

# A celebration of life

# Raymond John Lyon

19th July 1933 – 5th November 2019

Breckland Crematorium, Scoulton, Norfolk.

Tuesday, 26th November 2019

*a personal goodbye*

Humanist  
*Ceremonies*

Some might say that Ray Lyon had an ordinary life, but there is no such thing as an ordinary life. Ray's life may not have made headline news, but he didn't need to have climbed mountains, conquered a life-threatening illness, or endured some extreme challenge to be extraordinary.

In every life there is triumph over adversity, obstacles overcome, moments of insight and clarity, wisdom formed from experience, and, most importantly, a unique perspective. Look around the entire world and there will be no one like Ray Lyon, just as there will be no one like you or me. And that is extraordinary, not ordinary. Ray Lyon was unique, and he is at the centre of this ceremony today.

I did not meet Ray, but, with help from some of you, we will now hear a little of Ray's life and the type of person he was.

Ray was born to parents Vera and John in St Mary's Maternity Hospital, Croydon. At the beginning of the 1930's, a three-storey purpose-built block was built on the corner of St James Road and Lodge Road. It had 32 beds, each with its own cot. This was where life began for Ray. His early years were spent growing up in Croydon, with his younger sister Yvonne.

In 1940, when Ray was just seven years old, Croydon was busy with factories and warehouses clustered around Croydon Airport, which had just been converted into a frontline Royal Air Force fighter station. It was the beginning of five years of bombing attacks and aerial dogfights in the skies above the town that culminated in raids by Hitler's secret weapons, the V-rockets. Living in London was an enormous risk during those times, and Ray became one of the many evacuees, at first being sent to Brighton, until it was realised that it wasn't safe there either, so at some point Ray was moved to Wales. Around 110,000 children were sent to

Wales during this period, and rumours that they brought germs, lice, and disease would have undoubtedly affected the welcome they got from some people.

During his time in Wales, Ray worked on a farm with his Mum, growing crops and working with pigs and cattle. Ray's childhood was not easy. He was required to work hard, and his education was disrupted. It is not possible to know what he may have achieved if things had been easier, but for Ray it meant that his jobs were always physical ones. His first "proper" job was working on a building site.

He went on to work at Payne's Chocolate Factory in Croydon, where those lovely boxes of Poppets were made, and he worked at Thornton's, too. He spent time working as a security guard at the local shopping centre in Croydon, but his main role, where he seemed to find his niche, was working for twenty one years as a porter at the Queen Mary's Hospital for Children. Ray spent many years working nights, and he adjusted to the shift pattern well. It was whilst working here that Ray met Jennifer. She was working in the hospital laundry, and Ray obviously took a shine to her and wanted to be remembered because, on one occasion, he reversed the lorry he was driving further back into the laundry entrance than he should have done – almost peeling the lorry roof back on the low entrance in the process. Ray apparently drove a wider variety of vehicles than anyone else considering he only had a motorbike licence!

Ray had three marriages, with children Simon and Anthony from his second marriage, and Teresa, Nick, Kerry, and Richard from his third. With six children of his own, foster children during his second marriage, and working amongst children at the hospital, it is no surprise that Ray was the type of person who put others before himself. As a Dad, Ray was fair and very funny. He had a great sense of humour, and was a mixture of Norman Wisdom and Del Boy, with a laugh very similar to Sid

James. He was a fair and generous man, with an “open door” policy at his house. He offered his home to anyone who needed a place to stay, and, at different times, Ray had his sister, her husband, and their three children living with him. Even as adults, if his children needed him, he was there for them.

Ray’s time spent on the farm Wales, and the need to make every penny count for his family, led to his children growing up with chickens and rabbits, which were reared at their home to keep them all fed. Ray’s knowledge of livestock wasn’t what you might call expert. He once bought twenty chickens from the local market, but they unfortunately turned out to be cockerels!

