Charlie Legg

(Charles Francis Legg)

23rd August 1939 – 25th January 2019

### Tributes to Charlie

Amongst today’s pleasures is going to be hearing about those aspects of Charlie’s life with which we are less familiar. I hope you enjoy your moments of: “Well, I didn’t know that!”.

Here is Charlie’s sister Ruth, with her and brother Tom’s story of Charlie’s early life.

## Ruth Hawthorn

# Charlie: The early years

My memories of Charlie are a bit distorted: I was the kid sister, I was the nuisance: so I've discussed this with our oldest brother Tom, and he's contributed some balancing thoughts. And to start with, of course, we all shared most of the experiences. So I can confidently say that the first ten years of Charlie's life involved a lot of moves.

He was born in August 1939, in Kent, two weeks before the outbreak of the second world war. Our father, Stuart, had been in Canada since April that year on what was supposed to be a six-month project. When war was declared on 7 September, should Stuart come home, or should our mother Margaret risk the Atlantic crossing to take their three small boys to North America? Tom was only 4 at the time, and Robby 2½.

It was partly decided by Stuart's work - he was offered a job by the then brand new National Film Board of Canada. So Margaret and the children sailed across, in a convoy. Tom can remember the basket containing Charlie sliding backwards and forwards across the cabin floor as the ship rolled.

The family spent the whole of 1940 in Ottawa, and a couple of summers in Aylmer, then a countrified village on the huge Ottawa river. It may or may not be relevant to Charlie's later enthusiasms, but it was there that Stuart taught himself - and the older boys - to sail.

Charlie was 18 months old when the family moved next, to New York. Our summers were then spent in a series of idyllic places: Fire Island (where Charlie once got lost and baffled the Coast Guards by insisting his name was Charles Wegg), then at Cape Cod, and then on Martha's Vineyard: at that time none of these were smart places, just wonderful unspoilt countryside with ocean beaches, gangs of children and few rules.

We came back to England for good in the summer of 1948. That summer, and most summers through the rest of our childhood, we spent in the Lake District. Our grandparents had lived in a large house in the Duddon Valley, called Oak Bank. By the time we got there, our grandmother had moved up the hillside to a former farm house, Hole House, and Oak Bank had become a guest house. That's where Charlie famously fell out of a window - but I've always thought it was a bit of attention seeking because at the time I was the one who was ill.

Our parents had to choose a school for us that wouldn't be too much of a culture shock after America. Our cousin Julia had gone to Frensham Heights, a co-educational boarding school near Farnham in Surrey, that still held to some of AS Neill's progressive principles. So the boys, and eventually I, were sent there as day children.

We moved into a large house within cycling distance, called Braemar, where we settled at last. There was still rationing: our mother planted a vegetable garden, kept chickens and a goat, and Tom remembers the boys helping our father gradually tame the two large orchards - though he admits their involvement probably waned after the destructive stage (chopping down trees, flame-thowering brambles, and so on).

I think Charlie enjoyed Frensham: he made good friends, and was outstandingly good at sport. We used to say he'd been 'captain of everything' at school. In fact he was good at all games: his techniques in Racing Demon were legendary. But he was musical too: he really played the clarinet well and I have early memories of the Mozart clarinet quintet, played at breakneck speed, emanating from his bedroom.

After he left Frensham, initially he started a vocational course at Loughborough Tech and I still have a pair of brass washers he made there that he turned into earrings. It didn't last long, though, as he discovered that his A levels could get him a place on a psychology course at Manchester University, and that's where he went in 1958.

I remember visiting him there, and the real power-house atmosphere in the flat he shared with two friends on the same course: they all three got firsts and the other two went on to successful academic careers. It looked as if Charlie was going that way too: he was recruited to spend a year working under Piaget in Geneva, and when that ended he started a psychology PhD at Cambridge. He was still good at games: we all went to see him captain the university hockey team at Twickenham two years running.

Cambridge is where he met his first wife Veronica, who was spending her third year in the Psychology Department. I was still at Cambridge too, so I saw a bit of Charlie and many of our friends overlapped.

