

Memorial Service for Robert Onions a.k.a. Bob

9 April 1946 - 28 August 2015

Friday 18 September 2015, Ta' Mena Estate, Xaghra, Gozo, Malta

We are here to celebrate the life of Robert Onions, also known as Bob. Robert Onions was born on 9 April, 1946, to Hedley and Evelyn Onions in South Wales, younger brother to Peter and Richard, who are both with us here. He passed away aged 69 on Friday August the 28th.

Bob was not a religious man. In accordance to his life and wishes, this will be a humanist service. I appreciate that faith may be central in the lives of some gathered here. It was however not part of Bob's, and his family has wished for a non-religious ceremony out of respect to his memory. There will however later be a moment of quiet reflection during which you can remember and honour Bob in any way you deem best, including private prayer.

Sometimes death can surprise us. At other times it can be particularly upsetting and disturbing. For Bob, death meant he could finally rest from an increasingly debilitating illness. And though Bob's could have been a longer life in a fairer world, I honestly doubt it could have possibly been a fuller or more significant one. Before we go further then, I wish to urge those closest to Bob, especially Joanna, not to feel guilty for any feelings of relief you may have had once the end arrived. They are not selfish; selfish would have been wishing Bob's suffering to go on indefinitely just to keep him close to us. Was it not Socrates who said that even the greatest king envies the dreamless sleep of death?

What comes after death? For some, it is sometimes all too easy to fall in the temptation of thinking: "Apres moi la deluge", after me comes the flood. Clearly, Bob did not believe this adage. His first thoughts, knowing the death sentence hanging above his head, were not about the flood, but still how he could help others in death as in life. For any man, providing stability and care for his loved ones would have been enough. Bob went the extra mile, donating his body for scientific research, for complete strangers he did not know, and never will, to study. Bob's thoughtful gesture reflects the two central tenets of his life: selflessness, and the pursuit of knowledge.

Exemplary in death as in life, Bob left behind him not a flood but warm fire. Recall the Greek myth of Prometheus, himself a purveyor of knowledge.

Prometheus stole fire from the gods and handed it to humanity. Pitying poor shivering man, in his dark, wet cave, he disobeyed the king of the gods himself to bring warmth and light in men's lives. Several thousand years after the event, fire is still among us, it has not burned out yet, and no god has been able to take it back.

How is it that, in a transient world such as ours, Prometheus's fire is still with us? It is still with us only because Prometheus shared it so freely. Had he chosen to guard it closely and jealously, keeping it for himself, it would have expired with him, dooming humanity to the cold and

darkness to the end of time. What Prometheus did was to shine his own flame boldly and unreservedly in the midst of men, allowing his fellow beings to partake of it as they wished and use it to light and warm up their own lives.

Do we not all carry a part of that fire even now? In our everyday lives, this flame we carry grows or diminishes according to how we feed it. If we neglect our own hearts and minds, this flame may scale down until it is barely visible, its heat hardly felt. If we covet and attempt to hide it, it will likewise die down to an ember. Only a few closest to us will perceive it, dimly. If we properly nourish our hearts with love for others and our minds with learning, the flame will be seen from far, and many will help themselves from our fire, which will not diminish one bit our own. Rather, it will ensure its longevity and value through time.

When a man dies, his own flame may be extinguished, but the fire does not die with him as long as he has not lived selfishly. It lives on with the family and friends he has touched throughout his lifetime. I believe that though Robert Onions has died, like Prometheus, he has left his own fire behind him. He left his fire burning brightly here through his generous, loving and worthy acts, and it will keep lighting our way and be keeping us warm for a very long time through the memories we cherish of him.

I would like to invite Rob Ricards, a good friend of Bob and Joanna's, to read one last reflection about man's legacy to his loved ones, before I say just a few words about the life we now celebrate. Rob will be reading Aaron Freeman's "You want a Physicist to Speak at your Funeral."

