

Tribute for Gerald Easty. 3rd June 1926 – 8th December 2011

Gerry was born in 1926 in Hampstead. He was the only child of Charlie, a motor mechanic, and Edith, who worked as a cleaner and in a paper bag factory. When he was a few years old the family moved to Kingsbury. He gained a place at the local grammar school, and showed an early aptitude in both sciences and art.

Gerry's first wish was to be a surgeon, but as his parents were not well off, he studied Chemistry by means of a wartime bursary at University College London. His admissions tutor, seeing he was only 17 years old, said "we'll be getting them from the cradle next!" After gaining a 1st class Honours degree, and a PhD, he then became more biologically orientated, working on the structure of wool keratin. After this he was a Cancer Research Scientist for the rest of his career, becoming Head of Department of Cell Biology at the Institute of Cancer Research. He welcomed collaboration with fellow scientists from places as diverse as Italy, Romania, Russia, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan and the USA. He enjoyed encouraging young scientists, and invented various methods of improving cell culture techniques in order to study the behaviour of cancer cells in vitro. He published many papers and gave many lectures on the subject of tumour spread. His desire to collaborate rather than compete had already emerged when he organised a group from UCL to help build the youth railway from Zagreb to Sarajevo in 1947, after it had been destroyed during the war.

In 1948 he married Dorothy, whom he had met at UCL. Gerry and Dorothy worked together in the same laboratory for 28 years until Gerry retired. Their son Anthony was born in 1952 and daughter Gillian in 1958. When he travelled for work he disliked being away from his family for too long. He was very good at making and fixing things, and made a climbing frame, slide and swing in the garden, and a go-kart for his children. He was always very proud of the achievements of his children and grandchildren. As well as being a loving and supportive Dad, Gerry passed on his deep appreciation for music, film, art and literature by exposing his children to them from a young age. He was insatiably curious about the world around him and had a deep love of animals, taking care of feeding the Streatham fox population until very recently.

After his retirement he endured much ill-health, but never allowed this to spoil his enjoyment of life. He now had time to devote to his love of art, which included his own creations. His family treasure a number of pen and ink drawings, pastels and oil paintings which he made, together with a stone carving made from Northumbrian sandstone, which he carved using only a vegetable peeler. The most impressive was, perhaps, a mural he painted at the village house in Languedoc, which he owned with Dorothy, and where he spent many happy holidays with his family and friends. He enjoyed walking in the beautiful unspoilt countryside there, and helping neighbours with their grape harvest.

He also had time to indulge his other love – music, especially that of Mozart, which moved him greatly.

His family and friends all knew his health had been deteriorating for some time, and feel relieved that he finally died peacefully at home, as he had wished.