

**Tony Prout**  
**11 November 1953 – 28 June 2018**

**Archive Tribute**

Tony was diagnosed with Lewy Body Dementia and Parkinson's Disease in December 2017. It is a progressive and degenerative disease, with no known cure. He made the decision to travel to Dignitas, choosing to die with dignity while he was still able to be in control of his own life.

I don't need to tell you what a difficult decision this was, and there are countless checks and forms and procedures to complete, to ensure that it isn't taken lightly. Swiss bureaucracy is legendary, and Alison can tell you that it completely justifies its reputation. We can only respect Tony's strength of mind, and also admire the love that surrounded him, as Alison, Teddy and Chris have been there to help and support him.

Tony himself said that once he had received the diagnosis and understood something about the condition, he faced a choice: to let it take its inevitable and debilitating course, or to take control of his own life – and death.

He travelled to Switzerland with Alison and Teddy last week: he died as he wished on June 28<sup>th</sup>, and his body was cremated in a private ceremony.

Tony wrote this outline of his life himself to be read today, so this his story, In his own words:

*Tony was born on 11<sup>th</sup> November 1953 in St Thomas' Hospital, London overlooking the Houses of Parliament and within the sound of Bow Bells so he was a genuine cockney by birth. His parents were both Police Officers which at the time was most unusual, in fact, on the day they married the London Evening Standard published the wedding photograph on the front page.*

*Shortly after Tony was born, his father was due in court to give evidence where the defendant had pleaded not guilty. Before the proceedings started, the Magistrate leant forward, and said "PC Prout, how is your good lady wife?" His father said "I'm pleased to tell you she gave birth to a bouncing boy last night". The Magistrate said "Please give her my congratulations. Now let us proceed with the case". The Defence Solicitor surprisingly advised his client to change his plea to guilty.*

*Tony's mother was one of the first 12 female Detective Constables appointed in the country, a fact he was very proud of.*

*Tony was educated at Eastbourne Grammar School, and whilst there he entered the county trials for the over-16s 400metres. He claimed 3<sup>rd</sup> place in that race. The next race was the 400metres for the under-16s. The winner of that race beat Tony's time by just six seconds, and turned out to be Steve Ovett, future Olympic champion.*

*In 1972, Tony joined the Police Service in Sussex. When he joined, both his parents were still serving as Police Officers in Sussex, so it was a real family affair. He served in various roles over his 30 year career including Vice Squad, Crime Squad and a number of Headquarter postings, finishing his career as an Inspector. It was whilst working on medical retirements with the then Force Medical Advisor, Dr Mike O'Donnell, that they formed a friendship which still lasts today.*

*In fact, Tony asked me to ask you a question today Mike: What is the smelliest thing on the planet?*

***(if Mike cannot answer, the answer is an anchovy's bottom)***

*In addition, Tony was a self-defence instructor, side-handled baton trainer and Judo instructor. He helped run a judo club, where his son, Teddy, was also a member. Teddy went on to win gold in the Sussex County under 50kg weight group when he was 14. Achieving and performing well throughout his academic and working life has led Teddy to his current job with Humanists UK as a Director. A fact Tony was very proud of.*

*Tony then worked as a member of Police Staff for the next 10 years in various and diverse projects in the HR department (affectionately referred to by him as the Human Remains department), dealing with everything from hiring to firing people, employment tribunals, disciplinaries and overtime. He was responsible for writing the 'Guide to Regulations', a precis of which was included in the Sussex Police Federation diaries, which were given to all serving officers. As a result he became known across the county as the Regulation Guru.*

*During his service, he was awarded the Royal Humane Society Bravery Award on Vellum for helping to stop a suicide jump on Hastings West Cliff. The morning after the rescue, the officers involved returned to the cliff at the request of the local press. They wanted a photograph of them on the rocky outcrop where the rescue had taken place the previous night. They asked the officers to stand on the narrow clump of rock where they had struggled the night before, with 100 foot drops either side. Surprisingly, Tony declined the offer!*