Rob Ricards

You Want a Physicist to Speak at Your Funeral - Aaron Freeman

You want a physicist to speak at your funeral. You want the physicist to talk to your grieving family about the conservation of energy, so they will understand that your energy has not died. You want the physicist to remind your sobbing mother about the first law of thermodynamics; that no energy gets created in the universe, and none is destroyed. You want your mother to know that all your energy, every vibration, every BTU of heat, every wave of every particle that was her beloved child remains with her in this world. You want the physicist to tell your weeping father that amid energies of the cosmos, you gave as good as you got. And at one point you'd hope that the physicist would step down from the pulpit and walk to your broken-hearted spouse. . .and tell her that all the photons that ever bounced off your face, all the particles whose paths were interrupted by your smile, by the touch of your hair, hundreds of trillions of particles, have raced off like children, their ways forever changed by you. And as your widow rocks in the arms of a loving family, may the physicist let her know that all the photons that bounced from you were gathered in the particle detectors that are her eyes, that those photons created within her constellations of electromagnetically charged neurons whose energy will go on forever. And the physicist will

remind the congregation of how much of all our energy is given off as heat. There may be a few fanning themselves with their programmes as he says it. And he will tell them that the warmth that flowed through you in life is still here, still part of all that we are, even as we who mourn continue the heat of our own lives. And you'll want the physicist to explain to those who loved you that they need not have faith. . . Let them know that they can measure, that scientists have measured precisely the conservation of energy and found it accurate, verifiable and consistent across space and time. You can hope your family will examine the evidence and satisfy themselves that the science is sound and that they'll be comforted to know your energy's still around. According to the law of the conservation of energy, not a bit of you is gone; you're just less orderly.

Thank you Rob.

Bob was first of all a good man, a much loved and dependable figure for his family, and a man with a social conscience, giving plenty of his time for others. Bob was also a veritable cultured and erudite man. Kerry, his niece, describes him as a 'ridiculous fount of knowledge [...] on just about everything'. No two qualities in the human psyche go better together, goodness and wisdom, and light up the world. He read tirelessly, interesting himself keenly on any subject. His favourite subject was history, both that of his homeland the UK and of his adopted home, Gozo.

Volunteering with Wirt Ghawdex, he happily showed off the treasures of his beloved Gozo to the people who came to visit the Citadel, showing them around the newly opened silos.

He would often listen to music - classical, opera, rock, blues - or to poetry as he watered the garden at 'Dar Wus'. His favourite verse was by Shakespeare and Milton, particularly *Paradise Lost*. He was also a film aficionado, delighting in watching a wide selection of films, Werner Herzog being one of his favourite directors.

I think this is also the appropriate time to set some rumours at rest about Bob. He was *not* a spy in the service of her majesty. Or at least, that is as far as his wife Joanna knows.

It is hardly surprising that such a good, knowledgeable and interesting man as Robert Onions has left such an indelible mark on his friends and family. His fire keeps warming them even through its memory.

I do not believe we can blame Joanna for having fallen in love at first sight with this - I quote her here - 'good-looking, stylish, snappy dresser' and quickly dropping all her other three boyfriends at the time just to be with him. As many of you know, Bob and Joanna's story spans back 38 years. Ever since then, they have been completely devoted to each other, their happiest years being here in Gozo among many friends.

Joanna has chosen a poem by Anne Bradstreet, which she found best captures her thoughts to Bob, to dedicate to his memory on this occasion. I invite Sue, her good friend, to read it on her behalf.

Sue Scantlebury

If ever two were one - Anne Bradstreet

If ever two were one, then surely we.
If ever man were lov'd by wife, then thee.
If ever wife was happy in a man,
Compare with me, ye women, if you can.
I prize thy love more than whole Mines of gold
Or all the riches that the East doth hold.
My love is such that Rivers cannot quench,
Nor ought but love from thee give recompence.
Thy love is such I can no way repay.
The heavens reward thee manifold, I pray.
Then while we live, in love let's so persever
That when we live no more, we may live ever.