After his PhD he went on to a three-year stint as a post-doc student at Stanford in California and it was there that Jessica was born - the first grandchild for our parents (by a short head) so a thrilling event for all of us. But around that time Charlie found he could no longer support ethically the work he was doing there. It had included experimenting on animals with the justification of learning more about humans - but he began to suspect the aims were more for military than humanitarian purposes. He packed it in and the family returned to England.

It was at this point that Charlie's interest turned to public housing. They settled in London, Jake was born in 1970, actually at our mother's house in Devon, and Charlie worked for a while on a community development project in Lewisham. This is where the story should be picked up by the children and by his housing colleagues.

*(Celebrant)*

When Charlie’s first marriage ended, he was, by his own admission, in difficulty. He was living apart from, and missed his children, Jess and Jake.

Charlie and Kate met in 1972 on a demo about increases in council rents. Kate recalls that for their first date she took him to see a French film ‘Le Boucher’, about a serial killer of women. “Her choice” states Charlie firmly, in his memoir! Despite this, Kate says: “I rather took to him, and I think he took to me”.

Their relationship was sealed on holiday in Tuscany when their reading group rented a villa, the better to contemplate their choice of book: Volume I of Das Kapital. They moved in together, with Kate’s son Justin, into a tiny top floor flat in the Stratford Villas house of friends Drew and Pru Stevenson. A few years later they bought their own Stratford Villas house.

Here is Jess, and then Justin, to tell us about the Charlie they knew and loved.

## Jess Baker-Pike

# Charlie: Parent and Grandpa

I loved Charlie all my life. I looked up to him and admired him. I told Charlie this the last time I spoke to him, when he could respond, on the morning of Tuesday 22nd January.

Charlie’s parenting of Jake, Justie and I was based on fairness and his wishes state this clearly. Although this is conventional Charlie wanted to be an unconventional parent. This was highlighted by his insistence that we call him ‘Charlie’, I was not allowed to call him ‘dad’.

He told me many times how important it was for him to break with the norms of a family household. Life at 13 Stratford Villas in Camden Town was certainly alternative. In a way, this truth was reframed for me last week, when I found a file on Charlie’s computer named ‘Lodgers at Stratford Villas’. Included in the list of 60 lodgers dated up to October 2011 were our three names: Jess, Justie and Jake. It made me laugh and shake my head that we, his children, were listed equally with lodgers. However, it does show how many people benefitted from Charlie and Kate’s inclusive philosophy, a very large extended family.

Unconventional is a good way of describing my childhood a Stratford Villas. It meant there were difficulties but alongside this came many benefits. In particular, it ensured an early understanding of what it is to be independent. I was only 13 years old when, I moved to London and had to cook my first meal for at least 11 hungry people as part of the ‘Supper Rota’:

Charlie was renowned as a cook in the supper rota, nicknamed by some as ‘Chickpea Charlie’. The meals he served were unrelentingly based on butter beans in a creamy sauce and chickpeas in a tomato in a sauce. His meals would be redeemed by the ‘surprise dessert’ which was almost always Marine Ices ice-cream. Charlie had a sweet tooth, a love of chocolate and culinary delights of our many French holidays were beautiful French apple tarts, chocolate eclairs and we were always in search of ‘Le meilleur glace’, the best ice-cream.

Adventure and independence, I learned from Charlie and Kate included getting home alone from Heathrow after school trips. It enabled me to fully enjoy what is now called the ‘night-time economy’. Partying all over London with total freedom was fun for a young teenager and nothing disastrous happened. These qualities perhaps have translated in me living in Oxfordshire, Justie in Toulouse and Jake, as Charlie described it to Paul his main carer is ‘somewhere in the world’. Jake is the most well-travelled of everyone in both our generation and our parents’ generation.

Charlie was a loving and dutiful ‘Grandpa Charlie’. He did have to wait but, his patience was rewarded, by first Rubi, then Jamie, Rose and Mia about 18 months apart and in that order. He put in long hours watching CBeebies then nature programmes with you. He was especially happy when you were all together, he delighted in you.

