

Archive Tribute of

Edward Keith Henry John

30/04/1942 – 03/02/2018

Written

Steve Parry

Humanists UK

Accredited Funeral Celebrant

Tribute

Keith was born in Haverfordwest on the 30th of April 1942 and lived in New Cottage, Porthgain with his father John Henry John, who was known as Jack Jack, and his mother Bertha. He had four older sisters Gladys, Glenda, the twins Jean and Joan and some years later two younger brothers Michael and Ronnie.

As I said earlier his full name is Edward Keith Henry John. But he was only supposed to be named Keith Henry John. However, Bertha sent Jack out to register the birth, but enroute, he decided to stop at the local pub, The Sloop, and while there he got talking to the landlord, Edward.

Edward asked what Jack was up to that day and when Jack told him, Edward offered Jack a free pint if he would name his son after him. Bertha was not pleased at the sudden name change and so he has always been known as Keith.

He seems to have been caught in the middle, spending much of his childhood as the young brother of four sisters, before becoming the eldest of three brothers. So, he was always at the bottom of one pecking order, while all the responsibilities of being at the top of the other and was always the one sent to get cigarettes from the local pub.

A few weeks ago, his sister Glenda sent Keith an email that Mark read to him. I'd like to read a little of it, where she spoke of their childhood.

“I keep looking back to the old days, not rich by far, money wise, though we never went hungry like some, but quite a happy family. Playing Ludo and Snakes and Ladders indoors and then down the harbour for so many

hours with mammy calling us in for our tea at the top of her voice. Do you remember the day when you climbed up the Jib of that old crane?

You were the only boy in the village with four older sisters (a bit bossy maybe.) You grew up to be a remarkable man. I admired you leaving home at sixteen for Barry, much braver than me, (I cried going to Fishguard.) You were always determined.”

So as Glenda said in 1958 when he was just sixteen he moved to Cardiff, where he lived in digs and undertook an apprenticeship as a fitter’s mates. Having completed this he went to work as a fitter for the Gasboard in Grangetown.

One day he was in Astey’s café on Central Square in Cardiff with a friend and he saw Christine and went over to talk to her. They hit it off, and before long started courting.

Sometimes Keith would stay at Christine’s parents’ house in Cadoc Crescent which caused some problems. On one occasion Christine’s father heard noises downstairs in the room where Keith was sleeping, being a protective father, he investigated and found Keith missing. Having searched the house, he went outside eventually finding Keith walking stark naked and fast asleep along Cardiff Road.

On another occasion he went missing only to be found standing in a wardrobe by Christine and when he woke up he told them he had been waiting for a bus.

Keith started working in Barry and he and Christine were married on the 18th of March 1967 and moved to a flat in Churchill Terrace where Diane and Mark were born over the next few years.

In 1975 the family moved to 39 Winstone Road, where Keith was still living until he was taken ill at the end of last year.

As a father Keith was involved in everything the children did. Mark played football and rugby and was heavily involved in sea cadets while Diane played kazoo in a marching jazz band and Keith took them everywhere they needed to go.

He was always interested and watched all their activities and made them watch and support each other. It was the same when Wales played rugby. It was a family tradition to all sit around watching the game and listening to Keith shout and scream at the TV.

They told me that at Christmas he used to record himself putting on a voice and saying "Ho Ho Ho" on to a tape recorder. He would then set it to play outside the front door. Diane said the voice he used was a bit creepy and years later he used the same voice when recording messages on special birthday cards for his grand-children, never quite setting the tone he intended.

Keith and Christine were loving and strict parents they always wanted to know where the children were and what time they were going to be in, and they were never allowed out late. Diana remembers that she was allowed to go to the Barry Boys' Comp discos, she was allowed to walk there with her friends but when she came out her dad was always waiting in the car to her drive home.

Whether she was safer walking home or being driven by Keith was debatable, because it seems that he was not a good driver, though he was a fast driver, with only one speed; top speed and so close to the car in front that it looked like it was towing him.