Thank you Sue for reading those beautiful verses on Joanna's behalf.

I would now like to invite each of you to a minute of silence during which we can reflect on Bob and our cherished memories of him. Those of you who wish to pray may do it silently during these moments.

Peter, Bob's eldest brother, will now be sharing some of his memories on Bob.

Peter Onions

As the eldest of three brothers to lose one was a tragedy but the emotion I felt with the loss of Bob, the youngest, can I think, be likened to losing a son.

Bob was almost ten years my junior. I watched him grow from his very first day, April 9th 1946. We were as close as two siblings could be. Too far apart in age for there to be any rivalry.

Bob's early childhood was fraught with a number of traumatic events. We lived in Briton Ferry, a small town in South Wales. During our time there, my little brother nearly died. At about the age of five, he had a severe attack of peritonitis which was caught just in time with emergency surgery.

A short time after he had recovered, in the local park and playground, he survived a fall, from a rather high slide. Fortunately, the only injury was a broken arm. Whilst his arm was healing, one morning he was standing on the corner of a street near our home when an

electric milk float swung around, throwing off a metal milk crate, striking Bob a glancing blow. Thankfully, again, he was not seriously hurt. You could say at that stage he was a survivor.

In 1953, we left the 'jinx' town behind and moved to the delightful seaside town of Penarth, a few miles from Cardiff.

Middle brother Richard, Bob and I attended schools in Penarth and in 1957, after 'A' levels I had to do two years National Service, in the RAF. I decided to sign on for an extra year and after training, was posted to Malaya. I did not see Bob for more than two years.

In August 1960 my service ended and I returned home, a civilian. I had telephoned ahead to tell the family which train I would be on and my eta. Penarth had two railway stations, one a small Halt near the police station, where we lived. As I started to walk up the road from the Halt, I saw a very excited young boy running towards me. I realised it was 'little brother,' Bob. How he had grown. Without saying a word he stared me for a few seconds, turned and rushed back to the steps up to our house where my parents were waiting. When I reached the welcoming party, a breathless Bob burst out with the words - 'you were a school prefect when you went away and now you are a man!' That afternoon, when the excitement was over, Bob and I walked down to the seafront and I bought him a Knickerbocker glory. It was his first!

Bob continued at school in Penarth but the family eventually moved to Llantrisant where my father had taken up a new post. Bob attended Grammar school, in Cowbridge. He enjoyed amateur dramatics and once played the lead in a school production of Richard III. It would have been wonderful to have had a video recorder. His rendering of 'My Kingdom for a Horse' was epic.

Bob was an avid reader, as anyone who has seen it, will have noted from his extensive library. He developed a great interest in opera and classical music.

Having obtained the necessary 'A' Levels, Bob went up to Birmingham University where he read Law. After two years he decided it was not for him so he returned to work in Cardiff, eventually joining the Civil Service in London.

In the interim he married. In the early days of matrimonial life, in the 1960s, the 'jinx' struck again when Bob and his then wife were involved in a horrible road accident. The car being driven by our mother, during a torrential rainstorm, aquaplaned and collided with another vehicle. Fortunately, Bob's injuries were minor but both our father and Bob's former wife were badly injured. Mother had a split lip!

In January 1970, I moved my wife and children to Hong Kong where I had taken a position with a major aviation company. Bob fancied the idea of working in Hong Kong and about three years after I had moved to the Colony, an opportunity arose for Bob to accept a secondment to the Hong Kong Government, where he settled down and very much enjoyed the work and

the lifestyle. We spent much family time together, Simon and Amanda, my children, being very, very fond of Uncle Rob. (Rob became Bob amongst his friends; and eventually the name stuck although Dick and I still refer to him as Rob).

