

Archive Tribute of

Thomas John O' Halloran

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Written by

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Tribute

Tom was born on the 9th of March 1929 at Pendoylan Street in Newtown, Splott and was one of Mary and Henry O'Halloran's ten children. His father was a docker and life for the O'Halloran family and those around them was hard.

For his children and grandchildren and those of us from later generations it can be difficult to imagine how hard life was for Tom and his family. Born in the great depression and aged only ten when the Second World War started, his was a life of going without. In later years he loved watching his children and grandchildren growing up and having much easier childhoods than he had experienced.

Tom had a sharp mind and learnt things easily in his later life, so he always resented that his time in St Alban's Catholic School had been wasted. Education was not valued highly, and he learnt little that would be of use in his later life.

But he was able to learn things for himself. He started a lucrative little business looking after men's bikes when they were in the pub at a penny a bike and getting their beers for them for the same charge.

Tuberculosis was common and when he was thirteen, first his mother and then a few days later his sister, died of the dreaded consumption, leaving his father to bring up the children. About the same time at the age of thirteen Tom left school and started work.

Aged fourteen he worked for a while at the Heinz Baked Bean factory in Tindell Street, which he enjoyed, as all the women there used to spoil him. The following year he began work as a builder's mate.

Aged fifteen his day involved walking from his home in Splott to Cyfartha Street to pick up his builder's truck, a handcart that was loaded with tools, and then push this the five miles to Ely, where he would work all day, before making the return trip.

Before the end of the War he tried to join the Army, just like his father had done in the first world war, and like his father the recruiters realised he was too young. He returned to the building site for another three years until he started his National Service in the Army. He spent two years in Yorkshire before returning to Cardiff and began work in the steel industry.

He had no training in the role, but he managed to get a well-paid job as a Steel Erector and just blagged it. Just after he started one of his workmates shouted for to him to pass a particular tool, Tom had no clue what he was talking about, so he looked around and then said, "I don't know what's wrong with me, I can't see it for looking," and then allowed the work mate to point it out to him.

1953 was a big year in Tom's life, a year of opportunities lost and gained. The eldest sons of dockers were by tradition given a ticket to follow their father and work as a docker. The ticket was a guaranteed of a well-paid job for life. His eldest brother had taken the ticket.

Tom was working in the Cold Roll Steel Mill at Guest Keen and Nettlefolds when a girder fell on his foot. He was off work for six months and during this time a second ticket to work as a docker was offered to the sons of Henry O'Halloran. This would have been his, by right, but as he was injured his younger brother took it.

That same year he met Olive, who hearing that his father was a doctor agreed to go on a date with him. By the time she realised she had misheard it was too

late, they went out on a date and then started courting, getting married in 1955.

Their first home was with his family on Broadway in Roath, but in 1956 Olive's mum died and they moved into her home to look after Olive's older brothers, meaning they never had a home to themselves before Bev and Jan came along over the next ten years.

In 1990, Tom moved from Rumney to Cathays to live with his partner Dot, starting a thirty-year chapter in his life. Throughout this chapter their friendship with Olive was a constant.

In 1992, Tom retired from the Welsh Government after his first heart attack.

Living in Cathays he became a regular member of Cathay Cons Club but never lost touch with the friends he had made in Rumney and particularly those in the Rompney Castle where he was their longest serving customer of sixty-four years.

In 2002, Tom and Dot moved from Cathays, back to Rumney, just around the corner from his daughter Bev, but they always maintained their friendships with Cathays Cons Club.

Family Tributes

The best people to tell you the rest of his story are his family, so first Jan is going to come up and tell us more about Tom.

Jan's Tribute

Roger, my husband suggested a few days ago, that I should bow as I approached dad today.

I must admit, I couldn't help but laugh, as he would have laughed at the very thought of me bowing to him.

He was always laughing, usually mischievously.

Bev and I have lovely memories of dad from years ago, and I know he'd be happy for me to share some of them with you.

Dad had a chair, as was usual, didn't all dads have a special chair.

Mother would say that dad's chair was pretty well worn, and that's putting it politely!

