

Ralph Earnest Southard
26th June 1927 – 11th January 2019

Encouraged by his daughter Wendy, Ralph wrote a wonderful set of memoirs which he called 'The Last Victorian', as through his large extended family, Ralph had been strongly influenced by Victorian values. There are forty-two pages of closely typed script and it was a joy to read and I marvelled at how much Ralph had packed into his life and what detail he could remember!

Ralph was born into the family of Hilda and Frank Southard, the younger brother to Frank. It was a close family with many relatives living nearby. Ralph's childhood sounded wonderful! He was given a lot of freedom to play in the streets. He and his friends enjoyed 'pug' raids, throwing clay and occasionally bits of brick at other kids, their 'enemies'. When he was caught scrumping for apples in the grounds of the local Children's Hospital, he and his friends gave false names and addresses!

When he wasn't running around, he would play marbles, hoops, hide and seek, cigarette cards and when he was a little older he enjoyed riding his bike. He admitted he was not one of the tough guys and even from a young age, he believed in the old adage 'Discretion is the better part of valour'. Throughout his life Ralph chose to avoid 'laddish' behaviour and confrontation.

Ralph was not too chuffed when at the age of five he had to start attending Shirley School. He cheered up when he found out there were girls playing in the playground and he recalled that's where he met his first girlfriend, Cynthia. He doesn't say how old he was! He admitted in his writings that he never really liked going to school and he was not much of a scholar.

The Southard's lives were severely disrupted for the six years during the Second World War. To Ralph's relief, his parents decided that he would stay at home and not be evacuated. Ralph said he was never afraid, probably because he did not realise the danger that was always imminent. Ralph loved watching the air raids as the German bombers swept over Southampton, as the British search lights criss-crossed the skies. Sometimes he saw spectacular dog-fights with the British RAF pilots creating vapour trails as they defended the factory in the city that had built the very same Spitfires that the pilots were flying.

At the age of fourteen, Ralph had to start work. He told his parents he wanted to continue to look after the horses used by one of the local delivery companies, a job he had loved doing after school. His parents had other ideas. Ralph's mother wanted him to continue at school and become a GPO telegram boy, but Ralph was not too keen to continue his schooling. His father made the final decision, that Ralph should have a trade. So, Ralph joined Whites a yacht-building company, to become an apprentice joiner where his brother Frank was already working.

Over the fifty years of his working life, Ralph had more than twenty different jobs! For several years Ralph was a joiner in various ship building yards and for the NAAFI working in Hamburg and Berlin, which was still behind the Iron Curtain. Ralph also included in his trades, shop assistant, bread delivery man, Kleeneeze salesman, and in later years he delivered car parts to garages on behalf of various car companies.

Ralph first set eyes on Myra when she was working in his mother's shop. She was only fourteen. He started courting her a couple of years later and romantically proposed to Myra at Bolton's Bench. Ralph and Myra were happily married for sixty-six years, bringing up Roger, their firstborn and Wendy their daughter. Ralph worked hard to provide for his family. They lived modestly but were comfortable in their various homes. For many years when the family were young, Ralph took his family on caravan holidays at Croyde Bay in Devon, an area which still has a special place in the hearts of Ralph's family.

Ralph was a quiet man, a thinker, not one for large groups of people or exuberant children! But the Southard's home was not without fun and laughter. Roger particularly enjoyed sharing his father's humour. Ralph and Roger would sit together watching comedy films, the Marx Brothers and rather risqué 'Carry On' films. Whilst Roger rolled about the floor, clutching his sides, his father would sit quietly chortling to himself.

One of Ralph's favourite singers was Bing Crosby. A highlight of Ralph's life was when he managed to get tickets for the whole family for the Michael Parkinson Show, when 'Parky' interviewed Bing Crosby.

Ralph was renowned for starting a new interest from time-to-time, which would become a bit of an obsession with him! His family and sometimes his friends, would spend many an hour listening to the latest opera that had become a favourite of Ralphs, or listening to blackbirds and robins singing in the garden, recorded by Ralph on his tape recorder. From his days as a delivery driver, Ralph was an expert on local roads in Hampshire, Dorset and Wiltshire. Many of you may have been on the receiving end of Ralph's intimate knowledge and advice of which 'A' or 'B' roads should have been taken to arrive at the Southard's house!