His life was flung into turmoil halfway through his tour, when his wife left him for a married man who had recently taken up a post with the new Hong Kong Cross Harbour Tunnel Company. Unfortunately it was I who introduced Bob and his wife to this charismatic character, an old friend from the UK. Bob went through a bad time for a while. However, his strength of character and a coterie of close friends helped with his recovery.

As it turned out his ex-wife's conduct was the best thing that could ever have happened. Soon after Bob's return to England he met Joanna. This meeting was the beginning of a thirty eight year love affair. All of you will no doubt, have recognised the sheer intensity of their love for one another.

During the 1980s Bob took up scuba diving, an activity he enjoyed for quite a long time. It was when hauling a heavy boat up the shingle beach at Hallsands, in south Devon, that he seriously damaged his spine, an injury which prevented any further diving with tanks although he and Joanna did snorkel for a while.

After 14 years in Hong Kong my wife and I returned to England. Simon and Amanda had been at school in West Sussex and Hampshire for several years. When they, individually, moved to London to widen their horizons it was Uncle Rob and Auntie 'JoJo' who were on hand to help them as and when needed and for which my former wife and I are eternally grateful.

Bob and Joanna fell in love with Gozo after repeatedly spending their holidays here. Prior to their retirement, from high pressure jobs in London, the 'lovers' had agreed that Gozo would be the perfect place to spend the rest of their lives together. It was the right decision and they eventually built 'Dar Wus,' in Xaghra, where they lived so happily since 1997.

Joanna and Bob enjoyed a common interest in so many things; Opera, Rock and Classical Music and an eclectic taste in literature.

At the Laura Vicuna School, they assisted children, at several levels, to comprehend and improve their spoken English, by reading stories in English and discussing them with the children. I attended one of Bob's classes and was thrilled to see the joy and laughter of the children as he role-played the characters in stories he was telling.

Bob and Joanna were involved with charity work. They were closely involved with arranging Art Exhibitions for the 'Eden Foundation' for a number of years. Bob particularly enjoyed being a volunteer 'sitter' for a Gozitan Heritage group, showing visitors round part of the Citadel in Victoria and giving them the benefit of his wide knowledge of Gozitan history.

They both spent some time seriously studying the Maltese language. Bob followed a course for just a year but mastered an impressive vocabulary. Joanna later took it up again and persisted for some years.

Bob made friends easily; sincere friendships, many of which were destined to last in perpetuity. Bob was a clever, wise, kind, generous, loving, human being. He earned the respect of everyone he met. He did not, however, suffer fools.

All branches of our immediate families loved him and were shocked when news of the original cancer diagnosis was announced. Following the major surgical procedure, about 16 months ago, all seemed to be well. The 'lovers' decided that they should marry and in July 2014 a small but joyful ceremony and reception took place.

Perhaps not everyone knows that Bob had a nick-name which had been with him, I think, since school days. He was known as 'Wus' a term of endearment that Joanna has used almost exclusively for most of their life together. Although legally Mr Onions and Miss Williams, their wedding rings have been individually engraved Mr Wus and Mrs Wus.

To the horror and dismay of everyone, during a regular check-up, Bob was diagnosed with a secondary cancer. After two bouts of debilitating chemotherapy and radiology treatments, these proved to have had little effect on the spread of the cancer but contributed to the rapid decline in Bob's health. He faced the inevitable end stoically and with great courage. It was characteristic of this brave, lovely 'little brother', to telephone me himself, with the devastating news.

Bob never lost his sense of humour. When Dick and I last saw him, just a few short weeks ago, although becoming weaker, he joked with us when talking about the good old times we had spent together.

Despite the traumas of his early childhood and also in Hong Kong, when he must have felt unloved, Bob became a most caring and loving person. This is due, in no short measure, to his meeting Joanna and is clearly reflected in the many, many friends he has made and retained, during his eventful life, some of whom, I am delighted to say, are here today.

This Tribute is also for Joanna. Throughout Bob's ordeal, Joanna nursed him and tended to his every need with a greater love than I have ever witnessed between a husband and wife. No one could have done more for Bob than Joanna. The pain and uncertainty of not knowing when the end would come has been unbearably stressful; a burden a lesser woman would have been unable to endure.

