

A celebration of life

Keith Antony Harris

19th October 1953 – 24th October 2020

10.45 am, Friday 6th November, East Devon Crematorium



a personal goodbye

Humanist
Ceremonies

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Keith grew up in the village of Halton, just outside Lancaster. His parents, Larry and Barbara, worked full time shifts at the local mill so his grandparents, particularly his Nana, were key figures in his upbringing. His aunt and uncle, Dot and Ken, and their children Andrea and Roger, lived two doors away; Roger was more of a brother than a cousin to Keith.

After primary school Keith won a place at Lancaster Grammar School where he and Roger met Martin - and the three became friends for life.

He made a faltering start at university having taken 'A' levels a year early. His mother had died when he was 15 which must have been deeply unsettling. He left Warwick after a year, starting again at Lanchester Polytechnic in Coventry.

After graduating, he travelled, taking the hippy trail to India and then taught English to Iranian air force cadets until the Shah was toppled and, fair haired, he left in a hurry. He spent some time in the States before returning to Coventry where he met Gill, who was in her second year at the poly. They were introduced by a mutual friend. They hung out at a local park where Gill was a park keeper in the holidays. Keith laughingly observed that everyone was talking about the two of them so he suggested that they gave them something to talk about. Gill still has the bottle of Black Tower wine they drank on their first date in Coventry's only wine bar!

They lived together in Gill's one bedroom flat with its single bed, outside loo and no hot water until Ellen was on the way, when they were re-housed. They were married on midsummer's day June 1980 and Ellen arrived in the October.

The wedding was the longest day in more ways than one as Gill was in hospital with a threatened miscarriage. A nurse accompanied her to the Register Office but she missed the reception and Keith had to cope alone. They then spent their honeymoon in Neasdon in Roger's flat, Gill sleeping in the bed and Keith on the floor, a highlight being a trip to Brighton in the rain.

They moved to Exmouth in 1982 where Keith started a career with Royal Mail moving up through the ranks from the counter to top management. Joel was born in 1983 and several moves later, Elijah arrived in 1991 in the Midlands before they settled in Market Bosworth, a base for much commuting for Keith.

Keith took early voluntary redundancy during a major restructuring exercise and after some gardening leave (which didn't involve any gardening) he joined the Learning & Skills Council. He didn't enjoy it much but was very committed to its core purpose. He was always good at what he did: empathetic where needed but never reluctant to tell it like it was. He certainly didn't tolerate fools gladly. He was well liked and respected.

And then retirement when he was 60 and a move back to Budleigh Salterton which he loved. Now there was more time for making music and other interests. During their time in Budleigh, both Keith and Gill volunteered at the Budleigh Film Society. They enjoyed the local countryside and the sea, walking with their dogs, firstly, Monty, more recently, Tommy. Keith was also keen on birdwatching down by the River Otter.

I'm going to leave Ellen to talk about music, camping, cooking and family - and more besides.



Our Memories of Dad - Ellen, his daughter

On behalf of our family, I would like to begin by thanking everyone who is here today and for those who have sent their condolences and love. We have received countless phone calls, emails, texts, flowers, meals and thoughts. These have both been comforting during this difficult time and also a reminder of the huge impact that Dad had on so many.

Finding the words that fully capture and portray how wonderful a husband, dad, Grandad, and friend he was is impossible; our words won't measure up and as ever, we only want to make him proud. Dad wouldn't have wanted any fuss and the attention that he's going to get today; he would say 'Give over' or 'I wouldn't thank you for it' but we're going to carry on regardless!

As Jenny mentioned, Dad grew up in Halton with his big extended family living nearby. He would play out on the green, roaming the local countryside and river. He would get up to mischief, often coming home very mucky, battered and bruised whereas, according to Dad, 'our Roger' never did! Mum can remember Auntie Dot saying fondly, 'Our Keith, he'd get dirty in the bath!'.

Mum and Dad met in 1979. Infatuated with each other - it was love at first sight! After a whirlwind romance, they married in June 1980 and I was born in October. Coventry was home before moving to Exmouth and then Budleigh where Dad began his long and successful career with Royal Mail. Joel was born in Exeter in 1983 and not long after, Dad was fast tracked and promoted. We moved to Bournemouth and later Southwell in Nottinghamshire where Elijah was born in 1991. Our last move was to Market Bosworth in Leicestershire where he later became a much-loved Grandad to Harry and Ben. However, holidays to the coast and regular visits to East Devon to visit family only deepened Mum and Dad's love of the sea and when he retired, the natural next move was for them both to return to Budleigh. They moved back in October 2014 and couldn't have been happier. They rekindled friendships and made new ones and very quickly, Dad threw himself into the local music scene, enjoying the outdoors and establishing and enjoying the produce of his and Steve's homemade Black Dog Brewing Company!