As a diligent Grandpa Charlie he made regular trips to the City Farm and of cause the Prince of Wales swimming pool in Kentish Town. Some of my happiest times after my parents separated were in the Prince of Wales pool with Charlie. He paid for us to learn to swim and took Jake and I there when we saw him. It gave me so much pleasure to see Grandpa Charlie played the same tricks on Jamie and Rose and to hear that he did this with Rubi and Mia too. Swimming on his back with his feet out of the water he teased us as we swam chasing after his toes. At the last moment he used his arms to swoosh away so it was virtually impossible to catch him.

This love of swimming led to fantastic holidays for us all. Our teenage French holidays camping by the sea and wind surfing, which we all did as Charlie navigated midlife (there was motorbiking in leathers too!), then on to the sailing. Jamie and Rose loved holidays on Heartbeat, simply sleeping in the forepeek, crabbing and going around the marina in the ‘put-put’, the dingy with outboard motor, as well as crossing the English Channel.

Charlie seemed happiest to me when he was on board Heartbeat pottering diligently until his vessel met his high standards and was ‘ship shape’. He has planned one last trip to Dover with us, the place where many adventures began. So, once again we’ll be looking out towards the horizon and thinking of all the good times we enjoyed together.

## Justin

# Tribute to Charlie

Charlie wished today to be a celebration so I want to talk about his great love of the outdoors and sports.

Many of you will know already and for those that don’t, in his college days Charlie excelled in hockey and captained his college and the Cambridge university teams. He must have been good because he had all his original teeth.

Growing up we relished playing tennis together. We would go to Parliament Hill Fields every weekend during summer.

He had a metallic Wilson racket made famous by Wimbledon champion Jimmy Connors

We also cycled. I remember cycling part of the way to Cambridge. Looking around at nature, I cycled off the country lane and into a deep watery side ditch. Charlie was there to fish me out.

In later years as I discovered the joys of skiing, and I teased out of Charlie that he had been a skier himself – when he worked in Geneva.

Most will remember Charlie’s sporting side for his love of sailing. He would plan sailing trips meticulously. It became his passion.

Charlie would always challenge himself, and his great strength was to support others.

Warm, gentle and kind and much much more.

Charlie – for sharing your love of the outdoors and activities, thank you for being such a great sport.

## Margaret Gibson

# Charlie’s work in housing

Charlie is best known by any of us here connected with social housing, for his work with the then National Federation of Housing Associations where he worked for ten years from 1985, and the then Housing Corporation from 1996 to 1999.

He joined the Federation when Richard Best was Director and he worked in David Page’s team on a wide range of housing management and maintenance issues. He brought with him research skills and knowledge from his work with the Housing Research Group at City University, and he worked on the development of CORE, a new system for getting up to date information on lettings; on performance indicators and on standards for housing services. Housing maintenance was a key area of his work. Charlie’s colleague in this field was Dave Treanor who has asked me to say this on his behalf:

“Charlie was senior policy officer at the Federation while we were dealing with the 1988 Housing Bill: the biggest piece of housing legislation in fifty years and which introduced private finance, and competitive bidding for capital grants.

We worked together to establish the true costs of maintenance and future major repairs, and ensuring associations planned properly for them.

This research formed the basis for negotiations on the terms for the voluntary transfer of council housing to housing associations and catching up on the massive backlog of repair and renewal that much of it urgently required.

As well as dealing with the Department of Environment and the Housing Corporation, we had to build a consensus amongst housing associations on how best to handle these new risks and responsibilities. We worked to establish agreed standards for the delivery of affordable housing, including for affordable rent levels, and performance benchmarking.

The subsequent growth in the social housing sector stands as testimony to the success of much of the work he and many others at the Federation did at that time.”

Charlie was my manager at the Federation when he had been promoted to Director of Housing Services & Research and I replaced him in the post he vacated. This placed Charlie on The Senior Management Team of the Federation, working with the then Chief Executive, Jim Coulter, for whom he had a great deal of respect, and others including Rob Dazeley with whom he became good friends.

Looking back at this time, I can see two overriding characteristics of Charlie’s work at the Federation. Firstly, because Charlie approached issues with a research-eye view, he was meticulous in and took most satisfaction from the detail of the work he was doing. This included a year’s secondment to the Regulation Division of the Housing Corporation, where he worked with John Gatward, whom he very much admired. Charlie was less comfortable with his broader management role and when the opportunity arose of returning to the Housing Corporation to work on the development of a new regulation system for housing associations, he was glad to make the move.