It was more than a month since the Doctors declared that they could do no more for Bob. The prognosis was indefinite; 'possibly months, possibly weeks, possibly sooner.' Joanna moved Bob into a lovely nursing home in San Lawrenz where she was at his bedside three times a day

and towards the end had a bed moved into Bob's room so she could be with him pretty much full time. The 'lovers' were together when Bob peacefully passed away.

I would like to end this Tribute by reading a short poem:

FEEL NO GUILT IN LAUGHTER

Feel no guilt in laughter; he'd know how much you care,
Feel no sorrow in a smile that he's not here to share.
You cannot grieve for ever; he would not want you to.
He'd hope that you could carry on the way you always do.
So talk about the good times and the way you showed you cared,
The days you spent together, all the happiness you shared.
Let memories surround you; a word someone might say
will suddenly recapture a time, an hour, a day,
that brings him back as clearly as though he were still here;
And fills you with a feeling that he is always near.
For if you keep those moments, you will never be apart
And he will live for ever, locked safely within your heart.

Thank you Peter for that powerful tribute.

I would like to invite in this order the following people to deliver a short tribute each to Bob's memory: Chris, Bob's oldest and best friend; Roger, Joanna's brother; and finally Debbie, Roger's daughter, who will be reading a message from her sister Lara who could not join us today.

Chris Jones

I've known Bob for the last 62 years. It's not difficult to know someone for a long time; all you have to do is grow old! But Bob and I were the best of friends for those 62 years and it was a friendship that burst into life every time we met or every time we spoke. He was best man when Karen and I got married and is godfather to our three children, Wes, Lucy and Ellie. All three of them have asked me to say how proud they are to have him as their godfather and how much they love him and Jo.

I remember the first time we met. We were both 7 years old and it was Bob's first day in the school. He stood at the front of the class with a big bag in his hand and said, "My name is Bob and I've got sweets for anyone who wants to be my friend". I was the first there!

In the early days of our friendship, by which I mean up to the age of 35 or later, the friendship was based on the firm principle that I was the one who would get us into trouble and Bob was the one who would get us out of it. It was a principle that I always had great faith in.

I remember when we were both living in London and Bob moved into a new flat. I immediately called round and insisted that we visited all the local pubs, just to explore his new neighbourhood. The next morning I woke up on his floor and although I could remember that it was Bob's floor and that I had been out with him the night before, I couldn't for the life of me remember where I was. The worrying thing was that I could hear lions roaring and elephants trumpeting and they definitely sounded close. I thought, whatever you do don't open your eyes, and began to shout for Bob, saying I think we're in a bit of trouble here! Sure enough, I could hear him approaching with the reassuring tinkle of glasses as he brought a morning livener for us both and before I could warn him about those lions, he gently reminded me what I'd forgotten, which was that his new flat was directly opposite Regent's Park Zoo.

Then there was the time that we both decided to go to Paris for a week. I think it was when he had just come back from Hong Kong. Anyway, after several days of socialising I suggested that we did something a bit more cultural and dragged Bob to the top of Notre Dame cathedral. Now I don't think this was really my fault because Bob had never told me before that he suffered from vertigo. When you get to the top of Notre Dame, you are up on the roof with no barriers and all of Paris is laid out before you. There I was, pointing out the sights of Paris below us and I suddenly thought Bob was a little quiet and turned to find him spread-eagled against the wall, eyes closed, hanging on for dear life. I couldn't get him off the wall but luckily, there were two nuns there as well and they helped me get him down. Divine intervention, I suppose.

There's also the time when we went to Amsterdam but Bob always made me promise not to tell those stories. Mind you, how he ended up in one of those windows in the red-light district I'll never know!?!

