

Tribute

This tribute has been written from memories of Fiona and Mick with contributions from Andrew and family and friends.

Gordon was born in Wells on 24th September 1928. His father, Walter Jacobs, was a farmer and landowner and his mother, Annie Louisa Norman was a housewife who had eight children although only six survived to adulthood.

They were Doris, who died aged 9, Cicely, Norman who died aged 3 months, Herbert, George, Kenneth, Norman, the second child given this name and the only surviving brother, and Gordon the baby. For a mysterious reason which nobody has ever been able to shed any light on, Gordon's middle name was Lorraine, not a familiar male name and which has always required some sort of explanation from Gordon. Their family home was called 'Beryl Villa' in Bath Road.

The brothers were very close and had a secret language; Gordon's nickname was Bean. They were allowed to run free, and plotted their entertainment in a den called Tin Villa. For example, in one plan, one of the brothers jumped off the roof of their parent's house with an open umbrella as a parachute. Because Gordon was the youngest he was often on his own and spent a lot of time outdoors developing a love of nature, wildlife and a knowledge of birds which never left him. You could always depend upon him to know the species of bird or animal spotted in a hedgerow or the garden.

Gordon attended the Cathedral School in Wells. He enjoyed school, was not musical but definitely sporty and was part of the hockey and rugby teams. He also joined the army cadets but he wished that he had spent more time studying.

All the brothers took part in WW II and remarkably all returned. Gordon joined the RAF towards the end of the war, but his earlier war efforts included raising rabbits following the methods laid down in his book entitled 'Rabbits for Fun, Fur and Profit'. He never did make any profit but he made plenty of rabbits.

When the war ended Gordon wanted to stay in the RAF and train as a pilot but there were too many pilots and so he changed career and joined 'Cluttons' to train as a Building Surveyor. He enjoyed this work and when he was in his thirties, already with a family, a day job and responsibilities, through dogged determination and perseverance, he took his professional exams to become a Chartered Surveyor.

Once qualified and gaining his Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors letters, new opportunities opened up for Gordon and he enjoyed many years working for the Government's Estates and in particular 'looking after the Queen's estates' in the UK, and in Germany, Cyprus and the Middle East, with great success. He was especially proud of being assigned to look after 'Balmoral Castle' when posted to Aberdeen. He retired in 1991 and always remained a member of the RICS.

On his retirement, one of Gordon's bosses, Peter Draper, wrote the following:

"When you joined MPBW (over 20 years ago) you brought with you a wealth of experience which you have put to good use in offices stretching from the Persian

Gulf to Aberdeen. The quiet but effective manner in which you have carried out your duties has earned you respect from both managers and staff. Your conscientiousness showed in your willingness to stay on for another year after your original retirement date and I am most grateful to you for this. I wish you a long, healthy and happy retirement.”

He met his future wife Jean on the bus from Wells to Shepton Mallet but at first Gordon didn't believe she was old enough to date. Jean pursued Gordon and when she sought him out in 'The Swan Hotel' bar in Wells to give him a pack of cigarettes, he discovered that Jean was actually four months older than him so they started dating in 1949.

Gordon and Jean were married in Wells Cathedral in January 1952 and their wedding breakfast was held at 'The Swan' where they had their first date. They honeymooned in the Isles of Scilly which was a brave choice given the winter crossing by boat to St Mary's and had no accommodation booked before they left, but fortunately they met a hotelier on the crossing who looked after them and gave the newlyweds his best room at his best price.

Andrew was born in December 1952 and Fiona followed in June 1956. Jean wanted both children to have good Scottish names though Andrew narrowly escaped being christened Hamish, which Gordon felt would be a little out of place in Somerset.

The family home was in Chamberlain Street in the centre of Wells and Gordon was working in the property when it was a Cluttons' drawing office, before buying it for the family and converting it to a home. When the family moved in, the relocation down the hill from a rented cottage on the Mendips, included a goat and several chickens all squashed into the family's Austin. The goat, Jenny, once having eaten the overgrown garden, retired to a home in Coxley, but not before she made an appearance with Fiona at the 'Coxley Dog Show' winning a prize for the most unusual dog, allegedly Gordon's idea. The menagerie at Chamberlain Street grew to include, rabbits, guinea pigs, goldfish, a mouse and very many dogs.

Gordon introduced the family to puppy walking beagles from the local pack at Glastonbury, which ensured that the family home was always slightly chaotic. The family came home one afternoon to find all the kitchen wallpaper shredded on the floor with two puppies sat in the middle looking very pleased with themselves. This was one of many incidents always met with laughter and Gordon never lost his calm demeanour.

