

Tribute: Donald Victor Goldsworthy

Born: 27 February 1928

Died: 10 May 2018

Don was born on 27 February 1928 in Leytonstone to parents Florence, who was known as Sis, and Claude, who everyone called Bill but was known by the family as "Pops". It was often the case back then that for some long forgotten reason people were called something other than their birth names; but thankfully his older brother, Ken - who died some years ago - was known as Ken, and Don was known as Don.

His Dad worked on the railways and the family rented a downstairs room at 62 Cann Hall Road; another room was sublet to an elderly gentleman and yet another family lived upstairs. One outside toilet served all of them, and there was no bathroom. Times were tough. Don's Dad was out of work in the great depression of the 1930s and it was a struggle to put food on the table.

Don was born into a Tottenham Hotspur supporting family – something that became a lifelong passion for him. His aunt Annie and uncle Bert lived next door to White Hart Lane - so there were family gatherings every other Saturday for home matches. When the ticket price went up, Don had a favourite memory of his uncle Bert saying it would kill the game. I think this always tickled Don, as the new price was a shilling – five pence in today's money.

Don attended Cann Hall Road Boys School - where he met his lifelong friend Ron, who sadly died a few years ago. Don remembered once getting the cane for some transgression and when his Mum – who was fiercely protective of both her sons - found out she marched into the school and gave the headmaster a proper telling off.

In 1939 Don had his eleventh birthday, war was declared and he passed his matriculation to go to grammar school. And I can do no better than read you Don's own words about that time from a note he wrote in 2014. The note, by the way, was to let Paula and Ian know who was in some old photos – which in itself helps keep these wonderful memories alive.

Talking about September 1939, Don said: “I was on holiday staying with my Grandma and Granddad at Colchester. I had just passed as it was called then the scholarship and was due to start my new school. My mother got on to the school and was told that they had been evacuated to Coventry and it was total chaos there and said it would be better if I stayed in Colchester. It must have been a shock to learn that I was to stay with them for a while. I then received my letter saying I was to start at Colchester Grammar School (I should say Colchester Royal Grammar School) which was known to all except me as one of the best schools in Great Britain. My grandparents were so proud and it seemed to make everything ok”.

Don goes on to talk about the various inhabitants of his grandparents’ house – all a bit too involved to go into here – but it is worth reading another extract from his note to give you an idea of how things were.

“We slept like this: Grandma and Granddad in the front bedroom, aunt Ethel and Madge shared a double bed, then they had a box room which I slept in with Ron [that’s a different Ron to Don’s school friend] when he was there in a single bed. To get to this room I had to go through aunt Ethel’s and Madge’s room. We had no electricity upstairs and had to go to bed by candle light and I generally did my homework in my bedroom by candle light as it was the only place it was quiet. Of course we did not have an in house toilet so we all had a pot under the bed. How different life was in those days”.

Different it may have been, but it was a happy time for Don. Ending up in Colchester, he said, saved him. He was proud to be a grammar school boy and his grandparents loved and adored him; and even though there was rationing they ate like kings. Apparently his Granddad used to open oysters at the officers’ mess at Colchester Barracks – and Don’s love of food, especially seafood, can be traced back to this time.

Don eventually returned to Leytonstone and during the 40s he met the woman he would go on to marry and who was the love of his life – Jean. They were teenagers and met at a local youth club and once Jean fell for him, he didn't stand a chance! The story goes that after meeting him for the first time Jean went home and told her parents she'd met the man she would marry one day – and indeed that day came in 1952, when the happy couple wed. They were, truly, made for each other and went on to share 50 wonderful years of marriage.

Don's working life started at the local Co-op, when he was 14. Let's not forget that this was 1942 - at the height of the war – and there were air raids, bombs falling and near misses. But through it all Don enjoyed his job and showed early signs of his managerial potential. At 14 he felt he was running the Co-op branch - and he was probably right, as most of the older men were in the armed forces.

And in 1945 that is where Don followed – choosing the air force. And with his typical sense of humour, Don always said the end of the war was down to him because once he'd been called up Hitler knew he was beaten.

Don enjoyed his time in the air force, where he learned to be a motor mechanic, and learned to drive. He was told to take his test and get a driving license – but said at the time, “don't be daft, I'll never afford a car!”

He went back to the Co-op when he was de-mobbed but in 1948 – aged 20 – Don realised that his prospects were limited, so he decided to follow his brother into the City of London and work for United Rum Merchants. He started in the stock control department – sitting at a bench on a high stool adding up endless columns of figures all day.

But Don had an aptitude for figures – so, after working his way around every department at URM, he found his niche in the accounts department. By 1975 he was chief accountant – something he was immensely proud of, and loved to tell people about. And rightly so. Don worked night and day to succeed, and he did it all off of his own back without formal qualifications; a remarkable achievement by any standards.