Later on, when we had both reached maturity, there were two great loves in Bob's life (apart from me that is). The greatest love of course was Jo and I still remember when he first introduced us. He said, "I've found her, I've found the one" and as soon as I met her I could see that he was right. From then on BobnJo became one word.

The second great love in his life was Gozo and since Bob and Jo have lived here my family have spent so many happy times here that we have grown to love it as well.

When I was wondering what to say today, I thought I ought to say something more serious about my friendship with Bob, but I can't. Every story is filled with laughter and happy memories and I don't remember us ever being serious about anything.

When I first heard that Bob's illness was terminal, I told him that I was going to do a marathon in his memory. I didn't mean running about or anything silly like that; what I was planning was to have a drink in every pub we had both been in and where there was a funny story attached. Over the next few weeks we started to compile a list and by the time he died we were up to 87 and still counting.

Bob, like me, never mastered new technology, no face book, emails or texts. Even mobiles baffled him. But we did always keep in touch using the telephone, landline that is. But even here Bob had difficulties because he could never be the first to end the conversation. You always had to put the phone down before him, hang up first. Sometimes I would wait, just to tease him. After a long silence, I would say, "You're still there aren't you"? And he would answer, "No I'm not"!

Well I guess he finally did put the phone down before me but I know in my heart that he will always still be there. The truth is I loved him and still do. That's all there is to it.

Roger Williams

We were on a ferry to Spain when we got the news that Bob had left us. We debated what to do - should we try and book a ferry to return home immediately or should we continue with our holiday?

We did what we so often do when there is a decision to take - we asked ourselves What Would Bob Do? - and so decided to continue our holiday, and search every menu for seafood spaghetti.

The presence of so many of you here today is a better testament to how much Bob meant to so many people than anything I could say, and the selection of quotations on the memorial card sum up Bob's impact on the people he met better than I could so I'm not going to try to say all that in my own words. Instead I'd rather take a few moments to remind ourselves that he wasn't good at everything he did.

Bocci - Bob had his own court and time for hours of practice but very rarely beat any of the Williams family. It's possible he was just being a good host and letting us win, but I don't think so. I think he was just rubbish at it. My daughters all remember the debates about how much Cisk he needed to achieve optimum performance but he never did, so we'll never know. We do know that his skill went up about halfway through the 1st can but fell away after that. Which may explain why my girls and Cath used to feed him a 2nd can as soon as possible.

Information Technology - another of Bob's blind spots. He never did find out how to switch a computer on and only got a mobile phone about 5 years ago so Joanna could check up on him (they called it tagging him). We were glad he had one when Debbie had the task of coordinating a surprise weekend get together for us all in Budapest to celebrate Jo's 60th birthday. Debbie still remembers Bob ringing her for the 1st time on his new phone and whispering, "Hello Debbie, it's uncle Bob from Gozo, I'm in the garage". We decided that, despite all the rumours about what he really did when working for the British government, he wouldn't have made a very good secret agent.

Horse riding - not his best skill. We sat him on our family horse many years ago for a short ride and after about 10 paces Bob became the 1st person ever to fall off Jester.

Anything practical - if it couldn't be fixed with blu-tack and toothpicks it was time to call in a proper workman.

And, finally and surprisingly, singing. Despite allegedly being best mates with Shakin' Steven, Jo tells me Bob couldn't sing for toffee. Probably one of the few things I had in common with Bob!

SO...not much good at Bocci, IT, horse riding, DIY and singing but so good at so much else. Probably the most important thing for me was that he loved and respected my sister and made her happy for almost 38 years. He was a great support to Jo when our brother and mother died within a year of each other, and both much too young. I cannot think of any couple I know whose relationship came anywhere near that of Jo & Bob. I doubt they ever exchanged a cross word over that 38 years.

He was a kind, gentle, witty and amazingly intelligent man. He knew so much about so many things but never belittled anyone else's views even when he knew that they were just plain wrong. Debbie has told me a lovely story about the time, many years ago, when she was voicing an opinion on something or other that she didn't really know anything about. Bob didn't criticise her or make her feel small but later in the day he quietly handed her a book on the subject for her to read which put her straight.

