

A celebration of life

Robert 'Bob' Gaskell

30 September 1943 – 4 August 2020

20 August 2020, Pontefract Crematorium



a personal goodbye

Humanist
Ceremonies

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Bob was born and bred in Pontefract, arriving on 30th September 1943 and joining his parents, Joseph and Minnie, and his siblings, Eric and the twins, Rita and Peter. His wasn't the easiest of childhoods – his mum died when he was just seven, and his dad worked nights, and worked hard, to keep his family together – but Bob still found time for plenty of mischief and fun in between his chores.

At fifteen he went down the pit at the Prince of Wales Colliery. He was there for a few years, and his favourite thing about the job was the pit ponies; he always laughed about them pinching his snap right out of his pocket. When he wasn't working, Bob would be out with his mates, and often Peter as well, resplendent in his teddy boy get-up: smart suit and quiff. So he made quite an impression on the night he first met Margaret in the Courier's Arms; she told me he looked very handsome. Bob used to take Margaret to the pictures, or for a walk in the park, as well as plying her with gin and tonics in his efforts to impress!

They fell in love, and married on 29th December 1962. As newly-weds they lived with Bob's dad and then Margaret's mum, before getting their own place on Willow Park, the house that remained Bob's home for the rest of life. Bob was delighted to become a dad to Kevin, David and Maureen, and he worked hard to support his family, doing whatever was needed. At various times he worked on the railway, in manufacturing and on a pig farm (Margaret remembers making him strip off on the back step the day he fell in the slurry pit!). He ended up flour-milling at Kings Mills, and used to joke about starting his working life coming home black with coal dust, and ending it coming home white from the flour. Bob always made a lot of friends wherever he worked, and was well-respected by his colleagues, particularly at Kings Mills, where he was union rep for a good while and even went to Parliament as a representative.

In his downtime, Bob enjoyed a sociable drink at Willow Park Club, and the whole family would go on club trips to the coast when the children were small, Bob, like the other men, kitted out in suit and tie for the beach. When they got a car, Bob loved to take a drive out in the countryside, and they would often head to the Dales for caravan holidays with the kids and dogs. He loved his dogs, and he and Margaret had Yorkies for many years, even breeding them a couple of times. In fact, Bob had a love for all animals, and on those drives through the countryside would always pull over to guide home cows or sheep who had gone astray. And back when he was younger, Bob had quite the smallholding down on his allotment, keeping chickens and pigs, and even a goat, which he would bring home on a lead to eat the grass down in the garden.

Maureen remembers her dad heading out Christmas shopping for herself and her brothers when they were young; Bob would get in the festive spirit, literally, enjoying a few drinks on the way round the shops, so by the time he came home he would be in an expansive mood and promptly hand out the presents he had just bought. Still, that gave him a good excuse to again! Of course, sometimes he came home with less welcome gifts, like the huge windmill he brought back from Knottingley Carnival one year and erected in the front garden; quite the landmark on Willow Park! Maureen

was young enough to be rather taken with it, but, as teenagers, Kevin and David were naturally horribly embarrassed and even tried to set light to it at one point, to get rid of the thing!

Bob kept himself busy at home with all sorts of DIY and making toys for the children, and of course, tinkering with cars. Kevin, especially, shared his fascination with motors, and they would while away many happy hours together in the pit in Bob's garage. Bob was happy to tackle major projects, converting a Transit van to a campervan once the children were grown up; he was really proud of his handiwork (and equally pleased that it had saved him a bob or two), and he and Margaret had some lovely trips to the Dales or the coast in it, just the two of them.

Bob watched his children grow up, and welcomed their partners into the family; after David and Rachel moved to Orkney, Bob and Margaret went up to visit them several times, and Bob loved it up in the far north. Maureen and Andy live a bit closer to home, and so Maureen would be round all the time, especially after she became a mum. Bob could not wait to be a grandad, and he was over the moon to end up being one five times over, to Matthew, Adam, Emily, Scott and Courtney, as well as a great-grandad in turn, to nine!

Bob had had to retire early on the grounds of his health, but that at least meant that he was at home and able to spend time with his grandchildren in a way he had not had chance to with his own kids. He could be silly with them, make them laugh and not worry about looking daft. He built a tractor out of wood big enough for them to sit in, and enjoyed taking the little ones out or having them to stay. Though Maureen still remembers the New Year's Eve when her mum and dad babysat, and she and Andy came home the next day to find Matthew and Adam tied to their chairs! (The joke was Bob's idea, obviously.) Matthew and Adam recall how they enjoyed and valued their time spent with Grandad on days out and vacations when they were younger and also in more recent years. They will always cherish these memories. Emily remembers how she loved to visit her nana and grandad straight from school and have sleepovers; Grandad was always happy to drive her from A to B whenever she asked.

Bob also relished visits from his great-grandchildren, who all seemed to know his weakness; Charlie is only two, but whenever he asked his grandma for an ice lolly, he would always get one for Bob too! And Ellie had this to say:

'Grandad Bob was always laughing and joking with us and would sing funny songs. On seaside trips he would always want two ice creams, one was never enough. We would laugh and run away when he took out his false teeth and try to give them to us.'

Bob and Margaret continued to enjoy their holidays around the UK, often going with Maureen and Andy; Andy would drive them all to a cottage anywhere from Norfolk to Llandudno, Scotland to Devon, and Bob still loved to get out and explore the

surrounding area, wherever they stayed. Andy also did a lot of chauffeuring for Bob to his hospital appointments more recently, and was very close to his father-in-law.

Bob's health did deteriorate in the last few years, especially since Kevin's death, which was a huge blow for him and all the family. Margaret was devoted in looking after him, and was determined to keep him at home, where he wanted to be. Maureen and Andy were obviously on hand for support, but Margaret also wanted to thank Bob's carers from Victoria Home Care; they were so lovely with him, and he loved to see them. It was especially touching when two of the carers would sing to or dance with Bob; his love of country music stuck with him even as his dementia progressed, so Margaret continued to play him his Jim Reeves cassettes, right to the end, hence the music we came into today.

In the weeks, months and years to come, it may be the strains of Jim Reeves that bring Bob to mind, or a view over the Dales where previously he stood by your side, or perhaps when his great-grandson clamours for an ice lolly; or his memory may surprise you in the least expected of places. But wherever and whenever you think of him, he will always be with each of you, who love him.