

Archive Tribute

ANTHONY KEEN

30th July 1957 – 25th August 2019

Ceremony at

Breakspear Crematorium

at 12.15 pm on Monday 9th September 2019

Celebrant: Hilary Leighter
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Tony wrote these words for today in the days before his death:

“It is a privilege to be given the opportunity to write one's own eulogy, and to be able to reflect back on a fulfilling life. To be given the opportunity to acknowledge and thank friends and family for their support and love over the past 62 years.

Today we gather at a humanist service in the hope of getting the balance right between celebration and commemoration.

My personal belief is that we should reflect on times passed and not on ‘lost time to come’. The latter will only bring negativity whilst the former will have a much more positive outlook.

I grew up in the privileged, ‘post-war’ generation, untainted by having to fight in any major conflicts ourselves. We also had the NHS for healthcare and my school friends and I benefited from the blossoming state grammar school system. Employment opportunities were also many and varied, allowing me to live a comfortable, caring and fulfilling life.

The foundation for all of this would have been based on the kind and caring upbringing provided by my two loving parents, Peter and Muriel. Muriel is with us here today, I can only thank them both for their nurturing attitude, and constant care and love throughout my life.

My two sisters, Susan and Jenny, are here with their respective partners; and their caring attitude has always been reflected in their support for me.

Then, just 30 years ago, I met my future wife Margaret whom I married a few years later. This was a truly transformative experience because not only did I gain a whole new Irish family who treated me as one of their own, it also produced two wonderful children, Daniel & Laura. For any of you who have negative preconceptions of the younger generation, I suggest you take 5 or 10 minutes to chat with them, as they are two of the nicest, most thoughtful and caring people I know.

Well enough from me, I will now hand over to other people to run this service but my overwhelming wish is that there is some laughter, inevitably some tears but above all that it stimulates fond and happy memories of times gone past. It is not only time to reminisce with old friends, but hopefully to make a few new ones on the day as well.

I send my love and thanks to you all”

Tony Keen was born on 30th July 1957 at home in Hillingdon, to Peter and Muriel Keen. They met when they both worked in Boots the chemist, where Peter was a pharmacist, and he later went on to work at Glaxo. The family moved to Ickenham in 1968. Tony had an older sister Susan and a younger sister Jenny. Muriel, Susan and Jenny have written tributes to Tony, and I am very happy to share them with you now.

Muriel writes “As a mother one never wants to outlive one’s children, so losing Tony has come as quite a shock. I just want to say how very proud I am of Tony’s acceptance, positivity and optimism throughout the past year. With this attitude, he had the resilience to come back from his bouts of severe pain and sickness to make the most of the better times.

I must emphasise at this point that Margaret was at his side more or less 24 hours a day, and without her support I don’t think he would have coped so well. I am so lucky that Tony has left me a very kind and loving daughter-in-law and two very special grandchildren; Daniel and Laura. Goodbye Tony, rest in peace. Your loving Mum.”

Susan writes “Tony arrived nearly three years after me, the first boy in the family after a run of girls: myself and my two cousins, Linda and Shirley. My earliest memories of Tony are of an angelic looking baby with blond curly hair sitting in his pram, who could switch from a winning smile to tears and tantrums within seconds. As an adult he could also be charming and thoughtful, but passionate and fierce in defence of what he thought was right, or was *his* right.

Having been brought up to play demurely with dolls and prams, I had a culture shock once Tony was out of his pram and growing up. Play became a whole lot more boisterous, but with boys’ toys available, a whole lot more interesting too. Trains, especially the steam variety, remained an interest of Tony’s into adult life.

As siblings we did not always get on and I remember some furious fights and arguments over toys and play. And as adults we could still fight and disagree, because we were both stubborn and passionate people, but ultimately the love and loyalty forged in childhood overcame disagreements.

We had a paddling pool and I recall that being around water was an irresistible invitation for Tony to make everyone, including himself, as wet as possible. He was always inclusive of family and friends!

