

A celebration of life
Stephen Hazell

22 January 1942 to 10 October 2019

10.00 – 10.45 am, 22 October 2019, St Marylebone Crematorium

a personal goodbye

Humanist
Ceremonies

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Stephen Hazell died on 10th October 2019 aged 77. He was known to most people as Steve (or 'Stevie', 'Dad', 'Pa', or 'Gramps') but in this tribute he shall be called Stephen.

Stephen lived life to the full, with great zeal. As a teacher, he guided the understanding of his fellow humans. As a husband and father, he gave his love freely and, talking to his family, it is clear that they return that love. They have described him as 'Renaissance man', and in many other ways besides. But the very first thing that comes to mind when they think of him is: 'Healthy intellectual discussion' – or 'Big intellectual arguments', depending on how you look at it.

Stephen was born on 22nd January 1942 in Paignton, youngest brother to Maurice, Julian and Judith. Six months later his father – an RAF pilot – was killed in action. We can perhaps imagine the difficulties that his mother must have faced at that time. For Stephen, it meant being brought up by his grandparents. His grandfather, Wilfred, was a Methodist preacher who had been wounded in the First World War and set up as a cobbler when he came home. Kate can remember going when young to the cottage in Totnes after it had passed to her aunt, particularly the smell of the workshop, the garden full of raspberry canes, and the drawers full of carefully laid out ripening apples.

Stephen was a very bright boy indeed and was made Head Boy at the King Edward VI Grammar School in Totnes. But the school didn't think to put him up for Oxbridge – he had to do that by his own means, and in so doing he became the first boy to get to Oxford. His talent for science was encouraged at home but his passion for literature won out, and he was awarded a place at Merton College to read English.

Oxford must have seemed like a different world. He loved the 'dreaming spires' and would have been very aware of the history embodied in its very stones, particularly at Merton, one of the oldest colleges. Here was a rich experience indeed to contrast with the moorlands of his youth, which he also loved in a different way. His set of rooms on the quad were his own space – with a scout to clean up after him. He could engross himself in his chosen subject and engage in wide-ranging intellectual debate, added to which, of course, was the punting and drinking and climbing

through windows after a late night out – all of which he made the most of with his three great friends, Bruce, Mike and Jasper, two of whom are with us today.

His academic success at Oxford led to a Fulbright Travel Scholarship to do postgraduate research for a year – specialising in 16th century drama – at Rice University in Houston, followed by three months' teaching at the Texas Southern University Summer School. He returned to London, and met Lynda while he was a supply teacher at Paddington School – she was on the same teaching diploma course as his flatmate. They married in June 1966, and a day after their wedding left for Texas where Stephen taught at Summer School a second time.

Then it was straight back to London to take a post as lecturer at Hendon College (later Middlesex University) where he later rose to become Head of English. This was the time when Lynda and Stephen started their family. Kate and Libby remember a childhood which was driven by the great energy and zest for life of their parents. An advantage of both parents being teachers was long summer breaks, which they made full use of. A typical summer trip could start with the ritual of tidying the house ready for the exchange visitors, packing up the Volkswagen Passat and then driving off to their chosen house swap, often in out-of-the-way Italian villages. And being the man he was, Stephen set himself to learn Italian so he could converse with people. Art, culture and history were of course meat and drink to Stephen, added to which was his pleasure in the actual meat and drink!

Stephen did his doctorate at UCL while working at Middlesex. His subject – the fiction of Angus Wilson – demonstrates just what a wide range of literature he covered. In 1985 he moved on to Central School of Speech and Drama for five years. It was during this time that he and Lynda agreed to go their own separate ways, but they kept in touch, meeting in later years at a little Italian café in Goodge Street.

Usha was working in the teacher training department at Central School. Finding herself being wooed by the Deputy Principal was a surprise indeed – the first time he approached her she assumed she must have done something wrong. He then turned up out of the blue while she was recovering in hospital after minor surgery, saying he

had wanted to ask her out for the weekend. Despite her consternation, she had the gumption to tell him that she was being discharged the next day so, yes, she was free at the weekend. Things progressed from there, and Alya came along in 1989 – a happy surprise.

The most satisfying period of Stephen's academic career probably began in 1993. He'd been teaching in New York but was in limbo career-wise when a newspaper cutting arrived from Usha's father in Malaysia alerting him to a vacancy for Head of Visual and Performing Arts at the National Institute of Education in Singapore. He applied, and he got it. Here, he could indulge his passion for drama, and could direct plays himself – he revelled in it. Usha has passed me this message from a colleague:

Dr Stephen Hazell is fondly remembered by his former students and colleagues at NIE. His insatiable passion and love of learning, particularly in Drama, Performance and Literature, was infectious, delighting in new ideas and meaningful discoveries with critical insight and profound care. He is responsible for setting up and developing the Drama programme at NIE through many phases of growth, and nurturing students who went on to become purposeful, skilled and enthusiastic Drama Educators in Singapore.

