

A celebration of life

Frank Guilfoyle

12 January 1936 – 8 January 2020

Monday 27 January 2020, Wakefield Crematorium



a personal goodbye

Humanist
Ceremonies

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Frank was born on 12th January 1936 and brought up by his mum Mary and his stepdad, Joe, as his own father died when he was only young. As one of fourteen children, times were pretty tough; Frank used to joke that if he didn't sit down to eat his dinner as soon as it was served, someone else would. He did end up spending some time staying in Flanshaw Lodge as a teenager, but that spell successfully steered him away from mischief, and left him with friendships that lasted a lifetime. He formed a strong bond with the matron who looked after him there, Lucy, as well as her daughter, Caroline, continuing to visit them throughout his life.

Frank completed his education at the local Catholic school, but there was no question of him staying on for further studies. In fact, he finished school on the Friday, his mum took him straight to get a pair of long trousers, and he started work on the Saturday, as apprentice projectionist at The Playhouse. They had to get him a box to stand on so he could see properly. He went on to make deliveries for Hagenbach's Bakery, and it was at that point that he first met Renee. Frank was seventeen, Renee just sixteen, and on that initial encounter, at the fair in Wakefield, Renee said Frank gave a great first impression: well-spoken, polite, didn't swear and called his dad 'Pater'; she was sure he must be from a very well-to-do family! That impression was dispelled a few weeks later, on Christmas Eve, when Frank was running late for their date at the pictures; he had to pick Renee up in the delivery van and she ended up round at his house, surrounded by more kids than she could count.

Frank and Renee had only been courting a matter of weeks when Frank was called up for his National Service. He spent three years in the Royal Army Service Corps, spending much of his time in Germany, as commander of a section of diesel trucks, and achieving a promotion to corporal. Frank was rightly proud of his service record, though he never talked much about his time in the army, instead just dropping such little gems of information as, 'Parachuting's just like falling off the back of a lorry,' into conversation in years to come. Frank met his closest friend in the army – Mervin – and the two of them often spent their leave together down with Mervin's family in Berkshire. But of course, Frank also came home when he could, to see his sweetheart.

He and Renee wrote to each other all through their years apart, got engaged as soon as Frank was demobbed from the army and married on 22nd February 1958. They had managed to get a little cottage of their own, in Ossett, so, though they couldn't afford a honeymoon, they happily retreated there after the wedding. They had some happy times in that home, even if it did still have an outside toilet, and it was there that they welcomed David to the world.

Life hadn't been straightforward for Frank after he came out of the army; he suffered from blackouts, which meant he was considered medically unfit to drive or use heavy machinery, resulting in him losing his job at Crystal Springs. He spent nine months off work, though he didn't waste any of that time; Renee said for those nine months he took exceptional care of her, kept the cottage spotless and had all her meals ready when she came home from work. It must have been so frustrating for him, though, as Frank was a real grafter and had left the army with a glowing reference from his commanding officer, which read:

'Corporal Guilfoyle was well-liked and respected by his fellow-NCOs and the men under him, as well as by his officers. Industrious and dependable...he is of above average intelligence and I am sure he will do well in his civilian career.'

In the end it was Freddie Bennett of George Bennett & Son who set him on and gave him a chance; Frank started off filling coal sacks, and later began delivering them, once he had the all-clear from the doctor. It was at Meakin's in Leeds that he gained his HGV licence and became a long-distance lorry driver; luckily, Frank was always happy in his own company, so it never worried him, being away from home for days at a time. But he was a homebird at heart, and always glad to get back to Renee and his expanding family.

After moving to 42 Wood Street, Frank and Renee had their daughter, Diane, and then their youngest son, Mike. Six months later they moved across the road to number 63, which remained the family home ever since. The kids got used to their dad being away through the week, but he made his presence felt when he was home, and could be pretty strict with them all. There were a number of years, when Mike was a teenager, when Frank was not present in their lives at all, as he and Renee separated and then divorced. But, via the tortuous paths life sometimes takes us on, the two of them came together again eight years later. Renee said Frank always was the love of her life – there would never have been another – and starting again on a fresh footing never brought her a single moment's regret. They married for the second time on 7th February 1987, though Renee still didn't get her honeymoon!