Don loved his time at URM, and he had an emotional investment in the firm – there was much camaraderie and many friendships, not least Don's great mates Joyce and Peter Wilson. In fact, it was Don who recruited Peter - mainly because he was also a Spurs fan - and whom Don came to look upon like another son. There were other good friends too - far too many to list here - but among them were Ray and Ethel who shared so many happy times with Don and Jean.

It was a career with its perks, too – Paula and Ian remember their Dad often coming home from work, his briefcase laden with paperwork...and bottles of spirits! This was part of the “quota” – no less than 72 bottles a year, which eventually had to come home by lorry not in the briefcase.

When Don married his childhood sweetheart, Jean, in 1952 the couple were as happy as could be, and they set up home in Pevensey Road, Leytonstone. Don said that he fell through the floor when they moved in – literally, because the place was riddled with woodworm! Just as well then that he was a dab hand at DIY; carpentry, bricklaying, electrics – he was good at it all. So they carried out major renovations, turned the house into a home and he even built a garage in the garden – somewhere to put the car he once thought he'd never be able to afford.

In 1955 Ian was born, followed by Paula in 1956 to complete the family. They moved to 128 Wingletye Lane in Hornchurch – which in the 50s was like emigrating! This became the family home for almost 20 years – where they were part of a lovely community of friends and neighbours, and more often than not Don could be found under someone's car mending it so as to save them a few bob.

Don's brother Ken and his wife Vi, and their daughter Christine (who, with his customary sense of humour, Don always said was his favourite niece even though she was his only niece), moved nearby, as did his best mate Ron and his wife Joan; so did his work colleague and friend Stan and his wife Joy – whose daughter Kim is, I'm pleased to say, here today. The Taylors – Janet and Brian – were also good friends and neighbours, who played a big part in Don's life, along with their children. These were all true friends and they meant a lot to Don – as he did to them.

There's a story that gives an idea about how much people thought of Don. He was doing some electrical work one day and was short of a plug socket to connect up, so he asked one of his neighbours - Fred - if he had a spare one handy. Fred disappeared indoors and duly came back with one, for which Don was very grateful. It was not until some time later, when someone popped into Fred's and saw the bare wires dangling from the wall, that it came to light he'd removed one of his own to give to Don!

In 1975 Don and Jean moved to 137 Moor Lane in Cranham – a large detached house that became home for the next 10 years. I'm told that everyone will remember the fabulous parties there – especially at New Year. Don was always a better host than he was a guest and him and Jean loved to socialise. And they were great hosts – creating memorable occasions for all their guests.

In the early 80s URM was taken over, and the head office relocated to Horsham in Surrey. The nature of the firm changed and Don enjoyed the work less. He carried on commuting from Cranham for a while, but eventually – after a marvelous and fulfilling 30 odd year career – he called it a day and took redundancy. Before he'd decided to leave he'd been called in and asked to calculate redundancy packages for a number of staff – canny as he was, he did his own first. Good for him.

But he was far from ready to put his feet up. A new chapter beckoned and in 1985 Don and Jean moved to number 4 Garden Court in Lodden, Norfolk - where they started a holiday letting business.

As well as their own house, they ended up with four holiday homes - doing all the cleaning, maintenance and changeovers themselves. Don - with his accountant's head on - built the business plan around the school holidays but, unsurprisingly perhaps, it turned into a year round commitment. They often had all four cottages let out at Christmas – and every year they went to the trouble of decorating each of them, complete with Christmas trees and tinsel.

Don absolutely loved this – he and Jean were inseparable, so they worked on everything together and met lots of new people, many of whom became friends. Tom and Mary, who often rented one of the cottages and who are here today, are just one example – sharing holidays abroad, and I understand also sharing wine, whisky and laughter.

And another couple – Ann and Keith Viles, who now live in Birmingham but regularly rented one of the holiday cottages - wrote a lovely letter to Paula saying how sad they were to hear about Don's death, but how good it was to have known him. This was a holiday friendship that endured for close on 40 years, albeit from a distance, and they said how fond they were of Don, describing him as: "a real gentleman, kind and thoughtful with a happy and jolly personality." That says everything about Don – and how nice to be remembered for those qualities.

Don always said he would retire at 65, and that's what he did. Jean was becoming poorly, so they sold the cottages and set about enjoying themselves – which they also did, always together, and if anything even more inseparable. They also gave immense support to Paula and Keith when their son Oliver was born with disabilities.

Don thought a lot of all of his grandchildren – and he was a marvelous Granddad. When they were young, the grandchildren spent some of their school holidays in Norfolk with their Nana and Granddad – often taking along a mate, such was Don's hospitality. Many a happy hour was spent playing football – where it was a challenge to try and stop "the unstoppable one" from Granddad; and there were crabbing expeditions to see who could catch the most. These were joyful times for Don, and they are happy memories for his family.