*Whilst working in Hastings as Acting Inspector, Tony had a run-in with a furry fiend who had been stealing sandwiches from the ground floor locker room. 'Herman the squirrel' had been adopted by Hastings front office staff. Tony was feeding the squirrel her evening meal when she mistook his thumb for her dinner and sank her teeth into his thumb down to the bone. Apparently squirrels have remarkably sharp teeth. As a result of the incident, a quick trip to the local hospital was required, where the treating A&E staff thought it was highly amusing! Due to previous good character, Herman did not appear in court as she was forgiven, and no charges were pressed!*

*Tony met Alison in the early part of 1995; and they got engaged on Valentine's Day whilst on holiday in the Canary Islands in 1996. Because it was a leap year, it was Alison that proposed to Tony, though she didn't quite get to the end of the question before the answer was given! They married in May 1997 and enjoyed a honeymoon to Jamaica, which ultimately became their favourite holiday destination.*

*Other than Alison and holidays, Tony had two passions which were snooker and bowls. As a league snooker player he won many trophies at both club and local league level. He started playing bowls in 1974 and the pinnacle was winning the British Isles Singles in 1997, and on the way to that victory he beat the current world, Olympic and Commonwealth champion, Darren Burnett.*

*Tony was known for his quick wit and joke telling. On a cruise, during a visit to Barbados, there were a number of taxi drivers hanging around in a group for fares by the port entrance. As Tony and Alison walked past the group one shouted "Taxi Sir?"*

*Tony replied "No thanks, we are walking"*

*Taxi driver said "First time?"*

*Tony replied "No we have walked before!"*

*This caused much hilarity to the taxi driver's colleagues.*

*Tony and Alison were renowned for their holidays across the world, visiting much of the Caribbean - including a visit to Cuba whilst Fidel Castro was in power. It was there where they swam with dolphins in their natural habitat (that's the dolphins natural habitat not Tony and Alison's!) and Alison acquired a new boyfriend, in the form of a 300lb Canadian Sea Lion, whose breath very nearly beat the anchovies at being the smelliest thing on the planet! They visited Greece, India, Israel, Mauritius and Dubai, and took a day trip to Lapland. where they went snow-biking through forests, drove a husky sled, and entered the Arctic Circle. The last memorable holiday was in 2016 when they went on a 3-week cruise from Fort Lauderdale to Los Angeles via the Panama Canal. A real once in a lifetime trip.*

To sum up – Tony really knew how to live life to the full, with energy and enjoyment and integrity. And he wanted to end this outline of his life with these words from Douglas Adams' *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* - "So Long and Thanks for All the Fish".

Tony and Alison met when she was working at the Mansion Hotel and arranging events and talks, and she arranged for the police to do a self-defence awareness session. She remembers that Tony and his colleague turned up with a lady's handbag, stuffed with normal, everyday things that you can use to defend yourself, like a bunch of keys and a comb. It obviously went down well, because they came back to do a second session - and then Tony and Alison met again at a police and secretary 'blind date' evening. They married in May 1997, and though initially Tony was a bit worried by their age difference, they were together 23 years. Alison showed me a photo of them together – admittedly after a few drinks – but you can see the love that shines through them.

Alison has chosen a poem to read now; it's called *Release Me*.

*Release me, let me go.*

*I have so many things to see and do.*

*You mustn't tie yourself to me with tears,*

*Be happy that we had so many years.*

*I gave you my love and you can only guess*

*How much you gave me in happiness.*

*I thank you for the love you each have shown  
But now it's time I travelled on alone.*

*So grieve awhile for me, if grieve you must  
Then let your grief be comforted by trust.  
It's only for a while that we must part,  
So bless the memories within your heart.*

*I won't be far away, for life goes on.  
So if you need me, call and I will come.  
Though you can't see or touch me, I'll be near.  
And if you listen with your heart  
You'll hear all of my love around you soft and clear.*

*And then, when you must come this way alone  
I'll greet you with a smile and say "Welcome Home."*

*(anon)*

Tony had a strong moral compass, a firm understanding of right and wrong, and the strength of character to make that a part of his daily life and work. He also had a sense of humour that was a defining characteristic: he had the ability to laugh at himself and at others, to see the funny side of life even at its most serious. He was irreverent, intelligent and funny, a huge fan of Monty Python, Douglas Adams, Terry Pratchett and Mel Brooks movies. That delight in puns, in clever language and general naughtiness was so much a part of him.