Ralph's longest obsession was with Southampton Football Club. Right up until just before he died, he knew the latest scores and where 'The Saints' were placed in the League tables. Perhaps it is just as well he was not aware of their current position in the Premier League table!

One of Ralph's longer-term interests had been drawing and painting. Ralph wrote in his memoirs that it was when he was undergoing his apprenticeship at White's he found out that he was good at drawing. In his writings he pondered on whether he should have asked to transfer into the drawing office and use this hidden talent. He decided not to, because he had made many friends amongst his fellow-apprentices, so he stayed put as a joiner.

Many of you know that Ralph played golf for many years, enjoying many a happy round with his friends Harold and Jim at Dunwood Manor. For a short time, he and Myra played together before she got a bit bored and anyway, Ralph always won!

Following in the footsteps of his great-grandfather and great-uncle, with the help of Harold, Ralph applied to join the Freemasons. Ralph loved the ritual and performance of freemasonry. He would use his time whilst driving, listening to cassette tape recordings of the words, so he could recite them from memory. During his time as a Freemason, Ralph held many positions and at one time he held the top position in his Lodge. He was extremely proud of this achievement and of all the help the Freemasons gave through their charity activities.

It may be a surprise to know that Ralph made his stage debut at the age of 82 in a pantomime! When he and Myra were living in Somerset he happened to be visiting the local Village Hall when the words for the Christmas panto were being read through. As one of the actors had not turned up, Ralph was asked to read the lines. Ralph managed to be at the rehearsals on other occasions and eventually Ralph was persuaded to take the part. He thoroughly enjoyed it and once again showed he had hidden talents!

Ralph was delighted to become a grandfather to Terry, Niky and Henry and then a great-grandfather to Sophia and Oliver. Today Terry has asked to say a few words. Before I hand over to Terry, his sister Niky, has shared some of her fondest memories of her Grandpa.

Niky said she always looked forward to going to her grandparents' house either for their special get togethers at Christmas, or for parties to celebrate Wedding Anniversaries. She especially enjoyed staying overnight. Being given a double bed to sleep in was real luxury, like staying in a hotel, but with all the comfort, warmth and extra special love that only grandparents can give.

Having a special time with her Grandpa was always a highlight. Ralph would sit Niky by his side at his keyboard, a rather large organ that dominated his and Myra's living room. This being one of his new interests at the time! Niky remembers Ralph had labelled each of the keys on the organ with the letters of the notes, so that he could learn how to play the music. She followed his fingers moving over the letters and with time and his patience, she learnt how to play 'Mull of Kintyre'.

Niky remembers her Grandpa as being a man of few words, but if she had been naughty she knew when she had made her Grandpa cross. He didn't need to raise his voice, just say a few choice

words to explain her misdemeanour! Ralph wasn't cross very often, and Niky said mostly she remembers how funny he was. He would come out with hilarious things, which ended up with Niky and Terry rolling around the floor in fits of giggles. Best of all were the words Ralph made up to sing along to the Christmas song 'Little Donkey', much more fun than the words sung by Vera Lynn!

To end this tribute to Ralph, Terry, his grandson would like to say a few words and read a special poem, in memory of his Grandpa.

Over the past 38 years, I was lucky enough to have lots of memories of the kindest, most gentle man that is my grandpa.

- Dressing up as Santa and bringing a sack full of presents
- Days out at monkey world
- Our first bike ride on Southampton common
- Fishing in a bucket in the back garden

To name just a few.

I knew at the time how lucky I was, and valued those moments at the time. But there was one abiding memory that has impacted me more than any other.

When I was about 10 years old or so, he gave me a copy of the poem 'If', by Rudyard Kipling, which I'd like to read to you now.

*If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:*

*If you can dream - and not make dreams your master;
If you can think - and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools:*

*If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breathe a word about your loss;
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: 'Hold on!'*

*If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
'Or walk with Kings - nor lose the common touch,
if neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And - which is more - you'll be a Man, my son!*

I was a little too young to understand it at the time.

However, as I've grown older I've come to appreciate both the words and the gesture much more profoundly.

As a keen gardener, gramps was no stranger to planting seeds and patiently waiting for them to sprout.

I don't think he ever knew that those words did indeed grow on me over the years, providing a guiding light in some difficult times.

I certainly never really got to thank him for that, so the best way I can repay that now is to continue to doing my best to live up to those bold aims and pass them on to the next generation.