Singapore offered a completely new culture for Stephen to explore, and a whole new social life to match – and Usha was within easy distance of home. They lived in a high-rise apartment where they could enjoy a gin and tonic on the balcony in the evening. Life was fun – moving round the bars with big gangs of friends or inviting each other to dinner parties – often accompanied by the Buena Vista Social Club. They made friends for life, some of whom are here today. Stephen even became tolerant of spices, which made Usha very happy.

Time with Alya – and Rohan when he came along in 1995 – included cycling along the east coast of Singapore at the weekends, and of course more wonderful holidays – Stephen now had the whole of south east Asia in his sights! And one of the most

precious aspects of life there was being able to give Alya and Rohan the opportunity to connect with their Indian side by spending time with their relatives in Malaysia.

After 14 great years, in 2007, Stephen was due to retire, Alya was starting university and Rohan was due to start secondary school, so the family returned to the UK. But Stephen was never going to stop working. As well as acting as external examiner in Drama and Communication at the London College of Music, which took him all over the world, he continued his teaching and took time to direct plays and be a governor at Courtyard Theatre Training Company, Shoreditch.

Stephen applied the same dynamism and intellectual rigour to all aspects of his life, and it paid off. His children have grown up knowing how to think, to be resilient and to be independent – and to have a sense of humour that both unites them and helps them through the difficult times, of which there have been many in recent years. Usha of course has been there for her husband through all his severe health crises, and was determined to allow him his wish to spend his last months at home. Despite Rohan having to get back from Malaysia and Libby from New Zealand, they were all there with him at the end.

Personal tribute from Kate, Stephen's daughter

The word most used to describe our Dad is almost certainly clever – such a very clever man. Also challenging, competitive and proud – he loved a rigorous debate and always fought to win. But he was also generous with that giant brain, interested in everything and everyone and above all an enormous amount of fun.

From the wonderful family holidays of our childhood to the Singapore Christmases of our 20s and 30s, we enjoyed fantastic times together as a family and will always remember him at the head of the table with a glass of wine in his hand and a tale to tell.

He was an extremely loving father who gave us his unconditional support throughout our lives and remained as inspirational to us in his final weeks and days as he did throughout his life. We will miss him deeply.

Personal tribute from Libby, Stephen's daughter

Our dad – wise, funny, stubborn, competitive, fun-loving and so full of energy.

Looking back to when we were growing up, Steve and our mum Lynda gave us such wonderful childhoods full of great memories. We had some amazing holidays, and we remember how much Steve loved the intricate planning of camping trips and house exchanges, corralling us into epic three-day road trips across Europe to a beautiful lake in Italy or a mountain-top in the Alps or Pyrenees. And always with a little notebook filled with scrawled notes of plans and memories.

He was so full of fun and adventure – whether taking our teenage selves on a four-day mountain hike in the Italian Dolomites; taking me to the rainforest in Malaysia or the Blue Note jazz club in New York. That spirit took him to Singapore with Usha and Alya and then Rohan; and he was always incredibly supportive of my own adventure to New Zealand

He had so much knowledge and wisdom, it could be a little intimidating. He's the only man I know who could actually do the cryptic crossword, and you had to be ready to back yourself if you entered a political argument with him. The only thing that brought him back down to earth was his utter inability at Pictionary, and I can't deny that the four of us kids relished the moment where we could finally get the better of him!

In helping to sort out all his stuff recently, I have had the honour of reading some of his professional writings for really the first time. It has put me in awe of his intelligence and his undiminished desire to explore new ideas and knowledge. It truly was a life-long commitment.

I'll leave the last words to Pa. When asked recently to describe himself in three sentences he wrote – 'lively; improbably handsome; and last to buy your round'. I think we're all pretty proud to remember him that way. Thanks for being a fantastic father and a wonderful gramps. We'll always carry you with us.

Personal tribute from Mike Hind, long-standing friend

It's not easy to review a good life, a long career, and a sixty year friendship in three minutes. So I have been selective, using old letters.

With his usual critical acumen, Steve wrote to me – I was then in Saudi Arabia – in April 1981, speaking of the confused state of the nation: hunger strikes in Northern Ireland, civil disobedience in Brixton, the emergence of new political parties (what's changed?). However, the sunnier part of the letter deals with the family – and Steve was a devoted family man through two marriages and two partners. Kate had found herself a noisy new set of friends at her school, Libby had abandoned the violin in favour of blowing the trumpet, to which she was temperamentally more suited, Steve thought. The family was just about to embark on a holiday in Italy, which I know Steve loved. He had a favourite lake there, a source of spiritual regeneration.

And I remember other earlier letters from Houston, Texas, where Steve had gone following his success in Finals at Oxford, for a graduate assistant year. He writes vividly and appreciatively of the gleaming modernity and surprising richness of the cultural scene. Later, newly married to Lynda, he taught at Texas Southern, a black university in the same city.

The girls grew up; the couple went their separate ways, although always kept in touch over the welfare of the girls. Steve went on to do great things at the Central School of Speech and Drama, as deputy Director; there was the new marriage to Usha as well, and a second family in prospect. Steve took up an important new post at Nanyang, Singapore's second university, with a tally of publications by now, including two very good essays on Richard the Second and King Lear – Shakespeare always dear to Steven's heart.

