

A celebration of life

Denton Wells Brockway

20 March 1944 – 29 September 2019

1 pm, 18 October 2019, Sedgemoor Crematorium

a personal goodbye

Humanist
Ceremonies

Denton Wells Brockway

20th March 1944 – 29th September 2019

Tributes to Denton

Early Years

Tark

I don't know if any of you here heard Dent's mobile answer phone message - it goes something like this: "Hello, I'm Denton Brockway and I'm not sure why." There's a real irony here, especially when I think about the young Denton Brockway, it becomes an incredibly appropriate statement.

Although under the saddest circumstances it's been wonderful to meet such old friends from his Bristol days. Dent was generous to a fault in introducing me to all his friends. But for those of you who don't know me, I'm Tark, or Tiggs as Dent called me, and together with my sister Ali, we've known Dent all our lives. In fact Dent was our uncle, being the younger brother of our mum . Indeed in some of those early years we all lived and schooled together, and in many ways he was more like our older brother. On one of my recent visits to Dent, we talked about those years and he reminded me of a small moment which tickled him for the rest of his life. We were playing in the garden, and my little sister Ali could only have been about 3. She was fed up with being excluded from our Boys Own games, so she came up to Dent, and assuming the hero of the moment role, said: "Look, pretend I knock you out with my knocker-outerer!"

Although always his own man, Dent's start in life was quintessential of those many youngsters – way beyond the statistics, born through the trauma and confusion of the Second World War. His Mum, our Granny, a very gracious lady, whose own husband had died earlier from pneumatic fever , a direct result of the catastrophe of the First World War, had a relationship with a Canadian soldier destined for the European battlefield. Dent was the result of this. As my sister said – he was one of the lucky ones – his Mum and Granny kept him and loved him, despite the suffocating Victorian morality that still prevailed.

Dent lived with his little Gran in the fifties in the dark ground floor of the house almost on the beach at Pevensey Bay. He proudly showed everybody the bowls of beef dripping in the kitchen, which was used for his absolutely favourite marmite and dripping sandwich. It's possible that nowadays Health and Safety would send in a S.W.O.T Team to confiscate those bowls.

Anyone who knew Dent – even briefly – would know how funny he could be. I could tell a bookload of stories, but I've chosen two. The first one my father absolutely loved. He loved the story of what happened when my mother – Dent's older sister – somewhat belatedly asked him to tell me – an 18 year old – about, and I quote “the birds and the bees!” According to Dad, Dent apparently came up to me and said: “You know that thing that happens when you and your girlfriend get together- well your Mum wants you to know that it's exactly the same for the birds and the bees”!

On another occasion round about 1969, we drove up to a country pub in an old GPO van that Dent had managed to get hold of. It was a blistering hot day and there were about 60 people sitting outside the pub. Dent drove up at speed and somehow lost control, and the van went hurtling into a ditch. We were all virtually parallel to the ground. Aware of the 60 people who'd just witnessed this, Dent very calmly said, as we sat there looking stupid: “When we get out, we must make it look as if everything that's just happened was absolutely deliberate.” About 3 years later I heard him telling someone this story, and he had the bloody cheek to say I was driving the car!

His humour and warmth always prevailed. From our days as speedboat driver on the south coast piers to the time when we tried to move to France. I can remember between us we found a delapidated sofa from the local dump, and very cleverly made a delapidated sofa for the old Leyland van we intended to get us to France. But my enduring memory is how he saved me – a lonely teenager stuck out in the country, my parents living abroad. His visits at the weekend transformed my life. And I will always thank him for that.

I've just had a memory of one of the first things the 20 year old Dent did after we all moved to the country, and he saw a sign in the local village saying “Ye Olde Tuck Shop”. No prizes for guessing how he re-branded that sign.

I want to jump forward now to what really happened to the “Denton Brockway I'm not sure why” guy. Two things happened which changed his life absolutely for the better. Firstly, he met and married the other Ali in his life. It transformed him. He found love, companionship, stability and comfort. They moved to the

country together , which was an absolute mystery to me, until I heard they had moved right next door to a pub. Ali also became a huge support for the next thing that happened in his life - that momentous occasion when he received a letter from his daughter Caz. For almost half a lifetime, Caz had been searching for her biological father, and finally managed to connect with him. When he phoned me about this he couldn't believe his luck. Between the 3 of them: Ali, Caz and Dent – they immediately formed an unbreakable bond and the huge bonus on top were his 3 grandchildren – Hector, Rosa and Oscar who he was so very proud of.