Also, work for all of us in policy-related jobs at the Federation involved a great deal of consultation and collaboration within the sector. Part of being good at our jobs was forming friendly and productive working relationships with staff at all levels in housing associations and related organisations. Despite his claims to a degree of shyness, Charlie was good at this and popular with colleagues. Of their work together, Dave Treanor remarked that: “Charlie managed this with skill and a great deal of charm”.

Charlie was a kind, thoughtful and supportive person and it is unsurprising that, in his memoir, he wrote of his time at the Federation: “I enjoyed it a lot and made many friends both in the NFHA and outside.”

Lucky for me that I was one of them.

*(Celebrant)*

## Charlie’s volunteering in the community

From 1980, Charlie was an active volunteer on various committees and boards including Kentish Town Law Centre, Solon South East co-operative, Community Housing Association and Canalside Housing Partnership. Following retirement he became more involved in local community projects around where they lived. Here are Rasheed Graham, Charity Director of Urban Community Projects, and neighbour John Cowley, to tell us more.

## Rasheeda Graham

Early days:

I met Charlie when I was a green eyed 21 year old, I’ll be 40 this year! You see he was the Chairman at One Housing Groups Charity, Community Action. To the staff he was this mythical figure who was vocal and really steered the work we did. I was the secretary and quickly developed a relationship with him, finalising the agendas and sending out minutes. I remember thinking ‘how the hell does he do it all’. He seemed to be everywhere and had a real drive for change and making peoples lives better. He was a man filled with ideas and wasn’t afraid to ruffle a few feathers along the way. He really did care! In a world of big budgets and mundane housing issues, he had one purpose, one vision, making sure the charity really helped REAL people. He was creative in his approach, and well ahead of the curve. One Housing Group was one of the first social housing providers that had a dedicated Employment and Training Department, all Charlie. One of the first to give residents financial education, to help them manage their money better, all Charlie. And the first to research setting up furniture reuse projects, using empty community spaces on estates, again all Charlie.

Visionary – setting up Urban Community Projects:

In 2013 we founded Urban Community Projects, a small grassroots charity with one aim, empowering local people to build better communities. He was passionate about youth work and wanted to expand on his idea of setting up furniture reuse projects. The first few years his drive and vision was extraordinary. It felt like he met with every councillor, leader and community group in the borough. He got the charity its first 2 big contracts, which subsequently kept me in employment. He seems more worried about making sure I always had work, I truly loved that about him. It made me feel like I actually meant something to him, I know he truly cared about me, I believe that with all my heart.

He so wanted the Charity to succeed and I now have a duty to continue on with the passion and drive he instilled me. That’s my promise to him.

Impact: personal and professional:

I get emotional thinking about my personal connection to Charlie. It’s hard to share my deepest thoughts as their so personal to me. But what I will say is he has been the longest and most consistent man in my life. He took this council estate girl and turned her into a confident, powerful women. He instilled so much confidence in me. I can’t think of a job in my adult life that he hasn’t helped me get, or pushed me to go for. I had degrees, but they some how felt like a right of passage, proving that I could be the first in a family that never did before. But he made me realise all the education in the world can’t substitute a feeling, passion and empathy. He made me realise that work was more than a pay cheque. You actually had to love it, want to do it and above all, it needed to bring some sort of meaning to your life

His passions became my passions, not just professionally, but personally too. I spent most of my childhood holidaying in Brittany (my godmother is French). But as I got older and boys came along I lost my connection. He always seemed to be sailing in France, didn’t stop talking about his boat and his eyes twinkled when he talked about the freedom of the seas. So I thought when my 30th birthday was coming up I’d go back to France and do it in a boat. Nearly 10 years later, every year I’ve had a sailing holiday! Like I said his passions became mine. For my 40th I’m dragging my family along. 6 of us on a boat, I know he would have a wry smile as I complain about how annoying they were. But I finally understand why he loved it so much, FREEDOM. I truly hope he’s free now, gently sailing, with a smile on his face and the wind in his hair.

