

Philip Sears (1946 – 2019)

Welcome

Tribute

Born in Birmingham in March 1946, Phil grew up with his older brother David and their parents Herbert and Irene. Irene came from a large family so the boys spent lots of time visiting and holidaying with their many cousins. While Phil was still quite young, Herbert's work as a pharmacist meant they moved to Leatherhead, and Phil was educated first at The Lindens, then Parkside pre-prep school, going on to Kingston Grammar School after taking the 11+. Always a very bright child, Phil generally found his schoolwork fairly unchallenging and he was moved up a year at one point as a result.

We extend a particularly warm welcome to Phil's brother David, who is here with us today, and David has taken the time to write down some of his own personal memories from their younger days, which I'd like to share with you now. David says:

Personal Memories

My brother

Phil was younger than me by 4 years. In your 70s, that is a mere blink of the eye. It seemed much longer when we were 8, 12 or 16.

I was always leaving a school just as he joined. We met at the weekends or on holiday or on the few occasions when we were sick together - having measles and chickenpox at the same time on a hot summer in the flat over our father's chemist shop still lives in the memory.

Photographs from the time show us playing happily together on the beach near what is now the very posh Chewton Glen hotel, busy each year trying to dam a small stream called the Chewton Bunny that ran down on to the sand. We stayed in a caravan or bungalow and thought it was

heaven.

The pictures show that I was the thin one - Phil, somehow, in those still spartan post war days, was relatively chubby. This came in handy when, at our next home in Fetcham, I must have irritated him more than usual, for reason long forgotten, and he chased me round the garden with a cricket bat raised in considerable anger. Happily, in those days I could run faster than he could, and therefore survived his wrath. I would not have risked repeating that in later life.

At school we played different sports - I tried to keep out of trouble in football or rugby, running up and down, not doing much. As I only discovered recently, Phil played hockey with some success and because of this, felt such pride in the sporting achievements of his much-loved granddaughter Elizabeth - seemingly fearless in her full body armour as a hockey goalie.

As teenagers, we got up to the usual escapades, most of which are best forgotten. One event does however live on - as after a particularly heavy drinking session whilst on a school cadet force training session, Phil arrived home clearly well under the weather.

During the night he was quite ill out of the bedroom window of a newly acquired and relatively expensive house in Givons Grove, Leatherhead, to which our parents had recently moved. We awoke to find our father patiently hosing down the side of the house, seemingly taking it all in his stride. My admiration for both Phil and my father increased greatly. By this time our holidays were becoming more adventurous and we managed to get away together with two friends my age, Doug and Graham, in a battered old van on a fishing holiday in Wales. Pictures show us pushing it rather than driving it and I don't remember catching any fish, but we had a lot of fun. Phil later joined up with the other two boys to form a folk group called, for some reason, The Dustbowl Refugees. He could play music of all sorts - I could only listen.

And it was partly through this that he met Sue, who can tell what happened next better than I can.

Although I have tried for many years to document the family history, it was always Phil who could remember what really happened. With his

death I have lost many of my own memories and he could have done this so much better than I can. I am glad that he is no longer in pain, but I will miss him so much.

I know that Sue, Matthew, Claire and Elizabeth and everyone else whose lives he touched will feel the same. He was always striving for something more, in his business life or in what passed as leisure, on running or cycling tracks or in or out of swimming pools or even the English Channel. He fought hard until the end. He can lie in peace now in Clandon Wood.

Thank you David for sharing those memories with us.

So, we can pick up Phil's life story here from the time when he first met Sue. They were both students at Brighton College of Technology, but Sue was reading Pharmacy while Phil had embarked on a Civil Engineering degree, so it wasn't their studies that brought them together - it was their shared love of the vibrant 1960s Folk Music scene.

Phil was a talented guitarist and singer, and had begun performing at The Barge in Kingston while still a teenager, and also at The Thames Hotel's traditional jazz club near Hampton Court. During his time at college, he established a Sunday residency at The Stanford Arms in Brighton, as well as playing at various other venues along the south coast alongside the likes of Allan Taylor and Sandy Denny. After college, Phil worked at Addlestone Folk Club for a while, and he kept some fascinating scrapbooks recording the countless gigs he was part of during this iconic period of music history which you can have a look through later on. Phil and Sue have kept up their involvement with folk music for their whole life together, attending the Cropredy Festival in Oxfordshire every year since 1990.

They married at Harlow Mill in April 1968. That week began snowy, but by the afternoon of their wedding day became sunny, and their reception was mainly in the garden overlooking the river. Phil and Sue spent the evening at their regular haunt of The Thames Hotel. Their first home together was a 1920s bungalow called Ditton Nook in Ashted, which they did up and sold on so that they could buy a plot of land in Blackbrook, where they built a new bungalow, of Phil's own design, from scratch.

At the time Sue was doing her pre-reg in Epsom and Phil was working as a draughtsman for the building surveyor John Scrivenor Associates. As well

as managing to juggle their careers and domestic building projects, Phil and Sue were delighted to become parents to Matthew in 1971. Sue has told me how grateful she still is for the enormous support they received from Phil's mother Irene during these busy years, enabling her to continue working as a locum while Matthew was still relatively young.

Phil worked hard too with his young family to support now, but still found time to perform at Addlestone and Bookham Folk Clubs. In the mid 1970s, they moved to Hill House in Westcott, planning again to do the house up, sell it, and move on to another project, but life became ever busier and Phil decided to explore the freedom of becoming self-employed.

Under the name Philip Sears Designs, Phil and his team worked on many projects around Mole Valley: the Church Close development in Fetcham, Old King's Head Court and Rose Hill Nursing Home in Dorking, Beare Green Court, Dorking Golf Club, and National Trust Properties Polesden Lacey and nearby Hatchlands.