Sometimes, whilst sitting in that chair, dad would eat his tea off a tray, and Bev and I, like two hungry birds, would sit at his feet and beg to be fed from his plate. Food always tasted better off dad's plate, he was never mean. I'm tempted to think that mum gave him better food but actually that's very very unlikely!

My sister took great delight in eating his work sandwiches.

She would raid the fridge after a night out, and take a bite out of every one of dad's sandwiches. He came home from work one day so embarrassed as he'd

tried to share his lunch with a workmate who had forgotten his, and it looked as if the mice had been at them. She always took the middle as well, never the crust!!!

Also, whenever he struck a match to light the gas fire, Bev and I would fight over the extinguished match, that last puff of smoke smelt fantastic!

He called us his ankle biters, and sometimes we actually did bite his ankles, we did love to make him scream! Simple pleasures.

Talking of simple pleasures; dad was always tanned.

Well built, shiny and tanned.

Back in the early 1970's, when we had summers, dad painted our house.

Up the ladder, in the blazing sun, he must have fried, no factor 50 in those days.

He would think nothing of allowing Bev and I to skin him alive.

We spent hours, picking sheets of sunburned skin from his back.

Obviously, my sister always peeled the biggest sheet, she was 7 years older than me, and still is.

Moving back inside to our front room, you wouldn't be far wrong if you brought to mind the Royle family, not the Windsor's mind you, the Ricky Tomlinson kind.

One evening, must have been just before Christmas, dad was multitasking!

He was enjoying the comfort of his well worn chair, whilst at the same time, attempting to fix the Christmas lights which, were plugged into the wall light fitting, just above dad's chair.

Bev, had the responsibility of blowing up balloons, she could knot them because she was so much older than me, (look up and pause) and I was probably draping tinsel and generally getting in the way.

In wafted mother, bearing dad's plated tea on a tray, it was presented to him in a rugby pass kind of way, good job he could catch, and he allowed the lights to drape around his neck whilst he ate.

Before mother had left the room, my sister, innocently but with catastrophic consequences, sat down on the settee with rather too much enthusiasm.

Her landing was cushioned by a newly, probably overinflated balloon which proceeded to pop with the loudest bang ever.

Poor dad, about to take his first mouthful of food, thought the lights around his neck had exploded, up in the air went his tea. Food and tray hit the floor, the air turned blue, Beverley was in deep trouble and I saw the funny side, and still do.

Dad often told us, that he'd always wanted sons, he'd never asked for daughters! I think he changed his mind over the years, especially recently.

I'm sure he struggled to approve of some of our boyfriends. One occasion, he raised his eyebrows when we both brought our overseas boyfriends home for Christmas lunch. He said that it was like the United Nations 'in this bloody house'.

I can safely say that dad was delighted to see us married off to Mike and Rog respectively. He thought the world of you two, gratitude for taking on us O'Halloran girls was probably his overriding emotion.

Along came two grandsons, James and George, who christened him Damper, I'll let them share their memories with you. They adored him as he did them.

A special mention to Dottie.

Dad and Dottie were together for nearly 30 years and I have no doubt that those years were so happy for dad because of Dottie. He didn't always show it, sometimes Dottie got the sack for some misdemeanour, but she was always reinstated. We all know how grateful he was for Dottie's care and love.

We are all grateful for that.

Talking of grateful, we are definitely grateful to Willowbrook and all of the wonderful staff there, you made his last year better than any of us could have hoped.

Also grateful to dad's friends, especially the Rompney crowd, you made him laugh and had a lot of patience with him, especially recently.

Finally, extremely grateful that dad went peacefully in his sleep, as he would have wanted to go.

Can't help wanting to tell him off for leaving the party without saying goodbye. I know he'd be smiling today.

I'm going to hand over to our boys, James and George, his Grandsons who want to pay tribute to their Damper.

James's Tribute

James spoke about his Grandfather using the following points:

- Not a sad occasion, this is a time for celebrating a man who lived for a long and happy 90 years.

