

A celebration of life Denis Williams

18 November 1942 – 27 March 2018

a personal goodbye

Humanist
Ceremonies

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Denis was born in Morrision on November 18th 1942, one of five children born to Nellie and Tom and had three elder sisters and a brother.

The family moved to Penlan when he was eight. He didn't like school and told later of teachers who threw board rubbers at students and made the whole experience of education miserable. So, he mitched off quite a bit. He would disappear to the woods and mess about.

This was something he regretted in later life because he wasn't averse to discipline. He spent two years in the Army Cadets and really enjoyed it and was disappointed that he missed out on doing National Service.

He especially enjoyed rifle practice and when he was twelve he acquired an air rifle and became an accomplished sniper, his main target being the lady next door's washing and particularly her knickers.

His father was a steel worker and amateur football referee, so Denis used to go and watch games from an early age and often went to the Vetch to see the Swans play. He was also interested in racing pigeons and helping to look after them.

Denis left school at fifteen and started an apprenticeship as a carpenter, but he saw that his mates were earning much more than him, so he gave it up and started working on a building site as a labourer. Harder work, but better paid than an apprentice and he enjoyed it, particularly the banter that made the work seem easier.

At seventeen he made some changes in his life. He got some tattoos, in a period when they were in no way as fashionable as they are now, his mother was not pleased. In fact, she chased him out of the house and down the street she was so angry with him. He also bought himself a motorbike and he left the building trade and went to work for Griff Fender Removals.

The company was based in Swansea but had a depot in London and the job involved a lot of travel, which he enjoyed. He went all over Britain, spending several nights a week away from home. He loved this job as he used to say he would move a millionaire this week and a normal family the next.

The job gave him and his mates a few opportunities to earn a bit of extra money, on occasions he saved his expenses by not staying in a hotel but sleeping in the in the van, once in one of the coffins he was delivering.

One of the regular jobs was to pick up antiques from stately homes and dealers and deliver them. It was company practice that the van would only be half full, to ensure that the items could be securely packed to prevent damage.

So, the lads would often do antique picks ups, off the books, for Ben, an antique dealer in London, when they were going that way and pocket the delivery charge. One day Griff the owner was driving up the M4 outside Reading and saw his van, on an antique run, sitting heavy on its axel and obviously fully loaded so he followed it.

A couple of weeks later Denis went in to see him and ask him for a raise. Griff replied "What's matter aren't you get paid enough by Ben."

But this doesn't seem to have affected the relationship and Stanley Fender obviously though a lot of him, because he often asked Denis to spend weeks at a time running the London depot.

He was married at twenty-one and the marriage lasted into his early thirties and as a result he has two sons, grandchildren and great grandchildren.

When he left Griff Fender, Denis worked for a number of companies; he went to work for the Aluminium Wire and Cable Company, Afan Tinsplate, 3 Ms and BSC Velindre, where he was a crane driver and then a fork lift driver. When Velindre closed he went to work at the D.V.L.A; first in dispatch and then security where he worked for fourteen years, before starting work with Denco as a fitter, working on cranes at B.S.C Port Talbot mainly but also travelling all over the UK to maintain and service cranes.

In 1982, on a Friday the 13th he was at a dance in Neath and danced with Mary, who was down from Maesteg for the evening with a group of her friends. As he was leaving he saw them standing around and asked if everything was OK. They told him that their taxi wasn't coming so he gave them a lift home to Maesteg.

About a month later, he was at another dance and the same thing happened again, the taxi didn't turn up and Denis gave them a lift home. They seem to be unlucky with their taxis, but it was very lucky for Denis because soon he started going out with Mary.

Mary described their relationship as on and off, once being parted for three years before getting back together. They had very similar personalities and this resulted in clashes. They moved in together and in 1987 their daughter Rhian was born, and they moved into their current home in 1995. Denis asked Mary to marry him twice over the years, but she turned him down and the last time he said, "Right that's it, I'm not going to ask you again."

And then fourteen years ago Mary rang Denis in work, it was two weeks before Christmas and he was doing an extra shift on double time, working at Dencos in the British Steel plant. Someone went to get him, and she waited while he came in from the site.

"What is it?" he said.

Mary replied. "You know you asked me what I wanted for Christmas, well I want to get married on Christmas Eve. But there is only one spot left, so you have to leave work now, so we can go to the registry office and sort it out."

And sort it out they did, despite having to go to County Hall first to get a copy of his divorce certificate and getting a phone call that Rhian had been in a car accident and was in hospital in Bridgend. They arranged everything and were married on Christmas Eve.

He and Mary enjoyed being active and travelling. Mary's brother Eddie had a camper van and they went away with him and Jo. Denis bought a big tent that you could easily stand up in but Denis was concerned about the tent blowing away, so he pulled the guy ropes so tight that you had to crouch down to get in.

