

*A Humanist Ceremony
to Celebrate the Life of
Lord Victor James Woolley*

2nd July 1941 – 18th December 2018

*Conducted in the presence of his family and friends
on Tuesday 8th January 2019
at Grenoside Crematorium*

*Service taken by
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Tribute

Vic never liked to do anything conventionally if he could avoid it; he even made his entrance to the world during an air raid, on 2nd July 1941. He grew up in Darnall, in Sheffield, with his mum and dad, Evelyn and James, and his younger siblings Ian, David and Cheryl. As soon as he was able he signed up with the RAF, despite being a more than reluctant flyer, and at eighteen found himself training with the RAF Linguistics School. Vic may have been somewhat lacking in common sense, but he was a very intelligent man, and quickly became fluent in Russian. He was posted to Germany, where he worked translating intercepted messages from spy planes flying over East Germany. Vic was very proud of having served in the forces, and he greatly enjoyed his time in Germany; he really liked the people there, and the beer helped, of course.

After five years in the RAF, Vic returned to Yorkshire, where he married Sue, and became a dad to Mark in 1964. It's fair to say that fatherhood didn't come naturally to Vic, and he and Sue parted company when Mark was less than two. He married again some years later, to Christine, and they welcomed Richard and Katy to the world, but again Vic was a fairly infrequent presence in their childhoods. He and Christine separated after eighteen years together, when Richard and Katy were still small, but initially they lived only a few doors up the High Street. Richard and Katy remember going round to stay with their dad once a week, nights that were particularly memorable when he had failed to pay the gas bill. On those evenings Vic declared it was 'Cowboy Night', and they would cook tea on the open coal fire. He always had a great sense of fun; Katy recalls him taking her out to the garden with a little floret of cauliflower and solemnly planting it in the soil; when she went to check it the next morning, she was amazed, as he had replaced it with a full cauliflower head!

Vic lived over in Bridlington for a while, with his partner at the time, Janet, and Richard and Katy would come and stay for a week at a time, and be treated to culinary delights such as flat cola (apparently it was 'not cheap, it's a new type and it's meant to be flat'!) or stew and dumplings minus the dumplings, as Vic had forgotten to make them. Most of their time was spent at the Half Moon pub, as it had an indoor play area.

Though that was probably a safer option than the pub with the outdoor play area, as that was where Richard fell off the fireman's pole and broke his wrist in two places. Vic was all set to get another round in at the bar, until one of his drinking companions pointed out that it 'really didn't look right' and suggested they get to hospital.

At least as his children grew older they could enjoy the fact that when their dad did randomly turn up for a visit, he would usually be accompanied by plenty of fags and booze. Mark described one occasion when Vic had struck lucky after a ship ran aground at Bridlington and he managed to pick up 3000 boxes of cigarettes; he opened up all the sodden fags and stuffed the tobacco into pairs of tights to rinse the salt water off. Hard-won gains, and pretty grim to smoke, by all accounts, but full marks to Vic for ingenuity.

After leaving the RAF, chemistry was his thing when it came to work. He became a corrosion consultant, which initially took him to the heady heights of Emley Moor Mast; Vic was one of the first people to set foot at the top, despite being petrified so high up. He also worked on Tinsley viaduct and inspected Spaghetti Junction, as well as spending time on the

rigs off the coast of Scotland. Perhaps inspired by his early experience in Germany, Vic had a great curiosity about other countries and other cultures, and he was happy to take opportunities that arose in the Middle East. Vic worked in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Bahrain, adding Arabic to the list of languages he was fluent in (which also included German and Yorkshire).

