

A Celebration of the Life of



John Kelman Varley

17th January 1938 - 28th April 2018

Walton Lea Crematorium

Friday 11th May 2018 11:40a.m.

*Celebration led by Peter Gaskin
Humanist Celebrant*

Born in Toxteth, Liverpool to parents Jack and Florence (known as Molly) on 17th January 1938, John grew up with siblings Paul and Joan.

In 1954 when he was just 16 he joined the Merchant Navy - serving as a Steward on the huge Cunard passenger ships including The Britannic, Saxonia, the Sylvania and the Orion thereafter some smaller cargo vessels such as the Phyllis Bowater. One of his early colleagues and friends was John Prescott - later to become Deputy Prime Minister - also serving as a Steward. The two recently got back in touch with each other. The ships took John all over the world but one of the primary routes took them across the Atlantic - to New York and Montreal.

When he left the Merchant Navy in 1962 he did a short spell on the buses in Liverpool before joining Fords Car Production facility at Halewood where he started work car interiors - bags and cushions then later on the paint side becoming a foreman in the paint shop. He was to work at Fords for 30 years.

In the late 1960's John used to watch the Ford women's football charity games. Apparently he dated 7 members of the team! No surprise then that Gloria, later to become John's wife, initially regarded John as something of a Don Juan character - a Don Juan with 11 motorbikes no less!

Turning up for a blind date at the Boundary Arms in Liverpool she saw John sat there and couldn't help exclaiming "Oh no not him!" Whilst determined to resist his charms she did find him handsome and her resolve crumbled after just a week and she started bragging about their relationship at work.

Romance blossomed and Gloria and John decided to live together getting a place in Widnes in 1971.

But before she had met John, Gloria had planned to emigrate to Australia with one of her friends under the "£10 Pom scheme". She didn't want to let her friend down - but could she be sure of her Don Juan? She asked John to marry her - he said no - so she determined to start a new life in Oz.

John went down to Southampton with her begging her to change her mind- even as she boarded her ship - but it was too late.

He sent letters to her when she was in Australia - each lovingly tied with a yellow ribbon and a lock of his hair. (sons Paul and Liam reckon that explains the bald patch on Dad's head in later life). Under the rules of the scheme you had to stay in Australia

at least 2 years or pay both the outward and the return fares - about a Thousand pounds - a considerable sum and well beyond either of their means, yet John managed to get hold of the money and he paid for Gloria to come back which she did.

The two enjoyed living together in Widnes but found a new house in "Greenacres" - a new housing development in Elton where they moved to in 1976 - the year they also got married and the year Paul was born - a busy year!

In 1978, Liam was born. The family moved briefly to Huyton before returning to Elton sometime around 1981 where they have stayed ever since.

Everyone remembers a happy family life - usually caravan holidays in the UK - but one year they holidayed in Yugoslavia. Returning to their chalet from a boat trip and discovering that their keys had been lost - John had to break down the door. He was wearing shorts and a large hornet flew straight up his trouser leg causing no small panic - so you can perhaps (if you are brave) picture John dancing wildly around the chalet - eventually discarding his shorts for fear of being stung.

A lot of the boys friends used to call at their house - John was like a "borrowed" Dad for several of their mates - he would always insist they have something to eat - when they tried to turn down one offer he offered another - it really was easier just to politely say thank you and eat what was offered.

Some of the best memories are of day to day life - watching game shows - Bullseye for instance on the tv - munching chocolate bars - relaxing with each other.

John left the discipline to Gloria and was generally soft with his sons - he'd hand them boys chocolate bars (which Mum would have barred) and wink advising them "not to tell your Mum".

John bought Gloria a new Ford Escort car for her 40th birthday - he personally followed it through every stage of its manufacture to make sure it was just right.

As soon as Paul had passed his driving test he was on the insurance and allowed to drive it. He went out on the first day he could - and crashed it. Mum was incandescent - but Dad looked at Paul asked him if he was alright - when he confirmed he was John rubbed his head and told him in a remarkably calm manner that was the main thing - the car was just a piece of metal.

