger than your car'. We shook our heads, and then laughed about it.

I think that's one of the things that bound us, as we all grew up in the family together: a joy in humour, wit and seeing the funny side. Dad loved it when we gathered, in Wenallt, Wimbledon or Hayes/Keston. We played a lot. Games and sport were not frivolous pastimes for him. He hated frivolity. They were occasions to enjoy the company of others.

Wit - he had this sharpness of expression – 'acuity' he may say. Even when his mind was befuddled by Parkinsonism, he struggled but still often found the perfect word for the context. Like when he described Robert, who came to help dad at a crucial time, as 'a warm and effusive young man' – a perfect capturing of Robert's bubblyness and enthusiasm. Dad was as fastidious in his choice of language as he was in his arrangement of crockery in the dishwasher, back in the day, which did sometimes cause some strife in the kitchen for those, like me, who didn't really know the rules: "Wool, that doesn't go there!"

I didn't necessarily follow the rules. For some time, I think I was a bit of a mystery to him. Ever thinking of potential future pitfalls, he brought up pension plans just after I'd finished my first degree. He seemed baffled by the itinerant life I was making for myself. He just wanted me / us kids to be safe –

he helped me be that - but he accepted the unconventional ways I went and the decisions I made.

He also went a bit unconventional – finding Angelika, and opening a whole new dimension in his life when other people his age would be putting their feet up and turning on the TV (which he also did, it has to be said!).

Finally, on acceptance, he showed a way to see the good in people. As a young boy, I saw him welcoming others into our homes, making them feel at ease, with sincerity and a lightness of touch. He showed a way to accept others, get on with them and not to get hung up on difference. I think that's beautiful and I admire him for it.

Angelika

Brian remembered

Chance, fate, serendipity – we'll never know which forces determined that Brian and I should meet. We know how: Some time in 2001, a young woman, Malvika, herself alone in London while her husband Guy was conducting research in India, took pity on her recently widowed father-in-law, Brian, and invited him to see a film. As an afterthought, she asked, “can I bring my mum?” That mum was me.

Together we saw “Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon”, a Chinese martial arts movie. Not a brilliant film about the *Green Sword of Destiny*, but full of romance, poetry and action. During the following months, Brian and I transcribed, transferred these qualities into real life – our lives. In May 2002 we, two widowed oldies, got married.

The romance, the poetry and the action continued: we laughed together, read books together, listened to music, from Schumann to Miles Davis, watched films from the Sopranos to Kaurismaki. We took art classes near Florence, Brian studied history of art, we leisurely drove through various European countries and laughed some more. Most of all we laughed at Fate which decreed that there are no second chances: we knew that there are - and enjoyed them.

Once I retired in 2006, we travelled further afield, to the States, to Mexico but again and again to India. Mostly, because our beloved children Guy and

Malvika lived there, married to each other and with adorable children, Jalin and Ameya. Jalin invented a special name for Brian, calling him “Nanat” when he was too small to say “Granddad”. And “Nanat” it remained for all of us. Jalin patiently introduced Nanat to his marine discoveries and quizzed him afterwards to check if Nanat had listened; equally patiently and passionately, Ameya danced for him and showed him her artistry on the trapeze.

Closer to home, Brian so enjoyed his Bristol family, practical and loving Zoe and her three Ls: Lark with whom Brian shared his love of football, especially Charlton Athletic, taking Lark to his first ever football match there; Lali who fondly remembers playing pingpong late into the night with Brian at Christmas in Keston; and Lula, who with her siblings and Brian played charades and Sardines, so happily. Once Brian became less mobile, Lula enjoyed having a go on his wheelchair and “parking” it in tight spaces. And with love and pride, Brian watched and supported his oldest granddaughter, Amy, growing into such a competent young woman.

And still we laughed and enjoyed the good life, books, exhibitions and food, until in 2014 Parkinson’s Disease drowned out our laughter. Then came the days when I would need to persuade Brian to take physical exercises and keep his mind alert with puzzles. But our horizons shrank, slowly and inexorably. Our walks in Bushy Park slowed down to strolls along the Thames near our home, then to a few steps to the nearest bench on the riverside, then short walks with the wheelchair, which Brian resisted as long as possible. Brian’s interest in the arts, in music and literature shrank, too, as his attention span shortened and his energy waned.

Then came the months in hospital and nursing home in which I waged a daily battle against institutional hiccups to keep Brian as comfortable and safe as possible. Luckily, by then Brian did not take in what was going on around him; he gradually shut down more and more. Luckily again, he did not suffer pain, as far as we know. Occasionally, the old Brian would re-emerge. Though he

sometimes expressed anxiety or upset, it was mostly cloaked in worry about “that useless foreign secretary” or the “Russian security threat” or again about that document which was urgently needed. Traces of a – bitter - humour remained as when he told the physiotherapist trying to massage his stiff legs, “Cripes, can’t you hurt someone else?” His love of music lasted to the end: During his last days, a harpist played for Brian in his room. When I asked him if he had enjoyed the music, he said, definitely and clearly, “Immensely”. Over Easter, he spent hours in the garden, stretched out in his armchair, enjoying – I hope - sunshine and birdsong. And always he would say “excuse me” after every sneeze or cough.

Brian’s slow, then accelerating, decline in a way prepared us for the end, it did – and really, it didn’t.

READING BY LALI

Let me go, Anon

When I come to the end of the road
And the sun has set for me
I want no rites in a gloom filled room
Why cry for a soul set free?
Miss me a little, but not for long
And not with your head bowed low
Remember the love that once we shared
Miss me, but let me go.
For this is a journey we all must take
And each must go alone.
It's all part of the master plan
A step on the road to home.
When you are lonely and sick at heart
Go the friends we know.

Laugh at all the things we used to do
Miss me, but let me go.

Requiem, Christina Rossetti

When I am dead my dearest
Sing no sad songs for me
Plant thou no roses at my head
Nor shady cypress tree
Be the green grass above me
With showers and dewdrops wet
And if thou wilt remember
And if thou wilt, forget.
I shall not see the shadows,
I shall not fear the rain;
I shall not hear the nightingale
Sing on as if in pain;
And dreaming through the twilight
That doth not rise nor set,
Haply I may remember,
And haply may forget.

