

Archive Tribute of
Horace James Hurst
13/11/20 – 17/5/19

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At the beginning of each of our lives none know the length of our story; for some it just a short paragraph and for some, like Harry, the story covers many pages. But these stories are often unwritten and passed on through generations in tales told around the table over a meal, drink or at bedtime. But when the story is so long and when the centre of that story, like Harry spoke little in later years of their early life, we are left with the pieces of a story.

Harry was born in Llandaff, Cardiff on the 13th of November 1920. He was the eldest child of Horace and Lillian and the older brother of Mavis. His father was a paper maker employed at the nearby Ely Paper Mills. He grew up in Ely, but nothing else is known of his childhood.

He left school at fifteen and joined the Royal Air Force as a boy entrant in 1936. He entered as a trainee technician and underwent his initial and trade training at Llandow.

About the time he would have been completing his trade training the war started in 1939. At some point he was posted to a camp near Manchester, because it was here that he met Rose, the love of his life. Rose was a machinist and dress maker who worked in a nearby factory making parachutes.

Theirs was a whirlwind romance and as Harry could be posted anywhere in the UK or the world at any moment so they got married as soon as they were able. Rose was only eighteen and needed to get her father's permission to marry. This was given on the condition that they didn't have any children until the war was over.

They were married on the 23rd of December 1942 and despite the conditions set by her parents a honeymoon baby, Gwen soon came along. But by the time she was born Harry was away with his squadron.

He spoke little of his war service but there are some documents and some wonderful photographs of him in full flight gear and others which show him with some of his comrades in uniform wearing RAF wings on his chest. It is known that he also spent some time in Scotland, that he worked on RADAR, fitting the units onto planes, that he was in West Africa and that he was attached to the Royal Navy and flew on Catalina Seaplanes stationed in the tail position.

While on this attachment one of the ships he served on was torpedoed and many of his friends died. His discharge papers show that he received the Distinguished Service Medal, a naval award which was given for "bravery at sea." This is no small thing as the DSM was not given to everyone on a campaign and was ranked higher than the Military Medal, allowing the holder to use the letters DSM after their name.

The fact that Harry didn't tell anyone about this award says a lot about the man. All he ever said was that he was entitled to medals but didn't collect them because it was his friends who had died that deserved the medals not him.

While serving in West Africa he suffered repeated ear infections, which an RAF doctor ignored and accused Harry of trying to get himself discharged on ill health. Eventually he sought the help of an Army doctor but by that time the damage to his ears could not be reversed and so he was forced to leave the RAF in January 1946 due to hearing loss.

He returned to Rose and Gwen who were living with Rose's parents in Manchester. Gwen was now two and he had never seen her. She was initially

wary of him, not understanding who he was, as she thought her grandfather was her father.

Harry worked for a company in Manchester that made Galvanised rubber after the war until the family moved to Cardiff in 1956, at around the same time that his mother died. They lived in her house in Ely for some time, until they moved to a caravan on the Cambria Caravan Site at Culverhouse Cross.

Harry had several jobs over the years. Soon after returning to Cardiff he worked for a catering supply company, in Llandow, in the same hanger where he had done his RAF training twenty years before. In 1961 he started work at British Home Stores, where he stayed until 1972 when he became a Porter at Cardiff University, being promoted to head porter two years later.

Harry and Rose were both very hard workers. Gwen told her own children of how she remembered that she was often responsible, as a teenager, for cooking the evening meal as Rose worked full time as a seamstress and dressmaker.

They loved to go on holidays. In the 1950's, a time when few ordinary people travelled abroad, they led the way, flying from Rhoose on foreign holidays, mainly to inland Spain. They continued in this vein for many years, always preferring Spain.

In 1960 Gwen gave her parents a shock when she and Peter eloped to Gretna Green, though they were not initially pleased, they were soon delighted to be presented with grandchildren. Karen the following year and Kevin and Gaynor over the next three years, then in 1975 Richard came along and their family was complete for the time being.

As the grandchildren grew up Harry and Rose always lived a short drive from their home in Barry, in Pentwyn for two years and then in Tongwynlais before moving to Whitchurch in the mid 1980's.

Harry's grandchildren have many happy memories of him and Rose. They told me how generous he always was and would always make sure they never left the house empty handed, always giving them something, a present, some change or sweets.

Boxing Day was always spent at Nan and Grandad's where they would receive as many presents as they had been given the day before. Gaynor told me that often these presents weren't a surprise, as they would have already tried on the clothes while being told they were for a cousin, but the kids never let on they realised this wasn't true.

There were many days out; sometimes long walks in the woods near their home, sometimes day trips to lots of places, with favourites being Bristol and Newport Market and sometimes longer trips to visit family in Manchester. Richard was even luckier and was taken on holiday with them twice, to Tenerife and Spain.

In later years the day trips continued with his great-grandchildren including day trips to the Fairy Castle of Castell Coch, where he seemed to know everyone who worked there.

Having been a pioneer in RADAR, Harry continued in his love of gadgets and always wanted to be at the cutting edge of technology. He insisted on buying the latest things as soon as they came out and often the first time the grandchildren heard of, never mind saw, a gadget was when Grandad brought it home.

These included a Soda Stream, microwave oven, Commodore 64, video recorder and a big forty-inch TV. These would usually be bought from one of his two favourite shops, either James Howells or David Morgans.

But he enjoyed shopping anywhere and was delighted when he and Gwen discovered Bid Up TV, where he could buy some of the things he loved to collect without leaving his home. He particularly liked collecting clocks and there are over a hundred in his house.

Harry retired on ill health when he was in his early 60's in the 1980's. In the following years his hearing deteriorated to the point where he was completely deaf in 2003 when he and Rose moved next door to Gwen, Peter and Richard in Llantwit.

Harry loved working in his garden and he loved reading. He read books on many subjects and had wide ranging interests. Often, he would read up about things that his family were interested in so that he would be able talk to them about them.

With Gwen, Peter and Richard next door and the rest of the children living fairly close Harry and Rose were in the centre of the family they loved and were always proud of creating; four grandchildren, eight great-grandchildren and eleven great-great-grandchildren. They loved to see their family and hear of their achievements.

The family all got together for a party to celebrate their sixty-fifth Wedding Anniversary on the 23rd of December 2007, for which they received a card from the Queen. But the joy of this occasion was short-lived when Rose died just nine days later on New Year's Day 2008.

Harry recovered well from this loss supported by Gwen and Peter next, his grandchildren and their families. Richard particularly spent a lot of time with him and became Harry's assistant in the garden, following all the instructions he gave from the well-earned comfort of his chair.

When Gwen died in 2013 Harry did not recover so well. He had lost both his girls and felt their absence keenly. His long life and well lived life came to an end when he died in Llandough Hospital, after a short illness on the 17th of May.