- 4 men whom I can thank for making me the young man I am today: Dad, George, Mike, Damper.
- Our early years are spent in school, learning the basic 'core' skills: writing, playing rugby, reading music
- Damper did not particularly embody any of these skills, however he was a bastion of something much more important
- Being a good person is so often overlooked today, but Damper always had one foot in the past, in a time long gone where principle and morality and generally being a good person were on the same footing as exam grades or sporting victories.
- Damper taught me many more virtues than school ever could.
- Taught me to laugh at the small things - spending hours looking out of nana's front window at the passers by; holding his hand on the radiator until he feigned agony
- Taught me to be interested - stories about the war
- taught me to be tenacious - asking for more stories again and again until he gave in
- to be strong and resolute - 'fighting' for the last pair of rugby socks for me and George
- Didn't even realise he was passing down these skills which won't be around for much longer
- But the impact he had on me pales in comparison to the impact he had on every person he met
- His wicked sense of humour and his unwavering aim to always do the right thing, if occasionally misguided, has touched every person here
- So whilst it is true to say that he is dead in that he no longer breathes or walks, his legacy lives on in every person sat in this room

- It is his ability to so impactfully mark everyone with whom he came into contact that makes me so proud to be his grandson

George's Reading

Not How Did He Die

Not how did he die but how did he live
Not what did he gain but what did he give.
These are the units that measure the worth
Of a man or a woman, regardless of birth.
Not what was his church, nor what was his creed
But did he befriend those really in need?
Was he ever ready with a word of good cheer
To bring back a smile, to banish a tear?
Not what did the man in the newspaper say
But how many were sorry when he passed away?

Mike's Tribute

A lot happens in our busy lives. Much of it we forget about and don't find the need to remember or reflect on. When people die and we lose them, we can't enjoy them in the "now". Our "now" with them relies on a collection of memories and moments, something they said, something they did, something they made or built that's still here, perhaps even a favourite coat or how you remember their smell. In the last couple of weeks, memories of Tom have dominated our thoughts. We know how he would have responded to

something that just happened, or even what he would have probably said. My earliest memory of Tom was thirty years ago, seeing him in the front room of Nevin Crescent, reading his papers and studying the racing form. He was easy going and jovial. The sound of his laugh is something you don't forget, probably because we heard it so often. Personally, I'd like to think he was so happy because he couldn't believe his luck, that his daughter had found such a great bloke even if he was a Geordie! or as Tom often put it, "a Scotsman with his brains kicked in".

Tom was old-school and didn't tolerate bad language in front of women, especially his girls. He loved putting the world to rights with his mates in the pub or discussing the horse racing and yet another horse that had lost by a short head! You'd have thought he'd have learned to back the ones with the long necks! although he was no stranger to picking a winner. I remember the first Christmas after I met Bev. He invited me to join him at the Rompney Castle for a lunchtime Christmas drink. It was the first time I'd been out drinking with Tom. It became obvious, very quickly, that Tom was a popular man. What was also very obvious, was that he could shift some serious ale and I was way out of my depth! I've got very little memory of the rest of that Christmas Day, other than falling asleep on Karen's sofa while the kids played around me. I suspect Tom was testing me to see if I was suitable material for his daughter, so I guess I passed the test!

Tom enjoyed some of the simple pleasures in life, like good food with family and friends. Family Sunday lunches will always bring back happy memories. He loved sitting in the garden, in the sunshine, especially with a pint in his hand..... and don't we all!

Tom always tried to be the first to put his hand in his pocket to buy a round of drinks. It was always a challenge to get to the bar before him. It would be fair to say that Tom will be remembered by family and friends for his generosity. The most generous gift that he (and Ol) gave me was their daughter, which was typically generous because I don't think I ever asked him. To be honest though, I was very grateful as I was punching well above my weight! and still am!