Ray was the type of person who was always active and on the go. He was a true grafter. He would often finish a night shift, get home at 6am, get the children ready for school, and, after a short sleep, would then do extra part-time work during the day. Apparently, if Ray wasn’t moving he was either asleep or unwell, and once sadly worked himself to the point of exhaustion.

Dogs were always a big part of family life. Unsurprisingly, Ray would often be walking the dog at 4am. The German Shepherd from Ray’s time as a security guard lived in the family home, and spent his retirement years with the family. The appropriately named Satan had failed in his career as a police dog because he was scared of guns, but he did his job in security well, and also protected the family. Ray was able to walk him off the lead, although it is likely that Satan was responsible for the loss of a couple of rabbits and chickens.

It was the ordinary things in life that Ray enjoyed. A typical Saturday afternoon routine would be eating fish and chips, with the boys sharing the fish because a full cod was too expensive, whilst watching the wrestling on television – this was in the days of Big Daddy and Giant Haystacks. Richard remembers similar times spent watching boxing matches on television.

Ray had never been interested in travelling abroad, and he never owned a passport. Family holidays were spent in Norfolk, either camping or at places like Butlin’s. Jennifer’s Mum lived in Great Yarmouth, and these visits were what led to Ray and Jennifer leaving Croydon to spend their retirement in Lyng. It wasn’t retirement in the strict sense of the word because Richard was still only eight years old and Ray was still very much a parent.

As the years went by Ray continued to keep busy by doing gardening jobs for neighbours and tending his own garden, particularly his roses. Ray and Jennifer settled well into Lyng. They were active in the community and well-known and liked by neighbours. Ray wasn’t much of a pub goer, but did like The Mermaid at Elsing, where he enjoyed the occasional meal. He was not impressed by the pudding menu, though, because there was no option for his favourite – rhubarb crumble. Ray enjoyed traditional meals – “None of that foreign muck” – and, although not particularly interested in food, Ray did have a liking for proper pork pie with jelly and baked beans.

A “hobby” that endured throughout Ray’s life was smoking. He wasn’t fussy about which brand – John Player Special, Black Cat, or Red Players – whichever was the cheapest. The dangers of smoking are well known now, but when Ray was a child everyone smoked – it was considered to be good for you. Sometimes actors posing as doctors were used in adverts actually recommending that smoking a “fresh cigarette” would benefit your health. So, it is no surprise that Ray was a smoker from about the age of eight years’ old.

Another hobby or passion Ray was for the three-wheeler Robin Reliant car. Ray had a succession of these cars, and, as far as he was concerned, they were up to any task he required. He had a trailer made (larger than the car itself), which he would fill with lawnmowers, strimmers, and gardening

tools, which he would then hitch up to the car and tow around from job to job. Not content with expecting the car to take on this task, Ray would sometimes take the children along in the back of the car, too. He once hit a pheasant whilst driving, and rolled the three-wheeler down a steep bank into a ditch. Suffering from concussion but undeterred, Ray picked himself up, and walked all the way home.

Sadly, Ray's health declined in recent years, and he had no option but to slow down. He accepted that things needed to change, and, instead of rushing around, he spent more time relaxing and watching films on television. Following one of his hospital admissions, Ray knew that he needed to be cared for and looked after by people who loved him. He lived with Richard and Hayley for the last eighteen months of his life. Richard became Ray's full time carer, and Hayley could always be guaranteed to raise a smile from Ray, who regarded her as a daughter. Even during his final hospital stay, Ray continued to smile, made the nurses laugh, and gave everyone a thumbs-up if he was unable to talk. Ray remained content and happy until he died peacefully at the Norfolk & Norwich Hospital on 5th November 2019.

We have been celebrating the life of Ray Lyon. He leaves behind his children, grandchildren, and great grandchild. The ripples from Ray's life will continue with these people, and with all the generations that follow. Ray was a man who lived his life honestly, who worked hard, who had simple pleasures, and who loved his family.