

A celebration of life

Laurence Oldham

25th February 1923 – 18th October 2019

West Suffolk Crematorium, Bury St Edmunds

a personal goodbye

Humanist
Ceremonies

Thanks to Laurence's meticulous personality and attention to detail we can be certain that what is said today is correct! He was born in Burgh near Aylsham to parents Lavinia and John Oldham. His older brother Frederick died at the age of 39, he had a younger sister Doreen, and, sadly, their baby brother Roy died at just 18 months old.

Lavinia thought the world of her son, and they were very close. She was an accomplished organist, and, although Laurence wasn't a musician himself, he was a pretty good dancer in his time. He enjoyed the tea dances of the 1940's, and continued to dance well into his eighties, with his speciality being his soft shoe shuffle.

Laurence's father, who was known as Jack, was a cobbler by trade, who had served in the Cheshire Regiment based at Neatishead during the First World War. As we know, our relationships with our parents help to form us into the adults we become. Laurence and his father did not have a particularly good relationship, and it may have been this that made him seek approval and perfection throughout his life.

In the early 1920's, the family lived in Hyde, Cheshire, where Laurence attended Godley St John's School. He enjoyed playing football for the school team until leaving at fourteen, when he joined William Chadwick and Sons accountancy firm. This role suited Laurence's talent for numbers and attention to detail well. He was a proud man who took great pride in his work. Indeed, he always aimed to do everything to the highest possible standard.

Laurence's war years were spent serving with the Royal Armoured Corps. This took him to Egypt, where he was attached to the 8th Army. He trained in tank warfare, and was then sent to India, reaching the rank of Warrant Officer. Time was also spent in Burma, where we know many men had a particularly difficult time. Laurence chose not to talk much about some periods of the war. Instead, he read books, both personal accounts and non-fiction, about this period that appeared to have a therapeutic and cathartic effect on him. Duties closer to home included being stationed in Catterick in Yorkshire and Woodbridge in Suffolk. His knowledge of tanks was used in experimental tank warfare for the War Office.

Following demobilisation in 1946, he returned to his previous role, but found it rather dull and decided to take up the role of Accounts Manager at Robert McArd and Co Ltd in Denton. He went on to qualify as a Chartered Secretary, working for McArd's until the pressure of work and sadly the pressures he put on himself forced him to leave the role in 1961. He went on to become Director and Secretary of the Ford Car Agency in Hyde, and remained with that company until 1979, and continued to work as an accountant until he retired in 1987.

And in the midst of his professional life was a young woman called Mary. They were introduced to each other at a Saturday night Sunday School dance by Laurence's good friend Frank Derbyshire. They married in 1950, with Frank naturally asked to take the role of Laurence's best man. The family was completed by the births of Howard in 1950 and Brenda in 1957. Life continued in Gee Cross, Hyde until they moved, first to Higham Lane and finally in 1984 to a bungalow in Romiley in Stockport.

Happiness did not always come easily to Laurence, but these were happy years. Laurence and Mary threw themselves into the Community Theatre, where Laurence's skills were used to make the sets, and Mary helped with costume-making. His talents extended to gardening, and his green fingers resulted in lovely displays – all in regimented rows, of course, as befitted his personality. In later

years Laurence became treasurer of the Hyde Probus Club, a role he carried out for seven years to his usual high standard. He enjoyed playing snooker and bowls, and his love of playing football as a youth turned into a television spectator sport, with him hedging his bets by supporting three teams: Manchester City, Manchester United, and, for some reason, Chelsea.

Sadly, Mary developed dementia, and Laurence took on the role of carer, looking after his wife for several years. His life changed once more when he moved in with you, his family, which led to challenging times for you all.

Nevertheless, Brenda is certain that Laurence knew that you all cared for him, and he did appreciate it. He was, in essence, an honest, fair, decent, and kind man, who was able to show great generosity and love to his grandchildren. He found pleasure in ordinary things, and a perfect day for Laurence might have gone like this: tinkering quietly on his latest project or task, perhaps elevenses of rich fruit cake, and then lunch out with Mary and friends, where he might choose traditional meat and two veg, followed by rice pudding with the skin on. He would fit in a bit of a snooze, and perhaps watch some sport on television, before heading out to watch a theatre production, where he could admire the set he had made and know that it would easily last as long as the play would run for. These simple pleasures are where Laurence found his happiness.

Laurence was known in the family as “Mr Fix It”. But he did more than fix things. He made cupboards, wardrobes, and room partitions, and he also made beautiful toys for Rosie and Jonathan, such as a wooden tricycle that lasted thirteen years. Everything he made stood the test of time. Brenda chose the following poem because it reminded her so well of Laurence’s personality and his skills that he possibly inherited from his father.

POEM: Atlas by UA Fanthorpe

There is a kind of love called maintenance
Which stores the WD40 and knows when to use it;
Which checks the insurance, and doesn't forget
The milkman; which remembers to plant bulbs;
Which answers letters; which knows the way
The money goes; which deals with dentists
And Road Fund Tax and meeting trains,
And postcards to the lonely; which upholds
The permanently rickety elaborate
Structures of living, which is Atlas.
And maintenance is the sensible side of love,
Which knows what time and weather are doing
To my brickwork; insulates my faulty wiring;
Laughs at my dry rotten jokes; remembers
My need for gloss and grouting; which keeps

My suspect edifice upright in air,

As Atlas did the sky.

We have been remembering the life of Laurence Oldham. His life was not always easy or particularly happy, and this posed challenges for him and for you, his family. If you can take something away from that, perhaps it should be that in his memory you should live your lives vigorously and beautifully. By doing that you give respect and dignity to Laurence because you know that you respect and dignify life, and live your life to the fullest. The best of all answers to death is the continuing affirmation of life. It is now almost time to leave and for you to continue with your lives knowing that you looked after Laurence in the best way that you could until his final day.