Tom wasn't good with technology but he loved TV. He was fortunate to have been born into an era when television was invented which, coincidentally, was in the year he was born, 1929. This all worked great for Tom until the 1980s, when TV remotes came along and then the problems started. It was my job to sort out the problems with his TV. A few years ago, in March after his birthday, he called Bev because the remote control for his new TV had stopped working and he was not a happy chap. Thankfully, Tom and Dot live just around the corner. The flat looked lovely with all of Tom's cards placed around his lounge including the large card standing right in front of the remote receiver on his T.V., blocking the signal. Another problem solved! When Bev used to explain to Tom, how to use the remote control, he would always say, "aye aye!", confirming he'd understood, even if he hadn't. She may as well have been explaining how to spilt the atom.

Tom wasn't a detail person. He didn't appreciate long-winded explanations or pompousness. We used to joke that he had "staff" to deal with that. In hospital last year, we explained this to a rather arrogant consultant, who informed us that he had twenty years of experience of older people and instinctively knew if patients didn't understand what he was saying. He went on to demonstrate this to us and explained to Tom his diagnosis and proposals for treatment. As usual, Tom nodded and smiled throughout, giving the

occasional "aye aye!" to show he understood. At the end of a very long explanation, Tom turned to Bev and said, "What was that?"

Tom had his first heart attack when he was sixty-three. I remember in the Accident and Emergency department he looked very worried and said, "That's it. I'm finished". Thankfully he wasn't. He took early retirement and had another twenty-seven happy years.

After retirement Tom became very domesticated something I suspect he didn't boast about with his mates in the Rompney Castle! When Dottie used to go off to work, Tom took on the roll of house husband. When we used to call in after work, there were neat piles of ironed clothes on the ironing board He even ironed the socks and towels! You could learn something from your father Girls!

After retirement, Tom learned new cooking skills and adapted everything to a low-fat diet to stay healthy. We'd often get a call in the morning, after Dottie had gone to work, asking "How do you make beef stew or chilli or what do you put in spaghetti bolognese?" His prawn curries were very different but nice. Bev would always taste what he'd made. She'd ask, "What did you put in this Dad?" It was always a little bit of this and a little bit of that but the secret ingredient in his prawn curries??? a jar of sweet and sour sauce! It worked! Who would have thought he'd invented fusion cuisine before it became popular!

Sadly, as we get older, the balance of celebrations swing from weddings toward funerals. We would often get a call from Tom, asking if we could drop him off at a funeral service of somebody he knew. Tom welcomed the opportunity to remember friends in celebrations such as this I'd go as far as saying he participated in post-service activities enthusiastically! I know

he'd appreciate similar enthusiasm after this service. As they say these days, "Be like Tom!" but no pressure!

While we only get one life and what we do with it is down to us, it would be fair to say that Tom packed his life with a lot of happiness and a lot of love. A mark of Tom's popularity is the distance some people have travelled to attend this celebration of his life. After his first heart attack when he was sixty-three, we used to say, "if he died tomorrow, he would go doing the things he loved in life". Tom would say he'd rather go being shot by a jealous husband! But although he became more frail in the last eighteen months, he still enjoyed a full life, with plenty of humour and surrounded by the people he loved, right up until the end. The Willowbrook House team deserve a lot of credit for this. They say, "True love stories never have endings". When we look back over our memories of Tom, we won't remember the days, we'll remember the moments but this is where we'll feel them.

Roger's Tribute

Sometime shortly after 1am on Monday 3rd June the phone rang. Bev and Mike's name appears and I utter the words to Jan, 'this may well not be good news'. Bev shared the sad news that Tom had died in his sleep, extremely comfortably after having a good day and having lots of laughs with the wonderful carers at Willow Brook Nursing Home. Desperately sad, but the time was right!!!!!!

Thomas John O'Halloran 1929 to 2019 (90 years), what an amazing achievement. In 1929 George V was King and Stanley Baldwin Prime Minister.

Since then Tom has seen off three Kings and twenty Prime Ministers!!

Tom was born in the same year as Roger Bannister, the first runner to run a mile in less than four minutes, although he ran out of steam before Tom, only managing eighty-nine years on the planet, dying just last year.

I was privileged to be able to call Tom by Father-in-Law and respected him greatly.

A man full of love for his family, kind, caring, honest, dependable, generous and massively supportive to me as his Son-in-Law, I truly adored him and will miss his wise words enormously.