That trait too continued into adult life. He was always keen to ensure that family were there at the “big” moments of his life – his wedding, meeting his new son and daughter shortly after they were born, christenings, birthdays and family Christmases, mainly to share the fun and joy, but also sometimes to support him move through major thresholds in life. I remember him cradling Daniel, only a few days old, and being vulnerable and unsure as a new parent, needing family around him for reassurance as he stepped into that role. And he drew on the strength of his family too, during the last year, to help him face the challenges and vulnerabilities his illness presented him with.”

And Jenny writes “Considering our age difference of 2 years and 6 months, Tony was quite tolerant of me as a younger sister. We generally played quite happily together, although there were the usual squabbles and fall outs along the way. He did let me play with his toys – train set, Scalextric and toy soldiers. We also played board games together. I particularly remember playing Monopoly. As Tony was older than me, he always had to be the banker, and for some reason he nearly always won the game!

There was one activity that Susan and I weren’t so keen on sharing with Tony, and that was when we went on holiday to the seaside. There are a few photographs of us on the beach with Susan and I genteelly building sandcastles and a small figure in the distance with bucket and spade digging away furiously with sand flying everywhere. Once Tony set his mind to something, he did give it all his energy and passion!

Tony had a great sense of humour and could usually make me laugh. Unfortunately, as a small child he didn’t always pick the most appropriate time. I remember quite a few mealtimes when Mum would make us look at separate pictures on the wall, to try and stop us giggling when we were supposed to be eating our meals. However, I appreciated his thoughtfulness and ability to make me laugh when we were both in our twenties and sharing a flat together. There were quite a few occasions when he helped me to get over problems, or affairs of the heart. Even in the last few days of his life he was still saying things that made me laugh and I love him for giving me those final happy memories.”

Tony made lifelong friends at school, including Stephen, Colin, Geoff, Andy, Pete, John and Tony. When Tony left school he trained to be an accountant at JR Norman for a year, then became the Recreation Officer at South Ruislip Leisure Centre.

Following some time selling advertising space for the Middlesex County Press, which produced the local Gazette newspaper, Tony became an international sales rep for apparel companies Nike, Rucanor, Converse, Ellesse and Timberland, where he had risen to Vice President of Global Distributors. After taking early retirement from Timberland in 2011, Tony set up his own business AMK Business Solutions, advising clothing companies expanding into global trade. He retired from this in 2015, then worked with Margaret in property management.

Tony met Margaret O'Sullivan in 1987 when he lived in South Ruislip in a flat above the Fishing Net chip shop! Margaret shared the flat 2 doors down with her sister Noreen. Jamesy, a friend from Ireland, was renting a room with them. He started chatting to Tony, and introduced him to Margaret. They started going out, and married in 1991. They enjoyed going on walks together, and the first of many holidays to Ireland to meet Margaret's family. Tony was very close to Margaret's sisters Collette, Deborah and Noreen. Deborah has written a tribute to Tony on behalf of them all, and I am very pleased to read this to you now.

"We first met Tony in the mid 80's when he owned an apartment two doors away from Margaret and her sister Noreen. We were all very impressed by the good looking guy in the end apartment who was always so friendly and so well dressed, and had huge lines of washing out every weekend!

After some months we gradually got to know him, with the aid of our friend Jamesey Walshe, who decided Tony would be a great match for Margaret and so a conspiracy was started to get them together. He was always being invited in for tea, and once he had settled in with a cuppa, Noreen would suddenly decide she needed a bath, and disappear off to leave him and Margaret alone. When they finally got together as a couple, Noreen announced it was about time, she was tired of lying in the bath for hours and getting all wrinkled!

On his first trip to our family home in West Cork he impressed our mum by clearing the table after meals and doing the washing up. This would not normally be "men's work", so made a great first impression on his future mother-in-law. Very important to impress the mother-in-law!!