A short while later whilst John and Gloria were on holiday Liam, still just 16 and too young really to drive legally, drove their car - and crashed it - When he got back, John checked Liam was ok - rubbed his head and remarked that the car was "just a piece of metal - glad you're OK" then he advised "your Mums coming in now - Good Luck!".

Whilst he smoked himself John said to both sons that if they didn't smoke he'd get them each a car - Paul never did and true to his word John got him a car - Liam did - and got caught out - he didn't get a car.

Both Paul and Liam joined the Army - John was immensely proud of them.

At 55 John retired from Fords - he played a little golf and took on indoor bowling at Ellesmere Port - competing in various competitions. He spent time at the British Legion and of course at the Duke in Ince.

John and Gloria loved to travel - exploring many parts of the world - often in the company of friends or family. John loved New York in particular where he often visited as a young man in the Merchant Navy - he always used to say to Gloria he could live there but when he returned with her it had changed - as everywhere does.

They have been to Cyprus, Turkey and Malaysia several times and many other destinations including - Portugal and Spain, Mexico, Cuba , Poland, Ireland the Canaries, Cyprus, Australia, the Philippines and Thailand.

John enjoyed dancing - every Friday he would be found at the Duke of Wellington - enjoying a jive. And he loved a whiskey and a smoke - and would spend time enjoying political programmes on the television - he loved a good debate.

Whilst Gloria was out at work, John liked to keep busy - he would do housework and also occasionally did some decorating and "handyman" jobs for friends and neighbours. Over the last 10 years or so he also worked periodically with Gloria at Trafford Hall.

John loved his family and friends and offered friendship to many people - he would always find time to help anyone to find their way. He stayed close with his children and partners - wives Jo and Helen. He enjoyed mixing too with Gloria's family - sisters Debbie (who now lives in Australia with husband Greg), Sue and brother Keith and he delighted in spending time with his grandchildren when they came along - Joshua, Honey and Beau.

Perhaps remembering his time as a Steward on the passenger liners he would always tip when out - and never complain - even if he didn't particularly enjoy his food. He was once out with Liam and the two of them sat in a cafe to enjoy a sandwich. He pulled a face, unable to eat his sandwich which he described as inedible - when a waitress came to the table to ask if everything was alright he managed to change the expression on his face, smile and said it was "lovely" - he even left a tip.

He was content - often remarking that he had lived a good and full life - and he had - he was one of those generous hearted people who recognise their own good fortune and also recognise that not everyone shares that.

Seven years ago John was diagnosed with Lung Cancer and had an operation to remove the cancer then he suffered bowel cancer and again underwent an operation. Some time later he developed prostate cancer this time undergoing radiotherapy - he beat that and was in remission. Sadly the Lung Cancer returned last year and he underwent radio and chemotherapy finishing treatment at the end of November .

Gloria noticed that John now sometimes appeared somewhat confused and on occasion clearly hallucinating. As the two were leaving the hospital after John had had a scan, they got called back. The doctor explained that John had a brain tumour and that it was inoperable - he was told he had only three months.

John remarked that it would all be alright - that he'd beaten all the others. Sadly the doctors were right and John died at home around 3 months after that appointment.

John had once met the singer Johnny Mathis in New York and he always enjoyed the singers work and we'll now hear one of his famous songs - the Twelfth of Never. As this song plays please do take time to remember John in your own way and according to your own beliefs.

Private Reflection

Music - "Until the 12th of Never" - Johnny Mathis

John found happiness in many ways but throughout his life it was simply "being" with his family - with Gloria, his sons, grandchildren and with his friends that he loved more

than anything else and which brought him the most pleasure. John and Gloria appear to have enjoyed a truly happy marriage and life-long love affair. He often described Gloria as "his world" - theirs is a truly romantic love story.

"Happiness is nonetheless true happiness because it must come to an end, nor do thought and love lose their value because they are not everlasting" - Bertrand Russell