He also joined the Dorking Lion's Club, and as we'll hear more about in a few minutes his involvement here led Phil to discover athletics, an interest that very much shaped the rest of his life.

Phil and Sue enjoyed hitchhiking to Athens together in the early days of their relationship, where they met up with David and his wife Coreen and discovered the dubious delights of draught retsina. While Matthew was growing up they continued to enjoy holidays abroad, with many memorable journeys including drives through France to go camping and trips to Greece - later on you might like to ask Sue to tell you the story of their hair-raising cave visit with baby Matthew in Dikti. Sometimes they stayed in the UK, often renting houses in Norfolk with Sue's mother.

It was Phil's community involvement with Dorking Lions Club, where he was President for a year in the early 1980s, that opened the door to the passion he developed for athletics. In 1985, the neighbouring Lions Club in Leatherhead was offered the opportunity to stage a 10 mile running race on the M25 before it opened to traffic, and after participating in this and other races Phil became well and truly gripped by a love for athletic training. He joined the Dorking St Paul's Athletic Club shortly afterwards. His interest in, and support for, other members quickly led to an increased presence of senior runners in the club, with Phil's infectious enthusiasm encouraging

more and more to sign up for road races, cross country league events, and track & field meetings. Phil took over from David Clark organising the monthly 'handicap' race, where all could participate at an equal level, and continued to manage this event until 2016.

Phil ran several marathons, including London, Sutton and New York City multiple times. Ever the completist, Phil also ran his own tribute to Pheidippides by running from Marathon to Athens more than once. Phil's running saw him doing training runs on four continents, ending in a lift from a Turkish police vehicle over the Bosphorus in Istanbul - I'll leave that story for the family to re-tell.

When Matthew became old enough to join him, they ran together, taking part in the New York marathon in 1987 and Phil completed a number of Iron Man distance triathlon events in the early 1990s. As ever, Phil gave as much as he took, volunteering as a marshal when the 2012 Olympic bike races and torch relay passed through Dorking and working the PA at the Dorking Ten Mile Race in June each year, run by Dorking and Mole Valley Athletics Club. The distinctive burgundy and white kit of DMVAC was designed by Phil.

Many people have paid tribute to Phil's exceptional talents as a coach, and he became involved in triathlon training, organising extra time for his proteges at Dorking Swimming Centre, and competing in national swimming galas, biathlons and triathlons himself.

Whilst at school, Phil had had a keen interest in swimming, turning out for house, school and county teams. He captained the school swimming team, getting the swimmers training at Kingston Baths every morning before school. It is therefore no surprise that Phil's Saturday morning swim sessions at Dorking pool became a regular fixture for so many Masters, over the last 30 years. It was perhaps a sign of Phil softening up in his later years when the session extended to breakfast at one of the cafes in town!

In 2009, Phil was absolutely thrilled to be booked as part of a relay team swimming the English Channel. He had been training most Saturdays (after coaching in Dorking) in Dover Harbour, as part of Freda Streeter's group. His plan was scuppered when he suffered a heart attack after competing in a Guildford biathlon but he was given the medical all clear in time to become one of 3 swimmers who completed the 2010 channel

crossing in 11 hours and 21 minutes, as part of The Flying Doctors team with Paul Foreman guiding them from his support boat Pace Arrow.

It was a hugely exciting thing to participate in, with conditions having to be perfect, so it began with the suspense of waiting for the all clear to set off, and then the swim itself being not only incredibly physically arduous but also fraught with the dangers of having to navigate through ferries and oil tankers, under massive time pressure.

You might think once would be enough - and I suspect for many of us once would be too much! - but Phil jumped at the chance to repeat the experience in August 2011 as part of the 6 person 'Over from Dover' team, with Neil Streeter supporting on his boat Suva. They completed the swim in 13 hours 52 mins, and raised money for charity as well as achieving their own personal ambitions.

Phil continued to train as a channel swimmer and had high hopes of being one of the very few swimmers to complete a solo channel swim in his 70s, but with a diagnosis of melanoma in late 2011 his health had to take priority. Much medical treatment followed, and Phil accepted that his own swimming was necessarily compromised by it, but with typical generosity of spirit he channelled his energy into helping others. In 2018 he trained to become an official observer for the Channel Swimming and Piloting Federation, and so remained involved with channel crossings, overseeing 9 swimmers in total.

Over the last few years, the challenges of increasing health problems have made things more and more difficult for Phil and his family, but they've pulled together to face all that came along. They've asked me to give special thanks to Phil's oncologist Professor Angus Dalglish at St Georges in Tooting, and the whole team at the RSCH, for the exceptional level of care and expertise provided.

Throughout his treatment, Phil not only continued training others as much as possible, he also had many lovely times with his supportive family and he especially enjoyed the company of his granddaughter Elizabeth. Together with Sue they had lots of special days out at places like Polesden Lacey, the Weald and Downland Museum, Butser Farm, Hampton Court and of course, many trips to Dover.

To complete our tributes now, Sue has chosen the opening passage of

'Dover Beach' by Matthew Arnold.

The sea is calm tonight. The tide is full, the moon
lies fair Upon the straits; on the French coast the
light Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,
Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay. Come
to the window, sweet is the night-air! Only, from the
long line of spray Where the sea meets the moon-
blanched land, Listen! you hear the grating roar Of
pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling, At
their return, up the high strand, Begin, and cease,
and then again begin, With tremulous cadence slow,
and bring The eternal note of sadness in.

Sophocles long ago Heard it on the
Ægean, and it brought Into his mind the
turbid ebb and flow Of human misery; we
Find also in the sound a thought,
Hearing it by this distant northern sea.