They couldn't all fit in the van, so they used to use the tent as the centre of their socialising and as they drank more they got louder and louder, always being amazed the following morning that they hadn't been asked to leave the site.

One night Denis and Mary were very merry and their mattress deflated, they were so hard of thinking that they were unable to work out what had happened or do anything about it.

After that they got their own camper van and they had many adventures in the van travelling all over the UK for holidays and weekends with Eddie and his family and other family and friends.

Once Denis, Steve and Daniel went away for a few days in the motor home to the Forest of Dean. Steve and Daniel had done the shopping and Denis was cook. Denis was impressed with the size of the burgers they had bought, he could only get two at a time in the pan and they were really thick. When they set about eating them Daniel announced there was paper in his burger and they realised that they weren't as thick as Denis had thought, but were two burgers with the greaseproof paper still between them.

When on holiday in the Norfolk Broads they hired a narrow boat for the day. When it was Denis's turn to steer he panicked when he had to stay clear of another boat coming in the opposite direction and went into a reed bed.

But he didn't slow down and the reeds wrapped around the propeller sticking the boat fast. Even Eddie's impersonation of Humphrey Bogart in African Queen, shirt off and in the water didn't work and they had to be rescued.

Denis was a big fan of cowboy films especially John Wayne and whenever Mary was out he would take the opportunity to watch one of his many DVD's. He and his nephew Steve, to whom he was very close, had a great interest in drumming and the two of them would travel far and wide to watch their favourite drummers in drum clinics. They also had the same sense of humour, one of their favourite comedians being Rich Hall who they went to see four times.

Rhian told me she had a great relationship with her Dad. As she was growing up he took her everywhere with him, even to work on occasions, like when he was working at the D.V.L.A. as a security guard, and he used to put her in the lift and send her up and down.

They both loved cars and one of their favourite past times was test driving them. Rhian would draw up a list of cars she liked, and they would go around the dealers and take those cars out on test drives together, with no intention of buying them.

Denis was never out of work and he maintained that he was a hard worker, though Eddie pointed out that all the jobs he had were sitting down jobs. His claims of hard work were questioned when he came home from work one day and told Mary what a hard day he had, when Rhian showed him a picture her friend Matthew had taken of him in work that day, fast asleep in a chair.

He made it official and retired in 2012 and soon got bored of sitting around the house. Not so bored that he would do any of the many jobs Mary had for him around the house though.

But he was always happy to undertake projects for friends and family. Often pointing out to them what work needed doing, and then doing it for them. Be it building a wall, painting, wallpapering or anything else that needed doing. He did Rhian and Phil's house completely for them.

Phil told me Denis was a man who would do anything for anyone and he could turn his hand to anything. Except changing nappies. On one occasion when he was looking after Daisy, he even rang Phil and got him to come all the way home and change her nappy and then go back to work.

While he never gave in about that, he did eventually give in about doing work in his own home and last year fitted a new kitchen. As well as DIY he kept active going out with Mary; she said they had gone out every day since he retired and he particularly liked walking on the beach.

Denis and Mary have many friends and a close family, they had a good social life and Denis enjoyed their company and they enjoyed his.

Daniel has written a tribute to his Uncle Denis which says what a lot of people are thinking and feeling, and he is going to read it to you now.

Daniel's Tribute

This is one of the hardest things I've had to do, mainly because I still can't believe you're gone. But there are a few things I want to say.

I'm sorry I never hugged you and told you how thankful I am to have known you and had you in my life. Because I honestly don't remember the last time I said I love you. And looking back if I had known then what I know now I would have said it every time I saw you.

I'm going to miss the way you used to wind me up like when you told me you were the captain of the Wales rugby team and you used to sing with Michael Jackson, as I couldn't wait to go to school the following day to tell all my friends, my uncle Denis was famous.

It's so hard answering the phone and not hearing your voice anymore.

I just hope you rest in peace and will know how much you really meant to me and to everyone that knew you.

Goodbye Uncle Denis. I Love you.

Denis enjoyed spending time with all his family and friends but his favourite thing to do was spend time with Jake and Daisy-Bell. He would rather have the children than go out or do anything. Regularly Denis and Mary would get up early to make sure they were at Rhian's house at 7am so she could go to work, and they could look after the children.

He had a special relationship with Jake and doted on him when he came along. He would ring up and ask if he could look after him and then take him out for the day. Often, he used to sit outside in the car with Jake on his lap driving the car for half an hour at the time and Mary told me she loved hearing them chatting to each other. He was a wonderful grandfather and Mary gave me this poem to read which she said sounds like a conversation between Jake and Denis called "Inside Our Dreams."

Inside Our Dreams

"Where do people go to when they die,
Somewhere down below or way up in the sky"
"I can't be sure," said Grandad. "But it seems,
They simply set up home inside our dreams"