He slotted in seamlessly with his new Irish family, and we had many great holidays together in Ireland. He got to know a lot of the locals, and loved all the beautiful walks and taking the kids to the beach. Our parents loved him and were delighted that Margaret had met somebody who fitted in so well, took such good care of her and got on with everybody.

In turn, we were delighted to get to know his lovely family, Peter and Muriel, Jenny and Harry, and Susan and Tim.

We are so thankful to Tony for being such an important part of our family, and also the great friendship we have developed with Muriel, his mum, who, when Peter, his dad, passed away, came on the family holidays to Ireland for several years. She is now an honorary member of the 4 sisters club.

We are also thankful to him for the love he showed, and the care he took, of our sister and for the two beautiful children he gave us, Daniel and Laura, our treasured nephew and niece, and cousins to Colette's two boys, Cian (*Kee-an*) and Fintan. He has been an amazing uncle to these boys.

He had a great affinity with the kids and we have many happy memories of all the rough and tumble games he played with the 4 children, the many trips to Centre Parks which he organised for all of them and the great days out when Colette and her boys visited. He was proud of his lovely children and very supportive of and interested in everything they did.

Tony always had his camera and video recorder at the ready, and we have literally thousands of photos and video clips of all the holidays and events we took part in together. We will treasure these all the more now, even if over the years there were many cries of "oh no, put that bloody camera away".

Tony and Margaret were not just husband and wife, they were soulmates and did everything together, totally in tune with each other. It is truly rare to find the love of your life, but **they** did and we are most thankful for that.

With his passing, we will all have to find a new normal. It will be tough and a bit strange, but we are a strong extended family unit so we can all support each other, on this new and very unwelcome leg of life's journey.

Tony was a very decent human being, always having time for people and ready to help with anything. We are proud and honoured to have him as our brother-in-law and uncle to Cian (*Kee-an*) and Fintan.

Tony, you will forever be loved and you will always be an important part of our lives.

With love from your Irish family."

And Fintan writes "Tony, I want to thank you for making such a big difference to all of our family lives. The holidays were always fantastic, and you always went to great lengths to ensure everyone had a great time.

The trips to Centre Parcs, going to Wembley and the Reading games, and the various holidays you made really enjoyable. You always went out of your way to make sure the kids enjoyed themselves by joining in the games. I must mention as well the most thoughtful present I've ever received was the signed picture of the Munster rugby team and rugby ball.

You really made a difference to all of our lives. We have such great memories to look back on, and I just wanted to thank you. You are the best uncle I could have wished for. Lots of love, Finty boy.”

Tony and Margaret moved to Iver in 1992. They have 2 children. Daniel was born in 1995 and Laura in 1999. Tony was an absolutely brilliant Dad. He supported Reading Football Club, and took Daniel to their matches regularly, especially in the 2012 to 2013 season when they were in the Premier League. He had also liked trains since he was a boy, and loved to take the children on Santa Special trips on the Bluebell Line in Sussex, and on the Ickenham Miniature Railway, with his knees tucked up to his chin!

Laura has written a tribute to her Dad:

“It is so wonderful to have the opportunity to see the faces of so many people who knew my dad. He would have been honoured and delighted that each and every one of you made the effort to be here today. So I would personally like to thank you all for travelling here to celebrate such a wonderful man. There were many things that made my dad special, and I imagine that he touched all of our lives in different ways – as a son, a brother, a husband, an uncle, a friend, a colleague, but to my brother and I, the most amazing dad anyone could ask for.

Dad was always supportive, he would not only encourage our ambitions and ideas, but he would actively add to and help develop them. He was a great person to bounce ideas off of and he was always there to give me a nudge in the right direction on issues where I was being too hesitant. Be it friendships, relationships, teachers or bosses, dad was my go-to for advice – he could always strike a balance between pushing me in the right direction but never pressing me to make decisions he knew would make me uncomfortable or anxious.

Aside from unconditional love and support, dad never failed to show Daniel and I how proud he was of not only our achievements, but of the people that we have become.

