

A celebration of life

Simon John Hilditch

14 January 1957 – 18 August 2019

12pm – 12.30pm, 29 August 2019, Taunton Crematorium

Humanist
Ceremonies

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Simon made a cool entrance just now, exactly as he wished, accompanied by the legendary Dave Brubeck performing 'Take 5'. Simon's piano and many CDs at home are testament to his love of music and of jazz in particular. He liked Blue Moon roses. Maureen grew them in their garden and these are the flowers you see on Simon's coffin.

The stand-out aspect of Simon's personality was his quick wit and sense of humour. Maureen reflected that she never knew what he was going to come out with when they were at dinner parties. At a gardening club AGM suggestions were invited for ways of spending the surplus they had that year. Up goes Simon's hand and out comes his suggestion: "Have you thought about putting it in a hedge fund?" It took a few moments for the penny to drop, and then the Secretary said: "Simon, I do the jokes around here."

Simon needed a sense of humour. For thirteen years he and Maureen lived with his diagnosis of Parkinson's disease, which came only a year after they moved from Berkshire to their new home in Somerset in which they had envisaged an active and happy retirement together.

Simon was born in Oldham, Lancashire, to parents Eric and Trudi. Eric's family was large and its Lancastrian roots went deep – so there were many uncles and aunts and cousins and Simon had a happy childhood.

Here is Simon's brother Steve, to pay tribute to his brother.

Steve's tribute

It seems strange - unreal as the dog days of summer slip into autumn that I should be writing a tribute about my younger brother who died before he had time to fulfil the plans he had to share with Maureen. Parkinson's is such a cruel disease affecting not just the person who has been diagnosed, but also affects the wider family and friends, especially the person closest to them - their partner, companion and soul mate. Their life changes dramatically as they take on more responsibilities, responsibilities that had previously been shared. Maureen has been a wonderful support and comfort to Simon - no one could have done more and remained so positive throughout the ordeal.

There are many stories, too many to recount, but just one or two will serve to illustrate his sense of fun, One Sunday lunch time sitting around the dining table:

Simon: I don't like broccoli

Mother: Never mind dear just leave it on the side of your plate

Simon: I can't

Mother: Why not?

Simon: I have eaten it

Another occasion - watching Simon playing in the garden as heavy snow began to fall. Simon was wearing a long knitted scarf which he had a habit of throwing it over his shoulder with a dramatic flourish whenever it came loose. Mother and I watched him as the snow got heavier and when the scarf came loose, he threw it over his shoulder sending a spray of snow and water cascading everywhere. At this point he turned around, looked up, smiled his boyish grin as if to say - you knew I was going to that!

Being a Lancastrian by birth the worst part of the diagnosis, according to Simon, was the thought that he would have to talk like a Yorkshire man (ref to Michael Parkinson talk show host). Simon's sense of humour often consisted of pithy one-line observations, full of both bathos and pathos - at our mother's funeral he turned around and said - I have never been an orphan before.

I shall miss his humour, common sense and will always remain in awe of his practical skills whether working in wood or taking photographs, such a shame that he will no longer be there in future to pass on his thoughts and wisdom.

Simon your departure has left a big gap in our lives, all the bigger because in life you were larger than life - although no longer with us in person, your spirit and sense of fun will live on in our memories.



(celebrant)

The family moved south when Simon was about 6, and then later to Berkshire where Simon went to Charters School in Ascot. It was here that he met Nick Phillips and the two boys became best friends. Nick was Simon's best man at his wedding. He has asked me to read this tribute on his behalf.

Nick's tribute

We all have many fond and humorous memories of Simon over many years. We went through the teenage years together at school and socially.

Simon's character drew me and others towards him as he was more mature and worldly than the majority of the class. Many of us looked up to Simon, enjoying his company and his different style of humour, and those close to him joined in with this unique style of banter.

When at school one day, the PE master announced we would not be playing football today, but rugby instead. Huge groans from the lads, huge cheer from the back of the room....Simon Hilditch! Simon's solid northern attitude and build, compared to us southern lightweights, made him the best and only rugby player in our year. Although not fast, he would stumble along like an oxen, and nobody would go near him, let alone tackle him. Hence he gained the nickname Stumbling Ox.



(celebrant)

From age 11 Simon was in the Sea Cadets and went straight into the Merchant Navy on leaving school. He became a navigational officer on oil tankers but, sadly, was made redundant from the job he loved at the relatively young age of 27, and this marked the end of his Merchant Navy career. Before then, however, he and Maureen travelled the world together on oil tanker voyages, as Merchant Navy officers were allowed to have their wives join them on board.

Simon and Maureen met at a party and, inevitably, it was Simon's humour that brought them together. She felt a tap on her shoulder and turned around to see Simon, who had pulled down onto his head the nearby rise and fall lampshade – which looked like a coolie hat – and who said: “Hello plitty lady, can I get you a drink?” They married in 1980 and had their reception on a Thames riverboat. For their anniversary last November, Simon and Maureen had a lovely dinner together,

drank champagne and looked through their wedding album, enjoying together all those happy memories.

Simon loved the sea and he loved boats. He and Maureen kept a sailing boat in Chichester and often sailed in the UK as well as abroad on hired yachts. Simon also enjoyed golf and wood-turning.

In 2013, thanks to an initiative by Linda Bishop, the Williton and Surrounds Parkinson's Support group, the WASPS, was set up. Maureen says that Simon generally did not like to belong to groups but this one was different. He looked forward to their meetings, and he and Maureen have enjoyed much friendship and support from group members. Here is Linda, with her tribute to Simon.

Linda's tribute

We have so many memories of Simon. Of course our favourite one is of him running down the road just to prove that he could. He had a very satisfied grin on his face as he clambered into your car. Then there are meetings, he would not simply call out his name like everyone else, he would say "Do I have to do this?" or make a silly comment which would make us laugh. When we were exercising and passing things to each other he would not pass anything on, he would wind up with everything and have a good laugh. A few times we would dance during our exercises. One particular day Jenny, our exercise instructor, played a waltz and Simon took you Maureen and had a turn around the room. It was wonderful to see you two together. It didn't last long but for you both it must have been a dream come true. There was also the time he demonstrated some exercises from PD Warrior he was doing and he did his James Bond impression, everyone was amazed.

When he came to visit I made sure that there were chocolate cookies and a few times he and Joe had a beer. I always got a smile and a peck on the cheek or gave him a peck.

Simon was larger than life, with his cane and his piercing look and smile he could command any room. Simon had presence. You knew that he was there, he was just...Simon!

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