Dad was a highly eloquent, intelligent man and a lifelong socialist. Sensitive to our needs, he always gave sound advice. He was private but so generous with his time, affection and support for his family, friends and the local community. He became a Trustee at the Intercom Trust, a local LGBT+ charity, after attending Exmouth Pride with Eli and Mum.

Dad liked to plan - lists were a favourite, naming ingredients for a meal or jobs to be done that day. But he was always careful to not plan too much, ensuring enough 'down time' as he called it, to read his book, do the Guardian or a quick round of Scrabble on his phone with Mum, Joel or Elijah. He had a brilliant sense of humour - early memories involve sharing jokes from Joel's Haha Bonk Joke book and entertaining us with tricks such as his Eric Morcombe's paper bag trick! Dad was witty but dry with it! He also loved to have the last say! In June, Mum compiled a playlist of memorable songs to celebrate their 40-year wedding anniversary only for Dad to edit and tweak it upon receipt!

Dad had many loves in life as many of you will be aware but for us, there are a few that really stand out.

Dad loved the sea. He spoke fondly of night-time fishing trips with Mitch and breaks away with Roger and Martin. Early family holidays were spent on the North

Cornwall coast, camping and caravanning. I remember him sleeping with the car keys in his sleeping bag when the weather was terrible - just in case the tent blew off the cliff! We've often laughed about a frightening boat trip out of Padstow harbour - we loved it; mum and dad hated every minute. We laughed at amateur dramatics with the Padstow Players and tip toeing around 'Cornish edible slugs' as Dad called them, on the coastal paths - I never could eat a mushroom following that holiday!

After Elijah was born, we enjoyed holidays in France, Eurocamping. We would practise our French at the market, sample the local produce and get to know the locals - slightly too well on one occasion when Dad led our canoe trip on the Dordogne through a naturist camp! More recently Mum and Dad shared their love of the Scillies with us. Memories of us all aboard the 8 seater plane flying off the edge of the Cornish cliff and 'chartering' a vessel to St Martin's for Fish and Chips at Adams will always stay with us! Dad loved the Scillies: the bird life; the landscape and the trappings of island life! Holidays were a time for getting to know the culture - Mum and Dad would spend time daily using an app to learn the local language. They'd both be prepared, for example 'escritorio en tu oficina?' - do you have a desk in your office? Or more helpfully 'Dos cervezas por favor' - two beers please! They enjoyed recent holidays in Germany, Kefalonia and La Gomera, however Dad loved nothing more than breaks away with Mum and Tommy, the dog in their campervan, enjoying the outdoors and exploring together their favourite spots in Cornwall.

He was a great cook with a love of flavour with an interest in many cuisines. As children, we would always enjoy a family meal on Sunday, this was rarely traditional fare. Meals would always be a slow, relaxed affair with the focus on spending time together. There were never any left-overs; we would watch eagle-eyed as Dad measured up and divvied out the seconds - he would always joke that he needed a ruler and a set square for the job! There would be music in the background and following the meal, Joel, Eli and myself would entertain with pre-choreographed dance routines out of the kitchen pantry! Particular favourites included Swan Lake and The Sugar Plum Fairy! His love of cooking and food has continued into retirement with Dad taking great enjoyment and relaxation from it. We will all hold onto memories of him cooking in the corner of the kitchen, tea towel slung over his shoulder with his work space tidy and in order - a strategy that much to his annoyance, none of the rest of the family could live up to! At the right time, Dad would ask 'is it time to open the bar?' and we would enjoy a beer and a nibble as we

chatted. On the occasion that any of us would cook, we would do so knowing that Dad would be peering over our shoulder, watching and tasting as if we were on the set of Masterchef! He would always praise and enjoy our cooking, but also gently suggesting how or what to add differently next time!

As many of you know, Dad was a great fan of sport, particularly football and cricket, a love that is shared by his family and grandchildren. Dad was a life-long, passionate Manchester Utd fan. Dad loved watching live football and would take us to see games as we grew up, including Nottingham Forest, Burnley with Grandad, Leicester City, Manchester United and more recently The Grecians, Exeter City. Dad would also enjoy watching United on TV with mum, checking the latest news on the BBC Sport app and relaying his frustrations, passion and tactics through the family football whats app group with Joel and Eli! Dad also tried his hand as a football manager, managing Joel's football team when Joel was a child. He led them to great success, a promotion and a cup win in their first season. It was a tough job though, Dad often joked that Alex Ferguson wouldn't have had the same issues appeasing the parents! He showed the same love and interest in his grandchildren's football, talking tactics with them on the phone.