I first met Tom twenty years ago. To this day, he could never get my name right for some reason and often called me Rob, instead of Rog. I never really got to the bottom of this, Jan promising me she never had a boyfriend call Rob!!!!

Now, just to set the scene, you have to remember I was courting his youngest daughter, dangerous territory indeed. I'd been going out with Jan for a couple of months when the call came in, summoning me and suggesting it might be time to meet her father.

You have to realise what I had been told about Tom - a huge, strong man, ex-steel erector, doesn't suffer fools and a man's man. What did I have to fear!!!!

I remember the day as if it were yesterday. The meeting was to take place at Rhymney Street, Cathays where Tom lived with Dot. As we approached in the car, Tom was standing in the doorway, just staring, probably because his eye sight wasn't that great. Parking slightly up the road from the house, just in case a quick escape where required, Jan and I parked up and approached Tom, with Jan saying quietly under her breath, he likes a firm handshake!!!!!! Fear struck

as I put out my hand, said hello and was ushered into the 'front room' like something you would see in a gangster movie.

A little small talk ensued, but I knew we were about to get to the crux of the matter, RUGBY and more importantly Welsh rugby.

Now, as a proud Irishman and an Irish Rugby supporter, things could well have gone downhill rapidly.

(Welsh ascent) "NOW you got to realise, in this family", Tom instructed, "we support Wales with no exception". Oh! dear I thought as he looked at me straight in the eyes for a reaction. Following a lengthy discussion, Tom's decision was made, and I was to support Wales in all games including when Ireland and Wales were competing against each other. Not the best negotiation I have ever taken part in, but it allowed us to move on in a favourable manner for the next twenty plus years.

Ten years ago, I was privileged enough to take Tom to the Millennium Stadium (Arms Park to Tom and most of us here today) for a Six Nations game: Wales v Ireland.

I turned up at the Cons Club in Cathays for a few beers before walking to the ground with Tom. Turning up proudly wearing my Irish rugby top, Tom stood up and said (Welsh ascent) "you bastard", an expression of endearment, I believe, that he often aimed my way.

I must apologise for using the 'B' word, but to Tom 'Bastard' wasn't swearing, or so he always told me!!!!!!!

Anyhow, we walked to the stadium during which time Tom reiterated the loyalty I was to show during the game, despite the Irish top. This I dutifully did. We had a great evening. Tom hadn't been in the stadium that he loved so much before and adored the experience. I am so proud to have been able to facilitate this for him.

Being an Irish game, Bushmills whisky were hosting a promotional event, which Tom and I felt duty bound to show support for. Only fair after all. After copious amounts of Bushmills, the game was over and we exited the stadium to try and find Jan who was picking us up. After the windy walk through Cardiff, Jan appeared in the distance. Tom got into the front seat of the car, at which point some friends of mine from Chepstow appeared and grouped around me. Tom jumped (lot literally) out of the car, thinking I'm being attacked, with his fists up shouting (Welsh accent) right Rob (Rog) we can have these!!!!!! Jan promptly stood in front of him, directing him back to the car, shouting, there is not trouble, these are friends. We promptly sped off and returned him home.

Final result, Wales 15 - Ireland 17 - the game was never spoken about again!!!!!!

Tom loved nothing more than being at our house or at Bev and Mike's, rugby on the TV, roast in the oven, daughters fusing around him, drinks on the go and his Grandsons present, commenting on the game. He adored having his family around him.

The boys always promised to buy their Damper, a pint when they both turned eighteen. Last Dec 31st, George, the younger, turned eighteen and the promise was kept. The family, including many of his friends from the Rompney met up

at the pub and boys proudly presented Damper with a pint of Thatcher's cider. Jan and I were so proud and frankly couldn't believe the day had arrived and Damper had seen both his Grandsons reach eighteen and beyond.

I feel so privileged to have known Tom and thoroughly enjoyed his company for over two decades. More importantly my sons will remember him for the rest of their lives and will be able to talk about him to their children, Toms Great Grand Children.

Tom, it's been my pleasure.