Childhood for Fiona and Andrew revolved around the kitchen Aga, the garden and time spent playing with the dogs, listening to the radio, being outdoors and eating home grown and home cooked food. The atmosphere was always warm and homely and Gordon was a dedicated father. As the children grew, their friends became part of the extended family. Gordon was always the voice of calm and reason.

Andrew McEwan, a childhood friend has recently written the following tribute:

“We were so sorry to hear of Gordon's passing on the last day of 2014. My memories of childhood holidays always return to images of Rookscombe Lodge, of

Gordon and your mum, of Andrew and you (Fiona). I envied what appeared to be your idyllic country life amongst the farm animals; to me Gordon was a softly-spoken country gentleman, kindly and cheerful.”

Early holidays were spent at Lyme Regis where the family stayed in a beach hut with bunk beds, spending time on the beach, going out on fishing boats and rock pooling. In later years the family were to be found driving to Gordon’s cousin, who ran a sheep farm in Scotland, to stay in a remote shepherd’s hut on the estate. They engaged in huge walks, tickling fish with the cousins and feeding orphaned lambs whenever possible. There is one family photo where Jean insisted tea was to be taken outside – the table cloth was blowing horizontally and the family was surrounded by sheep, but Gordon dutifully, as always, obliged.

When Gordon’s career started to take off, so the holidays became more adventurous too, with coach trips across Europe and skiing holidays , on a shoestring, long before anyone really recognised skiing as a holiday pursuit. When the children were old enough to look after themselves Gordon and Jean started to live and work abroad, so visits to Bahrain, Cyprus, Germany and Aberdeen became the family’s holidays, cadging lifts with the RAF to see them.

Gordon and Jean loved travel and continued to holiday extensively abroad; in China, USA, Australia, Canada, Scandinavia, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan and Oman and once even driving back from Cyprus to Somerset. For all the enjoyment of travelling Gordon loved Somerset more and felt that this really was his home.

Throughout his life and when he was not working, Gordon loved being with the family, going fishing, playing golf, gardening and listening to music and the radio. After Jean passed away nine years ago, Andrew went on golfing holidays in Scotland with Gordon and Fiona went skiing in Italy and visited Dubai twice so he could revisit all the places he had developed in the Emirates during the seventies and of course, also to play golf. He also loved dogs and shared his bungalow in Kippax Avenue with a rescue dog, a small Jack Russell called Jilly.

During his later life, soon after he retired, he spent several years looking after Jean when she was diagnosed with Vascular Dementia, ensuring that she stayed at home as long as possible before she had to move to a care home where he visited her every day.

After she died the family were all worried he would be lost without Jean but was delighted when he decided to make the most of what time he had left. So he golfed, holidayed, renovated his home and became project manager when Fiona and Mick refurbished ‘The Chapel’ at Dulcote. Armed with a digital camera he would send weekly progress reports by email and was very happy to talk drains, plumbing, stone and wood finishes with Mick – his favourite phrase at this time was “I know Mick will disagree but.....” But Mick didn’t always disagree and his advice and local knowledge was invaluable.

As Gordon became more restricted by his illness and spent more time at home, he ensured that the world came to him via Sky TV, the internet and he streamed his music through ‘Sonos’ discovering new artists constantly. He shopped, emailed,

paid bills on his computer and kept in touch with family abroad. He never stopped being interested in the News and when he could no longer ski or play golf he watched sport on the TV.

Another family friend, Claire Logan-Stephens, recently wrote:

“From what I have learnt of your father – he was an amazing man, such a gentleman, kind and considerate and a devoted and thoughtful father and how wonderful that he got such enjoyment from his sound system and computer in later life.”

He wasn't afraid of dying but he was concerned how and when it would happen – he didn't like the uncertainty. He did become frustrated with his ill health but was also accepting and practical about it.

Gordon was thoughtful, organised and business-like: when Fiona was at boarding school birthday cards began with “Herewith enclosed a cheque for your birthday. Dad” – a standing family joke.

So when it was time for him to move to a care home, he was similarly organised; it was his decision and he did so with little fuss and a lot of dignity. All his papers were in order and arrangements made.

He sold his car, put his house on the market and his only request was that we made sure he had his Sky TV, 'Sonos' music system, a telephone and broadband so he could use his computer to continue to organise his affairs. A week before he died, Christmas cards were sent, presents were dispatched and bills were paid. On the morning he passed away one of his favourite albums, by Leon Redbone, a present from Andrew, was found playing on his sound system which he had set to listen to, 30 minutes before he died.