Dad played cricket for Withycombe Raleigh, then later opened the batting for Fiskerton although the highest score that Joel can remember is around 40! He toured many of the big grounds, watching cricket with Joel, Elijah and other family and friends. The contents of the carefully planned picnic was an important feature of the day! Often whilst gardening or cooking he would be listening to Test Match Special. Joel remembers sitting in the car with Dad on holiday, eagerly awaiting wickets together whilst the rest of the family were enjoying the beach! More recently, cricket had moved to low tide at Orcambe Point for games with the family and Tommy, the dog!

Other than Mum and his family, his biggest love was music - listening to it and playing it. He was an excellent guitarist, self-taught, with a natural talent and awareness for pitch and rhythm. Him and Mum loved singing along and dancing to many of the greats including The Stones, Dylan, The Beach Boys, The Beatles, The Band and Bowie. Our earliest memories of music in the family was not of Wheels on the Bus but of these great artists being played in the car going on holiday. We would all have a part, whether a harmony, playing the drum on our knees, air guitar and always with dad playing piano on the dashboard as we travelled down the

motorway - singing our hearts out along the way! We never went anywhere without a good collection of albums although disaster did strike in 1993 during our first holiday abroad. The night before we were due to go away, the house was flooded. Mum and Dad spent the entire following day ripping out all the carpets and furniture before we caught the overnight ferry to France. Whilst our house was on the front page of the local paper for being submerged in a foot of sewage water, we discovered that the only cassette that we had with us was my copy of Now 23 with the likes of East 17 and Enya! A double disaster!

Dad's love of guitar was always present - we would always be able to hear him playing somewhere in the house. He inspired us all to play the guitar, including his Grandson, Harry. We have always enjoyed a family singalong with dad playing the leading role! His love of playing led him helping to form the Harlequin Strummers and The Allsorts String Band. Teresa from The Harlequin Strummers spoke of the encouragement he gave to other band members, his talent and the way Dad kept them all in time! She reminded us of Dad's strong belief that their music was to entertain those most in need, bringing pleasure to many residents of care homes and raising money for local charities. We were amazed that as a group, they have raised over £4000 for local charities and are hugely thankful for their very generous donation of £600 to Hospiscare at Home in Dad's memory. As many of you are aware, Hospiscare at Home supported us in bringing Dad home for a few days after he left hospital enabling us to have a few precious days with him and a family sing-song on his birthday!

To the very end, Dad took great pleasure in playing and listening to music. Whilst in the hospice, he played his guitar, singing along with other patients and staff. In his final days, he spoke of a gig that he thought he was planning and in celebration of his life and to give thanks to the exceptional and compassionate care from the Hospiscare at Home team and staff at the Hospice at Exeter, we are planning to hold that gig - something we hope that you will all join us at when Covid is over.

Mum and Dad are like no other couple I know. Their 40-year marriage was built on a wicked sense of humour, respect and understanding and above all, love and laughter; they were best of friends. Dad loved Mum, his family and friends and together, we have many wonderful stories and memories to share and look back on. His illness came as a huge shock to us all, however in the very short time that he was unwell, Dad held onto his brilliant sense of humour, he spent time with his

family and closest friends and continued to play his guitar and enjoy his music. He had very little awareness of being ill or what was to come and we all took comfort in this. Dad's wisdom, kindness, generosity, love and touch of stubbornness will live on in all of us and never be forgotten. But to finish with his own words, after coming out of hospital and planning our together, he said 'Let's hope for a day filled with banter and badinage!' We will hold that close and ensure that we live everyday with him in our hearts and stay true to that mantra. We love you Dad.



Dear Dad by Elijah, his son

You were love and support

You were truth and wisdom

You were better than Morecambe and Wise.

Together you and mum taught us how to find our way,
helped us grow into our edges and beyond.

You will never truly be gone.

We are pulling all that you are to our chests and we won't ever
let go.

You are love and support

You are truth and wisdom

You will always be better than Morecambe and Wise.

Keith – a tribute by his cousin, Roger Mason

In the summer of 1969, Keith, Martin and I set off on our first holiday without the grown-ups. Keith was fifteen, Martin and I sixteen. We were going camping in Ireland and we had planned it carefully. We booked the train, the ferry and the campsite. We hired a tent from a shop in Lancaster. It was a canvas ridge tent with wooden poles, and it weighed a ton.

We set off from Lancaster Castle station in the early evening, changed at Crewe, and arrived at Holyhead in good time to board the night ferry. I have a vague memory of drunken men sleeping on the staircase that led down to the bar, and the bar floor awash with beer. We staggered off the ferry at Dún Laoghaire in the early morning, lugging the tent between us, and eventually found a bus that took us close to the campsite in Blackrock.

We quickly settled in and for the first few days mostly just wandered along the coast to Dalkey and Killiney, then still quiet villages. We saw some nuns swimming in the sea. We drank Guinness and Smithwick's in pubs, and ate a very good three course lunch in a cafe for five shillings (25p).