My daughters all remember when they were young and this very cool, slightly mysterious looking man in cowboy boots and dark glasses came from London to visit us. He was definitely a very cool uncle.

I could go on forever about this wonderful man and about how unfair it is to all of us that he has left us at far too young an age, but I won't. I will just say that Anne and I and our 3 daughters loved Bob dearly. I am pleased that Kerry and Debbie are here today, and I'm also very pleased that between us we talked Lara out of flying back from New Zealand to join us. As she can't be here Lara has sent a tribute of her own which Debbie would like to try and read to you.

Debbie Williams

When I was little I was desperate for Auntie JoJo to marry Bob, partly because I fancied my chances of being a bridesmaid, but also so that he wouldn't just be my "pretend Uncle Bob" anymore. In reality of course he was always my proper uncle, and the best uncle I could have wanted. He had a knack for talking to children like they were on his level, and could make me feel like I had a very interesting and insightful contribution to make to a philosophical discussion at the age of about 5.

Uncle Bob being taken away leaves such a big hole, not just at Dar Wus, on Gozo, or in his family, but in the world. The world needs people like Bob more than ever, someone who could be the biggest presence in the room while never raising his voice or speaking over

anyone; someone who combined humility and gentleness with strength and gravity; who could be so funny and so silly, and yet so fascinating, insightful and wise. Spending time with Uncle Bob made me feel loved, made me feel special and quite often made me feel drunk and a little bit sick when limoncello was involved.

It is a common cliché to say “don’t feel sad that you’ve lost him, be happy that you knew him”, and it is impossible not to be sad, but it is also true that we should all find room alongside our sadness to feel lucky and privileged to have had Bob in our lives. I will always be grateful to JoJo for bringing him into our family.

Uncle Bob is irreplaceable - we could mix a thousand people together and we wouldn’t come close to replacing him - but he wasn’t with JoJo for 38 years without passing on so much of himself; and that’s what I hold on to - that he does live on through JoJo, his wisdom, his kindness and his silly shopping lists; and he can live on through all of us if we never forget why we admired and loved him so much, and if we strive to be people that Uncle Bob would be proud of.

Thank you Chris, Roger and Debbie.

A short announcement before we proceed with the last part of our memorial: after the ceremony, you are all being invited to partake of some snacks and drinks. The Mud Dogs, Bob’s favourite Gozitan band, will be entertaining us with their music.

He Is Gone - David Harkins

You can shed tears that he is gone
Or you can smile because he has lived
You can close your eyes and pray that he will come back
Or you can open your eyes and see all that he has left
Your heart can be empty because you can’t see him
Or you can be full of the love that you shared
You can turn your back on tomorrow and live yesterday
Or you can be happy for tomorrow because of yesterday
You can remember him and only that he is gone
Or you can cherish his memory and let it live on
You can cry and close your mind, be empty and turn your back
Or you can do what he would want: smile, open your eyes, love and go on.

Bob is gone, though the photons which bounced off his face, and his energy, remain behind. As David Harkins reminds us, we have two choices facing us now. We can keep shedding our tears, or we can ‘smile because he has lived’.

Bob’s life being the full and significant one it was, as we have reminded ourselves today, it surely deserves a smile of recognition. Why keep crying for a life which was full and well-lived?

Is that what Bob, a man who had the strength of character and selflessness to think beyond his own life, would have wanted? What Bob would rather have wanted is for us to feed our flame and share it as generously as he can. It is also the most meaningful way we can keep Bob's memory alive.

We will be ending this ceremony with a song by Monty Python, 'The Galaxy Song', which Bob himself requested to be played. Bob is sending us a message even now on keeping perspective on our own lives: we are part of a much greater whole. Let the relative pettiness of our lives in the greater scheme of things be our comfort and teach us not to take ourselves too seriously.