Ali also played a huge role in helping him track down his Canadian family connections. These reunions can often go hopelessly wrong. But in his case they were a brilliant success. Both changes made his life complete. Over the years we've managed to have one or two amazing family get-togethers where everyone was there: my wife Carolyn, Tod, Theo, Lucy and Hettie, and he even met his Great great nephews: Alfie is here today, and Oscar, Arlo and Xander. Its painful, raw and sad right now, but because of his personality, I know we will come to a point where we can celebrate the memories with the love and laughter they deserve.



My Grandfather

Rosa

The home phone rang, so I answered, I was only 8. A man said “hello, it’s Denton, is Caz there?” I looked at my mum very confused and said “mum, there’s a bloke on the phone for you.” It was one hour and that phone call later I discovered I had a new Grandad. I never thought such a special unity could have happened to me to me and my family. I never believed I never believed I would be so lucky to have another Grandad. Denton taught me a lot of things. He taught me how to drive a boat, and crash it. He taught me to love trains and told me how remarkable they are in every single way. He taught me lots of things about pubs, how they’re a great way to spend your time and money. He taught me which were the best ones to go to and that pool is a ‘load of bollocks’. And of course he taught me about tactical Jagerbombs. There were so many silly things he brought to life for me, just a few being that pet cats don’t need exotic names and that it is a lot of fun to dip all your fingertips into hot

wax and ruin the candle. But of course he shared so much wisdom with me such as to embrace life regardless of what you have- it really is the people in it that make it great. He showed me how to be myself, regardless of how weird that may be. Denton truly was one of a kind, he never had a bad word to say about any anyone (unless they were a politician) and he would always let me paint his lovely elegant fingernails. Thank you for the laughter, your endless generosity and the bloody dyslexia. I promise to look after Ali, and of course tabby cat.



What You Want

By Hector

my grandads better then yours cos my grandads incredible 'course,
Incredibly forward, infellably tall and like his beard impeccably coarse,
I never got to tell him these thoughts
Opportunities eluded me and truthfully id try to set it up he'd get to muting me.
It used to be a muse to me, amusing that he wouldn't speak on how to be a
person for the better or the worsening
It used to be obtuse to me I used to feel to crude to speak
cos when I did im put back in my place for usual truancy.
But my grandad never did that, he got down, thats how kids chat,
or he'd knock me down in pool but always offer to get the next rack.
I can't believe that id of rather have plaid games on your computer
When biggest fountain of knowledge in the world could of amused yuh.

This man got me back to reading, into dreaming and perceiving
that theres meaning to the sadness that id felt despite the demons
european aint a title its a right and now im seething
Because I guess we hit the part were now I have to mention leaving.

I didn't want this to be about me, but im proud to be in your family tree
Im glad I got to meet you and from clearing out those cloudy seas
We went from having to little, from the feeling I needed purpose
To the fact that your my ceiling your my future your my worth it .
he gave us more then everything and anything that came with it
And it'd be funny if heavens real because well god should meet that cynic.

So im really sorry denton, I think I went and learnt my lesson
you said I should respect my self and just leave tories second guessing

Now my grandads better than yours so whatever,
Didn't make a song and dance because I knew you'd want some letters.



Bristol years

Robert

Hello everybody, I'm Robert and my claim to fame is that, with the exception of Tark, I may have known Denton longer than anyone else at this gathering. I'm going to think about the early days, from the 1970's to the 90's and I'm grateful to friends who have delved back through the mists of time with their memories of Denton.

We met him when I moved into a shared house in St Andrews, Bristol, in 1973. That same weekend, he and his then wife Anna took me on a tour of the Downs and we looked over into the Avon Gorge. It was there we had our first disagreement, which direction was the river flowing and which way to the sea. Of course, he was right.

Denton was very talented. From his craftsmanship in upholstery (for which he received a Gold Medal) to his sailing expertise – the latter, not a lot of people know about. We went down to a sailing school in Salcombe, on the first weekend of a course that I had enrolled on. Denton took a few of us out in a dinghy, and so impressed the Boss of the school that he was offered an Instructor's job on the spot.