With that capacity for re-inventing himself that he always showed, on the return from Singapore Steve took up a post as examiner then chief examiner for ESOL and Drama at the London College of Music. This brought admin. duties as well as strenuous tours: health began to be an issue. Lamentably for everyone, there were signs of dementia as well.

I was so glad to be able to see Steve in his last years, and to enjoy reunions at Merton with him.

One last memory, out of many I have had to omit: in our final year we shared digs in the Botley Road where the landlady would yell strenuously at her poor husband all around the house. We feared violence. Steve rose above it all to win college prizes for good work, and the quality of degree he had always seemed to promise.

It's apt to quote Shakespeare in while remembering such a Shakespearean as Stephen: in *Troilus and Cressida*, Shakespeare has Ulysses speak of Time as having, 'a wallet at his back, wherein he puts alms for oblivion'. The flip side of oblivion though is 'posterity' and Stephen leaves a lovely posterity in the shape of his children and grandchildren.

And so too soon, farewell old friend, we won't forget you.

Personal tribute from Rohan, Stephen's son

Thank you, Mike, it's always nice to hear stories of the adventures Dad got up to, and there are plenty. In fact, Dad was an excellent story-teller, and I've got many committed to memory. Possibly my favourite is how he used to steal grapes as a boy, to trade them for cigarettes with the bargemen down by the river near where he lived in Totnes. I always thought it was an awfully enterprising way to get up to mischief, and although I tried to emulate his creativity, I think all I achieved was turning his grey head white.

And I really do try to emulate him, because there is just so much to admire and respect in Dad, and whenever I speak about him to friends it's always with such pride and a hint of smugness too.

We all know how sharp he was, and as a child growing up, there's little else that makes you feel so safe as when any question you pose to your father – he'll have an answer for. I used to hold his hand when we would go on evening walks with Alya

and mum in Singapore, and I used to call it the talking hand, because I would ask question after question and somehow he'd pull an answer out of thin air. Frankly, it must have been exhausting for him, but that being said he always found the gusto to muster up deep dinner time conversation no matter how long his day. He wasn't just interesting, he was interested, and that hunger to understand the world around us has in many ways shaped me and my sisters – he gave us the gift of wanting to learn, so it's no surprise that he made a wonderful teacher. And we had to learn, otherwise we couldn't keep up with him.

And speaking of keeping up with him, the last game of squash I played with him was about five years ago now, and it is with real mortification to say that I couldn't keep up with him. He beat me. I was 18 and he was 72. So here's hoping I've inherited his vigour.

He was also incredibly kind with his time. He would always devote so much time to finding something for us to do, and I remember how eagerly he would ferry me to and from rugby matches three times a week, and stamp his feet and rub his hands together in the freezing cold on the side lines – except for that one time he forgot to pick me up and I was waiting for hours.

It is this mixture of his mental and physical energy, and constant willingness to plan and do that paints the wonderful and gentle picture I hold of him in my mind.

We once went to New York to see one of Dad's close friends, David Schiller, and I got to see two new worlds: one, the city of New York as it is, and two, the city that Dad spent time in all those years ago, through the stories he told me and the people we met. It was pretty magical, as was visiting any of the places from when he was younger – Totnes, Dartmoor, Oxford, even his stomping ground in North London.

Something you might not know is that Dad was actually really goofy – I reckon mum's humour rubbed off on him a bit. We laughed so much as a family, annoying neighbours through five apartments in Singapore and three houses in the UK. As many of you will know, these last six months were difficult for Dad, but he still made us laugh. And as I've said to some of you, he really brought the family together during this time. We got to experience that rare feeling that carers do – which is that

when you care for someone, you re-remember why you love them, and you love them all the more. I'm so very proud to call him my father, and I'm going to miss him more than I can convey. At this point I absolutely have to say how incredible mum was, and there's few things as satisfying as seeing your parents so in love after all the years and trials.

Usually at this point, you end with something along the lines of 'rest well Dad', but actually Dad never did have trouble with that: you could hear his snores from half-way across the house – sorry mum. So now we can find him in that silence, and when we need him, as ever, he will be there for us. Thank you, Dad.

Personal tribute from Alya, Stephen's daughter

Everyone has already spoken so wonderfully about Dad so I'm just going to share a song with you. If you don't already know Tom Waits, you're about to experience the raw, gravelly intensity of his voice. It's not easy listening, but Dad didn't tend to go for easy.

I always think that enjoying Tom Waits is like enjoying strong black coffee. You can't possibly like it as a child because it just doesn't suit your palette and you don't have enough life experience yet to fully appreciate it. You need to keep trying and you'll come to love its bittersweet taste.

The fact that Dad loved Tom Waits and strong black coffee – often together – was part of what made him seem so very worldly to me. Over time, and with a certain amount of effort on Dad's part, I came to love them both as well.

I will be forever grateful to my dad for opening my eyes to so much about the world around me. So for my wonderful, witty, wise Dad, this is Tom Waits with 'Come On Up To The House'.