When they were on holiday in Lanzarote, Teddy put Tony's name down to sing *Unchained Melody* in the karaoke as a joke. But Tony sang it brilliantly, and it became his party piece – Teddy says that once he'd sung it that first time, 'there was no turning back'.

*Teddy – Eulogy for Tony*

*There is a saying that sons are moulded by their fathers, I don't know if that is universally true, but I think it is in my case. My father was a man of great reason, a man who liked evidence before opinion. At the centre of that was a moral core that was unshakable. He had a long standing love of Terry Pratchett's Discworld series of books and I have always thought of him as the character Commander Vimes. The leader of the city watch who, when asked who watches the watchmen, said I've always watched myself.*

*He loved a joke. Especially a pun, he was always there with a one liner for any occasion. I remember that when he would pick me up after practice at judo or tennis, or when I finished a late shift at work, and we would drive past something funny, workmen staring down a hole, a mistyped sign, you could see a slight smile on his lips as they would move to work out what the pun would be! Sometimes they were in the moment, like walking to beach you have already heard, others were trotted out every chance he got: 'Where's your bin?' - Bin here all day: No, where's your wheelee bin? I've wheeeelie bin here all day!*

*He would find Humour in the absurd and there would be many occasions around the dinner table where he and I would be roaring with laughter at a linguistic slip which we would push further and further into absurdity, like someone saying we need to pick up the taxi driver rather than the other way round. Pick him up? Is he waiting for us to collect him? Do we need to get his car for him? Maybe we take him to his taxi in a Sedan chair? while watching Alison and Chris looking at us with bemused expressions on their faces, which only made us laugh all the more. This was also true of Mel Brooks movies, especially blazing saddles, or the movie Galaxy Quest.*

*He was also, for me, someone who could always find a solution. When I was very young I would go with him to his bowling matches and practices. One day I was playing with his metal Measuring tape for bowls. Once I'd played with it for a while I approached him as he was about to play saying Wix it daddy. Bent completely out of shape, he put it in his pocket and carried on bowling. Producing the fixed tape when we got to the other end, unknown to me it was the tape of another players.*

*In his retirement we would have days out together, visiting museums in London, or Sussex railways. In London he would regale me with stories of old Scotland Yard and old old Scotland Yard. Which would lead to stories of his time on the force, of which you have already heard, which always left me with feelings of wonder and amazement, pride that he made the world a safer place, that he was brave and unflinching in the face of adversity, and kind and compassionate in the presence of those for whom crime had so badly affected.*

*He lived his life with reason, meaning, and humour. Something I try to emulate in my own life. The over-riding feeling I have for my dad is pride. Pride is all very well, but a sausage is a sausage... Yet, when you have an abundance of sausages, pride is a rather good feeling to have. So, as I feel as though he was a man with an abundance of sausages in his life - I am proud of his job, of the way he treated others, of the way he lived his life and of his achievements. Finally, I am proud of his decision to end his life in the way he lived it. On his own terms, with full knowledge and fully thought through. With dignity and humour, care and thought for others, with determination and decisiveness. I have lots of reasons to be proud of my dad. But I am proud he was my dad. And that's how I will remember him*

Today we've remembered Tony Prout, remembering what he was like, what he did in his life, what he meant to you. You will all have your own memories and stories about him, from the times that your lives interconnected. He was different for each of you: a loving husband, a father, a colleague, a friend. He was a police officer, a bowls player and a snooker player, a man who always had a witty answer and a pun ready, and a man who knew the value and importance of living life well.

The author Terry Pratchett wrote: "*No one is actually dead until the ripples they cause in the world die away...*" and so as long as you remember Tony, as long as you talk about him and think about him, the ripples of his life continue through the world.