He didn't take it because he already had a job that he loved – with British Railways, where he worked at Temple Meads station. His station announcements have become the stuff of legend. On the Eve of my wedding in 1976, a large party of guests arrived from Glasgow and as they alighted from the train were greeted with "Welcome to the Burgess Wedding Party, Robert's Stag night will start in the buffet in 10 minutes!". There were several such announcements whenever any of our crowd arrived at the station, which didn't endear him to his bosses - but Denton really pushed his luck with "We would like to apologise for the late arrival of the 17.10 from Penzance – this is due to poor management!".

He was an Usher at our wedding. At the entrance to the Ceremony, I entrusted him with my raincoat - my wife Marilyn never quite forgave him for losing it!

Denton had a compassionate side to him, having raised money and collected food for Striking Miners families in the 1980s. He had a social conscience which led him to become an active member of the Labour Party during this time.

We had a fabulous social life in those days, mainly built around the pubs of Hotwells. It was so annoying, you could never enter a pub in Hotwells without finding Denton had got there before you. One of our friends said to me recently that although Denton was a pub guy, you never saw him really drunk. He liked to have fun but never lost his natural gentlemanly behaviour and sense of decorum.

It's no exaggeration to say that Denton was just a tiny bit of a Ladies man. He once made a "suggestion" to a lady (who shall be nameless) who fell about laughing and reminded him that she was living with her boyfriend (who shall also be nameless). Denton's reply was, "I felt it my duty!"

David mentioned the occasion when they were walking across the Mendip Hills. Denton was no great walker and was starting to flag when he let out a rallying cry of, "come on legs, there's a pint in this for each of you!"

I mentioned earlier his boating prowess. He used to sail a beautiful old passenger craft, the Tower Belle in Bristol Harbour, on which he gave enlightened and entertaining commentaries. I was cycling around the docks one day and could hear his dulcet tones over the loudspeaker as he approached in the Tower Belle. "Ladies and Gentlemen, on your left is an old ruin of a shipping wharf, on your right is an old ruin of.....everybody wave at Robert!"

He instigated the first of 3 Boys Barge Trips, in 1985. Great fun, where we chugged along and explored the beautiful canals and pubs of England in a narrow boat. I'd like to propose we have perhaps one more - "The Denton Brockway Memorial Boys Barge Trip".

A lot has happened since we met in that house in St Andrews, from whence what became a large group of young people made friends and stayed friends. It's been said to me that Denton brought so many people together - he gave the gift of friendship.

We've talked of his unique sense of humour. I'd like to leave you with an anecdote from our friend Ian, who lives in Australia and with whom we had a reunion only last week.

“Denton gave me a lift to the station at 5 in the morning, on a freezing cold January day. You couldn't see out of the window because of a thick layer of frost all over the car. I was scared. Denton, you can't see where you're going! Don't worry, Ian – I know the way!”



Cross years

Martin, Mark and Steve

When we were asked to say some words today we were truly honoured and felt it was best in the spirit of Denton to make a 'list', and in the true spirit of Denton, we will get halfway through the list and leave the other bits for another time, because it was his view that it was 'best not to finish the list as you will always have to start a new one'.

So, working our way through the list methodically, easiest bits first following another strongly held view of Dentons.

So, there are many people here who knew Denton very well, however not many people will know this fact. We all know he was a leader, however did you realise he was the first person in the southwest to pioneer self-storage facilities. Admittedly this was under the cover of offering furniture refurbishment and re-upholstery services to anyone who was in no rush to sit down. In fact it is said that Cheddar Man has a chair somewhere in the workshop waiting for a quick French polish and a little work to the bolster.

Next in our list, Technology, not a day passed in recent memory when Denton wasn't regaling us with the stories of how many steps he had achieved through the medium of his Fit Bit watch, none of this tallied with his activities of the day in a physical sense, however he did manage to work out that one game of spider solitaire was equivalent to four flights of stairs.

That said this was only the beginning of his technological feats, who could forget those evenings hunched around the end of the bar over his newly acquired ipad watching videos of the L4056 Diesel loco travelling on the

Southwest line north to south, and the junction box just outside Yeovil with its distinct markings... We could go on but we don't have all afternoon.