## John Cowley

Charlie was one of those people who recognises the shared benefits of being involved in the local community. One of the things he did for many years, until quite recently, was to chair the management committee of the Maiden Lane Community Centre. He gave his support to those working there. He appreciated their wide-ranging engagement both within the Centre itself and in the wider neighbourhood: the provision of child care, supporting and involving the local youth in a whole range of projects, organising outings and fun days, providing courses for adults, encouraging local people to use the Centre’s facilities, and giving enormous support to the neighbourhood’s very popular annual Summer Festival.

Charlie’s approach was to be supportive of those who are active locally. This was very much appreciated by everyone involved. It is important that we recognise the contribution he made over many years to the wellbeing of this neighbourhood. We will miss you Charlie.

## Robert Macgibbon

## Charlie’s love of sailing

I have known the Legg family since 1960 when I first met Ruth.

My relationship with them has taken many turns, including being Charlie’s GP in the 1980s, and now Ruth and I have been together for the last 20 years.

As a lifelong sailor myself, sailing has always been a part of my connection with the Leggs. I have a distant memory of joining Stuart and Robby on their beautiful yacht, Zelva, for a day sail out of The Hamble sometime in the early 60s. I can’t remember if Charlie was with us then.

Charlie took up sailing in a characteristically meticulous way, methodically building up from a Wayfarer and then on to a small cruiser, ‘Feeling Bubbly’. In the winter of 2003/4 he decided to upgrade to a modern, efficient but comfortable cruiser. After research he decided on a second hand Maxi 1000….at 10 metre Swedish made boat. He knew what he wanted.

For his research Ruth and I joined Kate and Charlie on a memorable road trip round the marinas of the Ijsselmeer in bleak stormy mid-winter weather. He viewed modern yachts in the wind and rain while I sloped of to admire heavy solid gaff rigged Dutch boats and barges, more the ships of my dreams. He was more of an enthusiastic sailor bringing his focused intelligent brain carefully into it all. I am a heart and gut sailor, and as a result, I may say, getting into too many unplanned scrapes over the years, so unlike Charlie’s approach.

In the end Charlie found Heartbeat, a 1998 Maxi, on The Hamble. She had had two previous owners, one being a heart surgeon (hence her romantic name).

For the next 13 years Charlie and Kate cruised each summer season. They made local day trips like across to Boulogne where they liked shopping for French food but also major cruises lasting 2 or 3 months; South Brittany, The Baltic and the Irish South Coast were some of those ambitious, well planned trips.

In a way Charlie’s sailing career reached a peak in 2011 when he sailed across the Atlantic with The ARC Rally, although not in Heartbeat.

I have had such fun with the privilege of looking through the details of all these trips in Charlie’s Logbooks for all those years.

Ruth and I are mentioned in those trips that we crewed on. One time in 2005 we set off from the North Brittany coast on their way home from South Brittany on their first major cruise. Heartbeat rose to the challenge of a stiff breeze on her port nose beating up to Guernsey. I was impressed by her seaworthiness and ability to surge confidently forward in choppy seas. Charlie had made a good choice.

Too many cruises detailed in the logbooks to recount here but I mention one from 2009 when, with a strong experienced crew, we accompanied Charlie back from German Cuxhaven across the North Sea on Heartbeat’s return from cruising the Danish Baltic for 2 months.

We crew took regular tricks at the helm over the 50 hours it took to get to Lowestoft while Charlie was free to navigate and ensure the smooth running of the boat.

The North Sea was largely calm with very little wind but, even though we had to motor most of the way, the trip through two days and nights was enjoyable; sleeping, chatting, resting, eating and just being together alone away from land.

But inevitably an end had to come with the sadness of Heartbeat eventually laid up for two years, standing isolated, high up on the Dover dock side.

I joined Kate and Charlie one week in 2017 to clear out the massive human baggage of all those sailing years and arrange for her to make her final trip back to where it all began, under Charlie’s ownership, on the Hamble.

So, a wealth of so much well documented sailing over many years, all a tribute to Charlie’s focused and really impressive sailing career.

It has been a real pleasure for me to have been a small part of it from the beginning to the end.

(end)