As a result many people have wondered, over the years, that he did not lose his license. It is probably OK to say now that it was due to the generosity of

certain individuals, who will remain nameless for legal reasons, who kindly took some of his speed camera points for him.

On one occasion when Wales were playing rugby in Wembley, family and friends hired a minibus and Keith drove. He travelled at a steady eighty along the motorway and the slip road into Leigh Delamare service station, barely slowing down to negotiate the sharp left hand turn into the car park.

Passengers screamed with fear as he followed it with sharp right and an emergency stop straight into a waiting parking space. He turned around to see a van full for ashen faced survivors staring back and asked "What, what?"

In recent years the pleasure he obtained from driving increased as did the fear he could cause in his family as he became confident in his use of both the sat-nav and phone while driving.

Mark remembered that when he was sixteen the family had a fantastic holiday in Calella. Christine and Keith usually quite strict, allowed them to drink alcohol for the first time, San Miguel. They travelled there and back on a coach and Keith got friendly with the coach driver, who from then on brought him back a case of San Miguel on each trip. Keith then sold them for a small profit.

He saw himself as a bit of an entrepreneur, on one occasion he followed very closely in the footsteps of Delboy Trotter and bought a job lot of reconditioned Hoovers which he then had a lot of difficulty trying to sell.

This venture was more successful than his foray into the world of wholesale jewellery though. He bought a consignment of jewellery that was not, of the highest quality, and never managed to sell any of it; so he gave it to his family as birthday and Christmas presents for many years to come.

Mark told me that as well as enjoying a bargain Keith was very well organised when it came to buying Christmas presents, but when he bought them he found it difficult to hold back the surprise sometimes giving them early as March.

One March he called on Mark and told him about the new Air Fryer he had bought Diana. Mark showed a bit of interest and shortly after Keith turned up again with an Air Fryer which he gave to Mark saying "Happy Christmas. Only problem is I normally spend a hundred pound on you but this cost me a hundred and forty so give me forty and it is yours.' Mark of course burst out laughing.

Christine and Keith loved going on holidays particularly on Mediterranean cruises, they really loved Turkey, where Keith's love of a bargain surfaced again as he enjoyed bartering with the locals. He practiced his haggling skills by playing with telephone cold calls callers, particularly double-glazing salespeople, seeing how much he could get them to knock off their offer before he hung up

One of the things it was obvious to me that his children admired in Keith, was his resilience and his attitude to life. In 1977 while painting an electric pylon he fell twenty-six feet landing between two electric boxes onto a concrete floor he was only given a fifty-fifty chance of surviving and had a finger and toe amputated. But he recovered and often said after that, that he was leaving Christine one body part at a time. In later years having a finger missing from one hand gave him a great opportunity to mess with his grandchildren when teaching them to count.

Christine died in 1998 and she missed her dearly. But his attitude to life help him through this tough time, as did the friendship that he built up with Susie

and Sandy through a bereavement chat room. He would often visit them in Edinburgh and it was here that they introduced him to a new love. Costco.

For a while they carried on a long-distance relationship, him visiting when he could. But eventually Costco moved down to Cardiff giving him everything he wanted, good quality products at bargain prices and free samples.

He knew which days to go to get a free cup of coffee and would often take Connor with him on his trips to Leckwith. Whatever his family bought from then on, he would look at it and then point out that it was cheaper in Costco.

He used his Costco contacts when Mark ran the tea kitty in Barry police station and supplied the station at cost. Even when Mark moved on he continued to supply the tea kitty, because he had got to know Deryn and others in the station and enjoyed helping.

Helping others was a very big part of who he was. Glenda told me to make sure I said that he would go to the ends of the earth to do something for you or to get something for, if you asked him.

But the people he enjoyed helping the most were his family. He was happy to pick Hannah up from Stanwell School each day even though she would often forget to tell him that she had something after school and was going to be late. But said he didn't mind waiting.