Frank and Mervin always maintained their friendship even after leaving the army, and, every Easter, Frank, Renee and the kids would pile into the car he had hired and set off early on the Sunday to get down there in time for a fabulous roast dinner laid on by Mervin's wife, Mary. Mervin and Mary gave them such a warm welcome, Renee said they always treated them like the King and Queen when they visited, and they welcomed Mike to live with them for a while, too. Renee and Frank continued to visit all their years and supported Mervin when Mary passed away five years ago. Those trips down south also took Frank near to many of the great racehorse trainers of the day; he was a huge fan of horse-racing, and so was delighted to be invited to look round the premises of great trainers such as Henrietta Knight.

Between those Easter trips down south and their visits to Blackpool in the autumn, Frank and Renee were happy to keep their holidays within the borders of England. They would often take a caravan on the east coast, where Renee would have them out walking miles, until Frank complained he always came home six inches shorter than he set out. But they did make it abroad in the end, to Tenerife for Renee's 60th. Renee decided it wasn't really her cup of tea, but Frank was in his element, sitting in the sun with his brandy and dry, his cigar and a smile. You wouldn't catch him sitting for long at home, though; he would much rather be nacking at his woodwork. Frank had his shed set up lovely, all his tools laid out, and he produced anything from bird tables to radiator covers in there, as well as helping out friends and neighbours and doing odd jobs from hanging doors to putting up fences. Everyone knew him in the area; it used to take him two hours to walk on and fetch the paper, there were so many people he'd to stop and chat to.

After years driving long-haul, Frank came back to work more locally, often delivering toiletries round the different Gibb's factory sites; he would park his lorry down the road from home, at Sally's Café, and earned the nickname of 'The Sure man' as he always had a ready supply of products for sale at a knock-down price. He finished up driving for Sims & Sons, retiring at the age of sixty on the grounds of his health, though even then he still worked on different projects with Mike, including collecting the last census from the local army camps. Frank had had struggles with his back over the years; one family holiday to Cornwall was nearly scuppered when he put his back out and ended up in hospital, but a concoction from a local medical man got him up and moving again and saved the holiday. Frank used to like swimming as it eased his back, going with Mike to Dewsbury Baths, and the two of them also enjoyed going down to Frank's local, The Boot & Shoe, for Sunday lunchtime opening, and to play the fruit machines.

Frank never won much on those machines (unlike Mike!), but then he never won much through his favourite pastime either: betting on the horses. He liked nothing better than settling down, again with a drink and a cigar, to watch the horse racing, and took the placing of his bets very seriously, even if they were only small ones. It's probably a good job they were, as he hardly ever won a penny, but the racing brought him a lot of pleasure over the years. David used to run him to the bookies after he gave up his driving licence, and one year Diane treated her dad and brothers, and David's son, Brett, to a day at Wetherby Races, so Frank could see the action in the flesh. As Brett recalls, his grandad's luck was in that day at least, as Frank was the only one of them to win anything.

Frank welcomed his children's other halves, Julie, Richard and Liz, into the family – Liz credits him with converting her to brandy and dry ginger too – and he was a doting grandad not just to Brett, but also to JP, Lisa, Philip and, most recently, Maddison, as well as being a great-grandad to Ethan and Evan. Frank was always really good with kids, seemed to be on their wavelength, and loved to see the young ones, perhaps taking the chance to catch up on a bit of what he missed when his own children were growing up and he was out on the road so much. Diane would often bring JP and Lisa round to play after school when they were younger, and continued with her own grandson, Evan, bringing him two or three times a week in recent years. Ethan would also come after school, and still does come and stay every Wednesday night, much to his great-grandparents' delight. And Frank and Maddie developed a really special bond; from the moment she could walk, she would charge to her grandad the second she got through the door, ignoring everyone else, and her visits kept Frank going at the end, brightening his day even when he was feeling really unwell.

Frank brightened all of your days while he was here, and he will continue to do so through the stories you tell of him. Each of you is missing this loving, caring, gentle man, but none more so than his sweetheart, Renee. She told me all Frank wanted to do was to make her laugh – even when he was ill he would find the energy to do or say something daft to raise a smile from her – and she knows he would have given her anything she wanted. Renee counts herself lucky to have had the bonus of an extra 32 years of happily married life with Frank, and you can all count yourselves lucky, too, to have had him in your lives.