However, keeping the technology theme and linked with another very strong memory of Denton, his ability to avoid the Cross Gentlemen's Christmas lunch is the stuff of legend, meticulously planned by Denton with the aid of lists, including the gathering of food orders then more often than not misplaced and discovered in early February in the pocket of the jacket he happened to have on in the previous year. Having put all of this effort in during November, the bugger then decided that our company was so poor that he would rather spend the third Wednesday of December in Weston General, that said and on reflection this may be more a comment on the quality of the food at our gathering, we were able to facetime him into the pub, to share with him our good company and he with us the various members of the nursing profession which he seemed to have gathered around him akin to a hareem.

Now Denton was always welcoming, he had time for everyone, even if, that time, sometimes, for some people, was sparing. As the self-appointed bon viveur and raconteur of the village Denton could tell stories time and again, with elements altering on each recollection (to spare the dignity of those involved in the stories am sure, Miss Bermuda 1969 mentioning no names) and as the alpha male in this afore mentioned sleepy Somerset village he would on many an occasion, and still whilst being generous and welcoming, point out to the newcomer that he had heard their story before and he was duty bound to inform them that it was dull the first time.

We all know Denton was very supportive of his friends, be this through just being there at times of difficulty, being knowledgeable where he thought our knowledge was lacking, and importantly being without prejudice when engaged in serious discussion. This he did across generations, with balance and with dignity.

But during his life in Cross and whilst working for the Bristol Packet he met someone very special, it was Caz his daughter, and in doing so learned he was a grandfather to three beautiful children. Over time we met them all and saw in Dentons eyes his pride and happiness, and without doubt this meeting changed him forever. They say that absence makes the heart grow fonder, and again without doubt, this is true as we know he treasured every moment he spent with them.

Crosswords, well we had many over the time, very much based on some diametrically opposed political view points, including some hard-hitting phrases like ‘you woolly or wishy-washy liberal’ to and in response to this, you ‘champagne socialist’ it very rarely got out of hand, unlike our current parliament. However these are not the cross words of which we speak, it is the black and white boxes which provided us with the most amusement, not forgetting the word wheel of course, Denton could not miss the opportunity to extract the rudest of words from just nine letters, in fact some of them were blends of rudewords which have now entered into our lexicon and if said in a Denton like way can sound complimentary when meaning quite the opposite.

With specific relation to crosswords, be they either in the Guardian, the I, or sometimes the Times (with his associated scribble over Chris Evans face for some reason) our club as it became known was very inclusive, in fact sometimes complete strangers would peer over Dentons shoulder to support our goal of three completions in a sitting. The strangest thing about the club, was his daily outright insistence to anoint himself as the scribe, with the element of jeopardy relating to his dyslexia adding to the challenge, thus creating the one rule of crossword club, check Dentons spelling. Many an early evening was extended as a result of peculiar spellings which if it weren’t for the rule would have prevented completion in our allotted pub time.

Ali and Dentons open door policy, is well known (you just had to check before bounding through after a power cut, whether Denton was up a ladder trying to reverse the polarity on the clock as it always started going backwards much to his annoyance and our laughter). That said each time you enter their home you feel loved and wanted, even if sometimes we felt like naughty school boys calling on Denton to tempt him out. Over the past months we have spent time with Denton at home, and made more use than we would have liked of the open door policy, being with him and being rude (but quietly so Ali didn’t hear us). However on one occasion we discovered something so beautiful, funny and mystifying we couldn’t help but question. Whilst sat there mocking Canal Boat monthly and the back issued of Class 2 Coach Bodies and their restoration, the door bell went, throwing the dog into a frenzy, the cat jumped off the bed, leaving Denton furious. We enquired ‘do you want us to get the door’, Denton responded ‘don’t bother, its Mark he will be on his way up’. ‘How do you know its Mark?’ we questioned, he responded as quick as a flash ‘because he is the only bastard that rings it!’

Now that the bugger has gone and left us, so has the age old tradition of the pub excuse, ‘ I would have been back earlier but I bumped into Denton’ The absence of this excuse, however please be assured Denton in writing this, it has been in different iterations used since his passing, will be sorely missed by many of us. I say sorely as tongue bashing when we get home without the excuse of, and this is his words which you will recognise, ‘have another one, you will make an old man very happy’, who could refuse, oh and when you agree, the deal clincher was ‘for you have a lucky face’ that generally meant at least two more beers.

There is so much more to share with you about our special friend, who is irreplaceable, but will live on in our hearts and memories for ever.

However as we keep our commitment to Denton we are not going to finish the list because that’s the way that he would have wanted it.