Ethan was always popular at the skate park in the summer because he was the only one who's grandfather used to deliver pizza to him. He also used to help Ethan earn some pocket money by cutting Keith's and his next-door neighbours garden. This involved Keith getting the mower out and pre-trimming the whole job before Ethan turned up, walked up-and-down a few times pushing the mower and left with cash in his pockets, while his grandfather tidied up and put everything away.

With Kelly there was no pretence as Keith would spend as much time as he could at her house doing odd jobs and keeping the garden trimmed and tidy.

He always insisted on helping his family whenever they needed work done in the house, unfortunately like his driving, his DIY was done at full speed. This often resulted in marks on walls, where he knocked into them with ladders and tools in his haste.

In 2010 Keith had a stroke, but again his resilience meant he didn't slow down even though he was a little unstable on his feet. He could still be found up the ladder and on the roof chasing birds off his solar panels much to the concern of his children.

He enjoyed going to bingo with Jeanette and they used to save their winnings which they would use for treats including going on holiday.

In June last year he was diagnosed with lung cancer and had an operation after which Mark was told Keith wouldn't be able to drive for six weeks. Mark decided to test his father and asked him how long they said it would be before he could drive. "Two weeks" Keith said Mark challenged him and argued with him but within two weeks he was back behind the wheel.

Keith spent his last sixteen weeks at Holme Towers, where he was given fantastic loving and professional care. Diane and Mark wanted me to say how grateful they are for how well he was looked after.

But even when ill he wouldn't slow down completely, and he continued to think of others raising £1350 for Holme Towers during his stay. There will be a collection today in Keith's memory in lieu of flowers and it will also go to this wonderful charity.

I read part of an email his sister Glenda sent to Keith earlier and I will finish his story with another excerpt from it.

“You are a lovely husband and dad, Diane and Mark are a credit to you both, showing their love for you now.

You’re so kind too, doing anyone a good turn when needed. You have done us proud love, as a son, brother, husband, father and grandfather.”

His sister Glenda wrote a poem some years ago about their childhood called “Childhood Memories” which I will now read.

How I love the village that was my home
And all the places that I did roam.
It came to me in the dark of night
that about these memories I’d like to write.

I must not forget that little stream
With the wooden bridge, where I’d sit and dream,
Only to be woken by the buzz of the dragonfly
As majestically he drifted by.

I’d wander down the village to play
And build little houses and make cakes from clay.
We made our own fun and life we did enjoy
There was no boredom then, for any little girl or boy.

We played in that grey sand within the harbour wall
There was no room there to play ball.
We bathed and fished and basked in the sun
We enjoyed ourselves and it was such fun.

I'd climb over that wooden stile on the right
Up to that landmark, just out of sight.
I sit there for an hour or more
Deep in thought whilst gazing at the seashore.
I'd slowly walk down to that rickety stile
And sit once again, for another while
Dreams come, problems and reality blown away.

I still remember that big brick wall
That stood above the harbour – it was oh, so tall.
We'd venture over this wall that was grim and bleak
To the other side to pick blackberries and play hide and seek.

We'd often climb up to Pen Top
In winter I can tell you it was a bleak spot.
Over to the ruins of the loco shed we'd amble
and up onto the engine we would scramble.

Engine drivers we all wanted to be,
But there was room in the cab for only three.
Not able to decide who would have this part
A row would erupt and for home we'd depart

We also had our own toboggan run
And I can tell you this was fun.
It was in the old quarry at Pen Top
And it was, for a while, our favourite sport.

Up that steep quarry bank we'd ascend
and on our bottom, the gritty side descend.
Up and down twenty times or more,
Happy times they were in days of yore.

By now we were tired, it was past tea-time
And that bank we could not again climb.
The shortcut now that we would embark
Was through that tunnel so long and so dark!

This tunnel was cold and dark like the night
We wished for the end to catch glimpse of the light.
Someone would shout "Ghost" just for fun
Then, oh, how those little legs would run.
My, what a sight we must've been

When we finally reached home far from clean.

I still love that village that once was my home

And all the places I did roam.

That place still means a lot to me,

Oh little village by the sea.

I will always visit it now and again,

That lovely village of Porthgain.

G.V.L Summer 1995