

Tribute from John Hansford

I first met Michel during the Summer of 2003 when he came to stay with Sappho and I here in Coleford. What was great was that my friends at the Football Club and in the pub, all quickly liked Michel. He settled in with everyone effortlessly. Michel enjoyed watching Coleford Athletic play football on our sloping ground. He was fascinated that the pitch sits on an old mining slag heap.

Being an old mining community there was much here to for Michel to discover.

In those days Michel had his own room, however when Michel's grandchildren came along it meant there was no longer a bed for him, so he had to sleep on a mattress on the front room floor. Phoebe was born in 2008 and Jacob in 2009.

One night in the dark he fell over smashing a little table. The next time Michel was due to visit Jacob who was 3 at the time asked us "will Grandad smash up our furniture again"?! This gave us many laughs over the years as we revisited this little story.

Michel never forgot his learnings as a trained Chef and every time he stayed with us, he would always cook a Fish Supper. A brilliant combination of different types of fish, capers, lemons, croutons with potatoes and salad. His salad dressings were out of this world and we would try to copy them ourselves, but we could never match his brilliance in the kitchen. Michel loved salad and he would literally have a salad with every meal that we ever ate together when at home.

The children, and us adults in all honesty, would marvel at the speed at which Michel could not only chop vegetables but how finely he could chop them.

Michel adored his grandchildren and the grandchildren loved their grandfather. Michel and Jacob were two mischievous little boys often cuddled up on the sofa in the evenings, tickling and tormenting one another. The children loved cuddling their grandad who we would affectionately call "Grandee".

After we had 2 extra bedrooms built then Michel again had his own space when he came to stay, and these stays would typically be for 2 weeks at a time. This Christmas just gone was no exception and this was the best we had seen Michel for a few years. He was again able to play football in the park. Michel loved it when we visited the seaside and at Christmas, we all went to Portland Island near Weymouth. Michel walked around the Rocks and was keen for us to do a longer walk to try to see some Owls.

Unfortunately, we ran out of daylight hours but this to us was another example of how physically and mentally fit Michel was during his time with us.

As was the time honoured traditional when we visited the seaside we finished off with Fish and Chips, a real favourite of Michel's.

Michel enjoyed watching old movies and Live Sport on Television. One Friday evening England and France were playing Rugby and England won. During the match we think that Michel was cursing in French as he shouted at the TV set. At the end of the game Michel turned to me and said, "England only won because the ball was wet". A few weeks later when France lost to Italy, I asked Michel if France had lost because the ball was too dry. I cannot repeat his reply!

Holidays

We would often take Michel with us on our summer holidays and he loved spending time with family, sitting in the sun, eating outdoors and enjoying a nice glass of red wine.

We had a lovely time taking Michel to see family in France in 2017. He burst into tears of joy and happiness when we arrived. To hear him speaking fluently in French and being around his family made us so happy seeing him like it. Despite over half a century in England to us it felt as though we could truly see where his home was.

Part of Michel's daily routine was to go and buy his paper in the morning, he would buy the Guardian. He also HAD to have some strong coffee first thing in the morning and could never quite understand why Sappho and I like to start the day with a cup of tea!

On one holiday we were staying in a Caravan near a clifftop on a farm about four miles from civilisation, along some terribly narrow country lanes. I was nervous driving along them as it was very difficult. One morning the fog descended upon us and we couldn't see our hands in front of our faces. I suggested to Michel that it might be better not try to go out to buy the paper as driving conditions were almost impossible. He simply replied with disbelief "No, we are going to get the paper". It took us about two hours and as Michel was a non-driver he didn't understand how bad the conditions were and chatted throughout the journey as if nothing was wrong.

Whenever he visited Michel would always bring books and red wine with him.

Sometimes the books weren't exactly what we were after but when they were then it opened up some new learnings for us. I've several bird books that Michel generously bought me.

Near the end of his most recent visit Michel said that he was very interested to see what happens with Brexit and how it plays out. For us, we didn't want Michel to leave us and we wanted him to remain with us forever. Despite him now leaving part of Michel will always remain in our hearts.

Later today we can raise a glass of red wine in memory of Grandee and thank him for bringing kindness and fun to our lives.