One day we took the train up to Dublin. In Woolworth's Keith caught sight of a handsome sunburst guitar. He had money in his pocket and it only cost £5. He carried it proudly around the city for the rest of day. He didn't know how to play the guitar, or how to tune it, but he knew how to hold it, and it looked cool. He was soon strumming it nonchalantly, sitting in front of the tent.

Three girls from Northern Ireland, who were camping nearby with their uncle, walked past and stopped to admire the guitar, and to engage us in some banter. Once they had established that we weren't Catholics, they said they would come back later when their uncle was in bed. They arrived with torches in the dark and joined us in our tent for a snogging session. The guitar was already working its magic.

The guitar survived the journey home. Keith soon learned some chords and some tunes. When his dad was on the late shift, I would spend the evenings with him in his house (two doors along from mine). We played records, including some old

blues – Lightnin’ Hopkins, Sonny Terry, John Lee Hooker, etc. Before long Keith was playing his own blues tunes and we were making up the lyrics. Fortunately nobody was listening then, but Keith never stopped learning and became an accomplished guitarist who entertained us all.

Old Friends – Martin

I had met Roger in our first year at Lancaster Grammar School as we were in the same form and had struck up a friendship.

I suppose my first awareness of Keith came during morning assembly. After the Masters, as the teachers were called, had left the stage, the Head Prefect would stand at the front of the hall reading from his list “ Bateman, Fisher, Harris...inter alia ,see me afterwards.” The list often seemed to be the same names.

It was during a school sponsored walk that I learnt from Roger that he and Keith were cousins and that his aunty, Keith’s mum had died and I realised that perhaps this accounted to an extent for Keith’s minor misbehaviours, although I will come back to that. I spoke to Keith for the first time when on that walk.

Over the coming months and years we three became good friends particularly through our interests, predominantly football, cricket and especially music. Cream, Jimi Hendrix, Dylan, Simon and Garfunkel and John Mayall were particular favourites but there were many more.

Keith and I were members of the school cricket 2nd XI, never quite good enough for the firsts but enthusiastic nevertheless. During one mandatory after school practice, at a time when my hair was growing and becoming curlier than ever, Mr Rimmer in charge of the practice, said to no-one in particular “Look at him , who does he think he is, Jimi Hendrix?” As quick as a flash Keith shouted “No sir Mitch Mitchell!” who was the band’s drummer for those who don’t know.

I have a fond memory of travelling to an away match, sitting on the coach with the radio playing and Keith, Paul Cocker and myself sitting towards the rear of course, singing along to All Right Now by Free, one playing air guitar, Keith no doubt while Paul and I drummed on the back of the seats.

Another cricket memory too: an away game at Stonyhurst College, a renowned Jesuit school. The pavilion was a couple of hundred yards away with a grassed area

at its front, surrounded by a one foot high picket fence with a gate and path leading up to the entrance. Keith and I walked towards the pavilion approaching from the side and stepped over the fence. A bellowing authoritative voice was heard "Is that the way they bring up boys in Lancaster!" We turned to see a Jesuit priest incandescent with rage who of course had to provide us with further humiliation by making us walk down the path out of the gate, turn round and go back through it in order to enter the pavilion in the expected manner!

This incident at about the same time as the release of the film 'If' it helped to form our anti-establishment views and I began to see that Keith's earlier brushes with prefects and teachers were almost all born out of his hatred and frustration with our class obsessed posh and pretentious education.

Happy memories also of Friday nights, the three of us at the Vale of Lune rugby club where we would have enough money for one pint and for some unknown reason a vodka, we must have thought it the height of subversion or sophistication, who knows! Live music and girls were the main attraction of the place of course. If we weren't there we would often be at the Broadway in Morecambe in the upstairs bar enticingly and exotically named the Kismet Room with its ultraviolet lighting.

Our friendship continued despite all three of us leaving Lancaster and heading to other parts of the country and leading different lives, meeting new people. I had some happy times in Coventry when Keith was there and he moved to Nottingham where I was for a short spell. There were mad times, sad times but I can't ever recall the three of us falling out.

Keith was always such fun, quick witted and great company. In the Simon and Garfunkel song, Old Friends, there is a line "Can you imagine us years from today, Sharing a park bench quietly, How terribly strange to be 70" which at 16 we used to listen to unable to imagine being 30 never mind 70!

In these last few years we had all envisaged attending football matches together and spending a few days each summer watching county cricket reminiscing and playing the part of grumpy old men with relish, sadly we only managed a few visits. Alas Keith didn't reach 70 and I know my life as well as all of yours will be much the poorer because of it. He will be sadly missed by all.