In 2002 Jean died – leaving Don bereft and heartbroken; truth be told he struggled to carry on without her but he had the love and support of his friends and family, which must have meant so much to him.

Let's take a moment now to look back over some of the things Don enjoyed.

We know about his beloved Spurs – with his mate Ron he went to nearly every home match, man and boy, for getting on for 50 years. And once Ian was old enough, at about nine, he went too – standing on a special folding box Don had made so he could see the action.

I've mentioned Don's DIY abilities – but he really was resourceful and could build and fix things with great skill. And Jean knew how to make the most of that – she didn't have to say much, just leave the Hoover that needed mending in the middle of the room alongside a screwdriver and it would be sorted out.

Don had a love of coarse fishing – he was so content on the riverbank, with Jean always by his side. He lost himself in the pastime – finding it relaxing and an antidote to stressful times, which are a feature of any life. He kept up the fishing in his later years, with the help of his good friend Ray.

He enjoyed getting out and about. Back in the 50s Don and Jean would go cycling as a foursome with Ron and Joan and think nothing of covering 50 miles in a day – sometimes youth hostelling as well. They had some wonderful adventures on their tandems – although the women later admitted to not pedaling all the time!

When the children came along there were frequent weekend day trips to various seaside resorts – always with Ron and Joan, and their daughters Linda and Susan. Picnics were had, songs were sung, life was lived.

In 1973 Don bought a Volkswagen Dormobile – and he and Jean travelled widely in it: Scotland, the Lake District and all round the UK - and as far afield as Spain, again with Ron and Joan, Linda and Susan. Remember this was 1973: no mobile phones, no internet, no Google maps, no sat navs – just a sense of adventure, and a self compiled guide book prepared by Don for the kids. He also said that the Dormobile's little stove (yes, it had cooking facilities) turned out the best steak ever. He simply loved that Dormobile, and it was the source of much pleasure.

And Don and Jean enjoyed holidays abroad in Spain, Malta and Ibiza – with their friends Tom and Mary, from the cottages in Norfolk.

Don and Jean also enjoyed music and shows – they saw shows like Phantom of the Opera, Sunset Boulevard and Seven Brides for Seven Brothers.

And Don loved his food – especially seafood, which went back to his schooldays in Colchester. And on his 90th birthday, his love of socialising undiminished, he announced that he wanted a party, and he made a list of what he wanted: oysters and cockles featured heavily!

He liked a drink now and then, too – whiskey with water, but not too much mind, was a favourite. And even in his old age he got up to mischief; only last year he conned his pal Alan into taking him to the pub on the pretext of just going out for a little walk to have lunch.

In terms of his character, Don was friendly, intelligent, kind and helpful. These qualities were the mark of the man – as was his independence, for which he was known.

He had a sharp wit and formidable sense of humour – with great timing, and an eye for a good punch line. He was a big fan of many of the comic greats – the Goons, Spike Milligan, Peter Cook and Dudley Moore, Monty Python's Flying Circus, Dave Allen and Morcambe and Wise. The man had taste.

Family was so important to Don. He always looked out for his brother Ken – who although older was a rather sensitive child. And when their Mum died aged 60, it was Don who showed great strength of character and supported his family in all sorts of ways.

And Don loved his own family – his children, his grandchildren and his great grandchild meant so much to him. Above all though, Don was devoted to the love of his life – Jean. He once said that he was “the luckiest man in the world because he'd married the woman who made him happy.” Who could wish for more?

There is always a risk when someone becomes unwell in later life that we remember them that way, and not as they were for the vast majority of their life. So, let's not dwell unduly on Don's later years. After he was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease in 2004 he faced the future with courage and remarkable determination. He read books, he had speech therapy, he took his medication, he faced up to the hand he'd been dealt with fortitude and very much on his own terms. And his friends and family stood by him and gave help and support, which meant so much.

After a couple of years it became evident that he needed looking after, and he moved in with Paula and Keith – which became his home for the next 10 years. I want here to read you another passage from the letter Paula received from Ann and Keith Viles. They said this: “It was a great comfort to Don when he came to live with you...we used to exchange letters and holiday cards etc, and he always said how good you were taking care of him.”

Parkinson's is an unforgiving condition, and it took its toll. In 2015 Don moved to Admirals Reach Care Home in Chelmsford – where for the next three years he became a firm favourite with the staff. He was still young at heart, still joking, even at the toughest of times, and still fiercely independent. The kindness and superb care that Don received at Admirals Reach is something for which the family will forever be grateful. On their behalf, thank you so much for making a difference.

Don's 90th birthday party was held at Admirals Reach – with oysters and seafood as requested, and most importantly he was surrounded by his family. It was a huge success, with the good folk at Admiral's Reach going out of their way to make it very special, and provided yet more wonderful memories. And it would have meant the world to Don.

Don died peacefully on 10 May. He was much loved, and will be much missed.