Every good result, every successful job interview, every pay rise was met with overwhelming support from both mum and dad, and usually ended in being taken out for dinner where we would chat for hours about everything or nothing much at all.

Some of dad's greatest attributes were his intelligence and his sense of humour. I have never known anyone smarter than my dad. You could ask him any general knowledge question, he would know the answer.

Ask him for any advice on writing letters or CV's – he would have the perfect thing to say. Ask him anything about work or business and he would give you well thought out, logical observation. I treasure the fond memories of sitting in front of the TV together watching Eggheads – dad coming up with informed, considered answers and me shouting haphazard guesses, ready to relish in the glory of Dad thinking that I had actually known an answer when I occasionally got it right.

As well as the logical side, dad also had a funny side. As much as I hate to admit it, I will miss his awful puns and jokes. And as much as Mum would probably hate to admit it, I'm sure she will miss dad and I relentlessly winding her up and affectionately making fun of her accent. I already miss being able to tell him funny anecdotes from my day, and I already miss the way he could always cheer me up when I was in bad mood and put a smile on my face.

As well as a dad, he was a teacher. He taught me more valuable lessons than school ever could and most importantly, he always led by example. Dad taught me to work hard in everything I do and to persevere with frustration and boredom to emerge successful. He showed this by working hard to support our family. I remember when I was younger and there were weeks that I wouldn't see him at all because he was away travelling for work. Whilst I would miss him, we were rewarded with him being able to retire early when we could finally spend hours walking in the park, perusing charity shops and going for coffee.

Dad taught me that it's good to be happy but it's also okay to be sad. He would always say to just feel whatever I was feeling and don't bottle it up. This was valuable in my difficult teenage years and only became more valuable in the past few months when feeling sad was really the only thing any of us could do. Despite what he was going through in those last weeks, he would be the one to bravely hold my hand as I cried at his bedside, he was the one to encourage us to cry and to be angry and he was the one who reminded us that this may be the end of his life, but it should not be the end of ours.

One thing that I particularly admired about my dad that set him apart from many other parents, was that he was not only a great teacher, but also a great learner. Despite being such an intelligent and knowledgeable man, dad would never shy away from the fact that as much as he could teach his kids, we could also teach him. He always showed a deep and genuine interest in new theories or articles or ways of life that Daniel and I would show him. He even became vegetarian after over 60 years of eating meat because my brother and I were passionate about it.

Cancer has taken so much from our family, but it has also taught us so much. Dad himself was the biggest preacher of cancer being the best leveller there is –it does not discriminate between the good and bad, the rich and poor or the fit and unfit. Despite it taking away such a huge part of our lives, it has also shown us to appreciate what we have a little better, love a little stronger and speak a little kinder.

It goes without saying that I will miss my dad more than I ever imagined I could miss someone, and that it hurts more than any pain I have ever felt, but I feel fortunate in many ways. First that I got to spend a beautiful and loving 20 years with my dad, but also that I know him well enough that when I ask myself ‘what would dad say’, I have a pretty good idea of what the answer will be. And in years to come when people ask me ‘what was your dad like’ I will have nothing but good things to say about him.”

Tony was always full of energy. He used to play squash, basketball, and handball, for which he was on the International Judging Table at a handball tournament in the Netherlands. He cycled with the Hillingdon Cycling Club, and ran with his friends Andy and Pete and the South Ruislip Lager Circle. He once ran a half marathon in 1 hour and 27 minutes.

After he retired he enjoyed walking with Margaret in Black Park and Langley Park, to Windsor and in London, and went to the gym each day. Unfortunately after his birthday in 2018, Tony began to find eating difficult, and was diagnosed with oesophageal cancer in September 2018. Though he had an operation in January 2019, and continuing chemotherapy, he did not recover, and he died peacefully on Sunday 25th August, surrounded by his family.

Tony was a kind and thoughtful man, with a great sense of humour.