Even working such a long distance away, Vic would try and avoid flying if he could, on one occasion driving all the way back to the UK. Unfortunately, while he was over here, he broke his toe, falling down the stairs whilst slightly inebriated, which meant that Christine, having never left Yorkshire before, had to chauffeur him through Europe and over the mountains of Turkey and Iran. Christine was used to impromptu expeditions with Vic, though; even picking up a new car wasn't straightforward with him. When he decided that he wanted the latest Citroen, in white, the dealership in Sheffield told him they would have to order one in; but, not prepared to wait a moment, he demanded to know where he could get one straightaway, to which the reply came, 'They'll have one in the factory in Paris.' So off he and Christine set, to Paris. Luckily the trip was uneventful, despite Vic inadvertently flying down with a load of ganja that he had forgotten was in his pocket; when he got home and realised, he panicked and threw it on the fire, leaving everyone in the house stoned for a week

Vic was impulsive, for sure, and not particularly reliable, but he was brilliant fun to be around, hilarious at times, and a good mate to share a drink with. The drink was obviously a bit harder to come by when he lived in the Middle East, but when he found himself in a dry country Vic would just make his own beer or spirits, which he was happy to share at parties. On one night he had already had a tippie or two, and was methodically trying to pour off a beer while leaving the sediment behind. He was concentrating so hard that he took no notice of Christine shouting at him until after he had finished the job, at which point he discovered that what Christine had been trying to tell him was he hadn't been pouring the beer into a jug, but into the lid of the Kenwood food mixer, which obviously has a big hole in it...

Mark, Katy and Richard all agreed that it was hard to know what Vic got up to during his many absences, but they could only assume it involved drugs, alcohol and women! He would probably have appreciated this quote, from one of his favourite authors, Terry Pratchett:

"It's not worth doing something unless you're doing something that someone, somewhere, would much rather you weren't doing." Whatever Vic was getting up to, he would always come home with a tan, and sometimes a bit more besides; after staying with Mark for a couple of nights he went off again, leaving the message, 'I've left you a present in your rockery', and within a few weeks hundreds of marijuana seedlings appeared. And on a later occasion, over in York, he turned up with box loads of Viagra he had got from some bloke at the airport. Vic considered himself a bit of a wheeler-dealer; there was a reason he felt so at home in his Delboy dressing gown. Out in the Middle East he used to be chasing the deal of his dreams on a gold mine; his role as facilitator was going to land him a £40 million pound cut, that he faithfully promised to divide equally with his kids. Perhaps unsurprisingly the deal never materialised, but Vic did try and help them out when he could, and was always the first to put his hand in his pocket for a round at the bar.

He moved back to Yorkshire for good in 2011, having been in Azerbaijan and Georgia and overstayed his visa. The RAF helped to repatriate him, and Christine kindly gave him a place to stay initially, to help him comply with the entry requirements. Once his pension was sorted out, Vic got his own place, moving into Pendon House in Penistone in May 2012. Having got comfortable there, his wanderlust seemed to leave him; even when Katy built a bar in her own garden and invited him to try it out for her thirtieth birthday, Richard and Katy's partner James had all on to get him out of his comfort zone and over there. Vic was quite content sitting with his children or friends like Dave, Sue and Liz in The Crown, The Spread Eagle or the Legion, enjoying an afternoon drink and the assortment of quiz shows on daytime TV. He was quite a talent at quizzes himself, and had his own five minutes of fame on the show Runway, though in the end he lost to an English teacher on a tie-break question about English Literature.

One of the reasons Vic was so good at quiz shows was that he was very well-read, and not just light fiction; his favourite book was The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists, and he would happily have two books on the go at once. He invested in a Kindle, and at the last count had got through 421 books on it. Vic was always one for gadgets, with the latest fancy mobile phone; he had a Nokia Communicator with fold-out keyboard when everyone else still had their brick-like 3210s, and was tempted by anything from laser pens, to smart watches, to the radio-controlled tarantula he used to manouevre round his flat; he even bought a pair of glasses with a camera built in, so he had the equivalent of a dash cam when he was out on his mobility scooter.

Vic was lucky enough to have several people looking out for him in his time at Pendon House. Liz used to clean for him every week, but more than that would keep an eye out for him, especially if it snowed, say. And Katy's best friends, Helena and Caz, were both brilliant, always popping in and checking he was ok; they came to see him in hospital too, were there the day he died, and Katy is so grateful for the care they took of her dad, just as Mark and Richard are grateful for all the efforts Katy has made in looking after Vic these last years.

Vic was a character to the end; his response to a likely diagnosis of dementia was to start plotting how to set up the local Tory councillor by planting marijuana in their garden, on the grounds that even if he got caught he could plead diminished responsibility! He was such an interesting person, always with a story to tell, or a joke to crack, and he is greatly missed.