

# A celebration of life Robert Desmond Luck (Bob)

6<sup>th</sup> August 1942 – 18<sup>th</sup> July 2021

Wealden Crematorium 6<sup>th</sup> August 2021

*a personal goodbye*

Humanist  
*Ceremonies*

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Bob was born in Caterham, Surrey in 1942, the eldest son of Gwen & Desmond Luck, the first born of four children, followed in time by Ray, Geoffrey & sister Daphne. He went to Caterham Hill School. He cycled all over the South East as a boy, and it was probably in those days, cycling down to the coast, that his love of the South Downs started. He and his friend Stuart stayed often in the Youth Hostel at Alfriston. He was a Sea Cadet as a young boy and a choir boy at St Mary's.

In memory of those days, and because Chris finds it particularly comforting, here is the hymn *Lord of All Hopefulness, Lord of All Joy*. Please stand for this if you are able, and join in if you wish – the words are on your Order of Ceremony.

*Lord Of All Hopefulness*

*Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy,  
Whose trust, ever childlike, no cares could destroy,  
Be there at our waking, and give us, we pray,  
Your bliss in our hearts, Lord,  
At the break of the day.*

*Lord of all eagerness, Lord of all faith,  
Whose strong hands were skilled at the plane and the lathe,  
Be there at our labours and give us, we pray,  
Your strength in our hearts, Lord,  
At the noon of the day.*

*Lord of all kindness, Lord of all grace,  
Your hands swift to welcome, Your arms to embrace.  
Be there at our homing, and give us, we pray,  
Your love in our hearts, Lord,  
At the eve of the day.*

*Lord of all gentleness, Lord of all calm,  
Whose voice is contentment, whose presence is balm,  
Be there at our sleeping, and give us, we pray,  
Your peace in our hearts, Lord,  
At the end of the day.*

Bob certainly had the skilled, strong hands mentioned in that hymn. He always had a mechanical mind and left school at 15 to work for Peugeot cars in Croydon. He then worked for a firm in Blindley Heath, servicing aero-engines, which led to jobs at Croydon Airport for Hawker Sidley's, and at Morton Air Services. Dan Air introduced him to Comets and there he got his first aircraft license for engines and air-frames. He stayed at Dan Air for 5 years.

He then took a leap of faith and joined Singapore Airlines working on the 707s and latterly the 747s. After five years in the sun, he and the family returned to the UK, and he began work for Laker Airways. When Laker went bust, he moved on to British Caledonian, which was in turn take over by British Airways, where he stayed till he retired.

So, a distinguished career, but that wasn't the half of it. There were also the motorcycles, the cars, the railways, the family, the friends, the Harveys and of course the running.

Bob was always a keen sportsman, and he enjoyed rugby for Haywards Heath in the mid 1960s until the mid 1970s. He was tempted to join a local rugby club in Singapore, but noticed that they were playing in bare feet, so rapidly changed his mind and took up running.

This hobby was to transform his world in so many ways. Bob continued running for the next 40 years. The friendships, travel and exotic destinations were a constant form of pleasure and adventure. Above all, there was the Hash – no, not that kind of hash, but the non-competitive running activity associated closely with beer, which was originally set up in colonial days, and revived after the war in Malaya. It subsequently spread world wide. Its objectives were defined as follows:

- *To promote physical fitness among members*
- *To get rid of weekend hangovers*
- *To acquire a good thirst and to satisfy it in beer*
- *To persuade the older members that they are not as old as they feel*

On his return to the UK, he joined the Brighton Hash, and over many years this helped him to indulge his love of Harvey's beer, interspersed with a fair amount of running.

Bob also took up duathlon, (run, bike, run) in the early 1990s and qualified to compete for Great Britain. Then he worked on his swimming technique with his great friend Jim, to establish himself as a triathlete, (swim, bike, run.) Yet again, he qualified in his age group to compete for Great Britain in both the European and World Championships. One of his greatest achievements was a gaining a bronze medal for the long-distance World Championships.

Bob also ran countless marathons, including London several times, New York, Jersey and Helsinki. He ran Team South Downs relays for Brighton Hash over decades and his beloved Beachy Head marathons, competing for the Hash, being followed by a banquet of smoked salmon sandwiches, and vast amounts of champagne! And then there was WARR - The World Airline Road Race, a gathering of airline industry professionals from all corners of the world, including all levels and positions of the industry. Their goal is to provide a worldwide athletic event, promote travel within the airline industry and foster friendships and co-ordination between airlines.

So on to the motorbikes, starting with his Gold Star. Over the years he owned many bikes, including Ducatis, Hondas, a BMW, an X-UP and Motor Guzzis. His friend Jim was often his companion on motorbike adventures, as was Dudley. Together they went to Monza, to Goodwood, and to watch bike racing in East Germany. It happened that there was a big England v Germany football match on when they were in Germany, so they all piled into one vehicle to get back to the hotel quickly, Bob sitting on the racing bike in the trailer behind them. They all rushed in to watch the football, leaving Bob locked in the trailer, where his shouts and bangs finally attracted the attention of the landlord.

Sometimes the combination of the drink and bikes didn't work. Jim remembers a time he had to leave Bob on the grass by a phone box in Westmeston, so he could go and fetch a car driver to take him home. Little did he know that he'd sat him down in a bed of nettles, making for a very uncomfortable few days.

He was happy on four wheels too, and at one point built his own Midas. He enjoyed motor racing as much as bike racing, making regular trips to Brands Hatch, Silverstone, and often to the Monaco historic race.

