

Donald Bannister
15th April 1943 – 31st January 2017

Tribute

Don was born in Slough in Berkshire on 15th April 1943. He had two sisters, Grace and Cindy, and a brother, Peter, who died as an infant. Don's father was a fireman, who did a lot for Slough during the war, and Don was always very proud of him.

After leaving school, Don went to work for Slough Council as an groundsman, and later moved to BT where he worked as an engineer until 1992. Don's first love was Mary, who came from Cornwall. Later he met Carol, who he married in 1965 and with whom he had a son, Stewart.

After leaving BT, Don became a self-employed gardener, and he had many clients who became friends and who would share coffee, cakes and chats with him. Many of his clients stayed with him for more than twenty years, until he retired. Gardening was very important to Don but he was always a shrubbery man, rather than a flower man. One of his clients had a cat called Timmy who used to follow Don around the garden and sit on his shoulder. Don used to tell Timmy his life stories as he was working – they were best pals. Pat told me that Timmy was the real love of Don's life, and that Don was heartbroken when Timmy died. He commemorated Timmy in a poem, one of many that he wrote.

Timmy, you were a very good friend
Though your life came to a sudden end
I know I'm going to miss you so much
Everyone who knew you their hearts you touched

You'll always be with me in my heart
I wish we hadn't had to part
If there is a heaven and a god somewhere
I know you'll have a special place up there

Your memory will live on with all who knew you

Don and Pat were neighbours and their two families knew each other since the early 1970s. They went on holiday together and, on one of these occasions, Don really did (as the song says) get "Lost in France".

In 1994 Don and Pat became a couple and were very happy together. They shared many interests and enjoyed doing the same things. They also had fun disagreeing about things – Don was an Arsenal fan, whilst Pat supported Tottenham, and they made bets between them on the outcome of matches and put their winnings in a jar. Their dog, Gully, joined the family eleven years ago, and Don enjoyed taking him out for country walks.

Through Pat Don became a step father to Sharron and Chris and he loved them and their children – Georgie, Harrison and Alfie – as if they were his own. He was very supportive in everything Pat and the family did.

Don always loved being outdoors – the natural world was very important to him. He particularly enjoyed being in his garden, where he could often be found – smoking roll ups. He also loved animals and could communicate with them, which led to him being known as Dr Doolittle.

Don was a stubborn man and, when he was diagnosed with cancer in 2005, he fought it every step of the way. He carried on his gardening work but eventually his deteriorating health meant that he had to retire. Last April he and Pat moved from Loudwater in Buckinghamshire, where they had lived for 26 years, and settled in Bridgwater. Don loved being in Somerset and really enjoyed his new house and garden. He and Pat were married in November last year.

Eventually Don's illness meant that he had to spend periods of time at St Margaret's Hospice, where he became a great favourite with the staff. After a short spell at home he returned to the hospice and said that he was comfortable and happy to be there. He died at St Margaret's on the last day of January.

Don was a strong, kind, and genuine man - a very loyal person. He stole the hearts of everyone that had the pleasure of meeting him. He will be greatly missed.