And somewhere in all this there was time for family. He married Sheila in 1965, Helen was born in 1970, and Ivan in 1973. Bob and Sheila moved house 12 times during their marriage, six of which moves were in or near his beloved Downs, but they still found time for masses of travel, much of it linked to running and to motorsport.

He was very close to his brother Ray. They were best man to each other, and went on various expeditions, such as heading out to the Dutch Grand Prix in the late 60s with a tent in a suitcase, and going skiing. Ray & Bob were often part of big birthdays for one another, such as Bob's 40<sup>th</sup> in Balcombe, his 60<sup>th</sup> in Cross in Hand and his 70<sup>th</sup>, when Helen and Tim hosted a BBQ party for him. Bob as always organised the beer and Ray and Helen cooked and prepared all the food - another great afternoon in the sunshine with great company of family and friends. Sheila bought him a flight in a Tiger Moth to celebrate.

And of course his passion for making and fixing things came in very handy when working on Ivan and Sanna's home near Helsinki, and Helen and Phil's in Oxfordshire.

Later, Bob delighted in the arrival of five splendid grandchildren: Felix; Scott; Joseph; Nickolas & Lettice, and he always adored his lovely daughter-in-law Sanna.

And then there were pets: bull terriers Redder and Snowy, Bob's beloved Westies Stephy and Katy, and in the early days a donkey called Jasper.

The Great Railway Journeys were an opportunity for friends to get together. Starting at Haywards Heath, they would take the Lewes stopping train, descending at Cooksbridge, Plumpton, Lewes, Glynde, Berwick and ending at Polegate, drinking a pint of Harveys in the pub at each stop.

For the last seven years Bob's partner has been Christine. They met first when they were both learning French in 2004, and became friends. He was a huge support to her when her husband died, and ten years after their first meeting, they became a couple. Sadly Bob was not well during those seven years, and Chris became a huge support to him in her turn. They were inseparable.

Railways had always been an interest, but it was at Chris's that he was able to indulge his interest big time by creating his own 45mm railway in the back garden. With his usual handiness, he constructed buildings out of flatpack resin, which Chris painted. Jim joined in with the assembly.

And Chris and Bob visited Jim at his house in Brittany, where they sanded the staircase for him, before heading off on a tandem along the canal.

Bob's daughter Helen is now going to talk to us about "Pa Luck"

*Where to begin, some of you will know my dad as Bob, Robert, Grandpa or Grandad, but for me he was Pa Luck.*

*As the first born my earliest memory was climbing over a stile with him and our bull terrier dog called Redder in the snow, decades later and we were still clambering over stiles on various Hash runs or Marathons, (when our bodies would allow.)*

*As a daddy's girl I always looked up to him and naturally wanted to join him in his endeavours, I had my own work bench in the garage, (an upturned wooden crate to you) and my implement of choice a plastic hammer with a pink handle that smelt very plastic, and a yellow hammer head with beads inside that shook every time I banged it. It has to be said I thought I was the 'bees knees' and extremely productive.*

*But Pa Luck wasn't just a whizz in the garage, he also taught me how to play chess in Singapore on our large marble chess board, (which I still treasure to this day) and this is something that I have also gone onto teach my children at school. Pa Luck was also quite a talented artist and would occasionally draw a cartoon character if I asked him. Maybe this is where I learnt a few skills, as well as being handed down to both his Grandson Scott and Granddaughter Lettice.*

*He loved cartoons, particularly Donald Duck, Tom & Jerry and Wylie Coyote & the Tasmanian Devil, I will forever remember his booing laughter at these moments.*

*I too have also loved the thundering noises of aircraft engines, particularly the 747's, and as a child Pa Luck would sometimes take me to watch the aeroplanes take off at the bottom of the runway at Paya Lebar, (the airport before Changi, in Singapore.) There would just be a chain mail fence between us and I would get to sit on the roof of the car to get a great view. We would then do tail spotting, working out which airlines from which countries were either taking off or coming into land. And how many engines and what model aircraft it would be.*

*These times and interests continued through out my life time with pa, whether it was at the Shoreham or Fairford Air shows or noting the planes coming in overhead at Kota Kinnabalu in Borneo or more latterly Spitfires and the Red Arrows flying over Cross In Hand. Mum, Ivan, Sanna, Phil & Tim were also part of these spectacles and discussions. In his latter years Scott & Nikolas will forever remember him playing radio controlled aircraft with them both.*

*Pa Luck always had an ingenious way around things to solve problems and his help in renovating No. 5 my first home with Phil in Clanfield, Oxfordshire, alongside mum, was one of those times, as long as there were copious mugs of tea, cake and later a beer, my Pa was content.*

*He then went onto help Ivan and Sanna with their complete house build in Finland which really made a huge difference to their on going projects and family life.*

*His advice was measured and accompanied by a wicked sense of humour that would often have us all in fits of laughter around the dining room tables. For Sanna these are the memories that she holds particularly dear.*

*Very occasionally Pa Luck could be caught watching the tele-box, as long as you weren't watching a tourist/holiday program you were all right as the familiar saying of 'been there done that,' sprung up continuously to everyone's hilarity.*

*Back in the day, we would also join my mum and pa Luck at my Uncle Ray & Aunty Jan's, whether it be for a weekend, an anniversary, birthday, New Year or Christmas, with fellow family members and Ray & Jan's good friends, and after a sumptuous meal of deliciousness, alcoholic beverages and much laughter and whilst the women (traditionally in the kitchen were washing up) Ray & my pa could be found snoring together on the sofas, sometimes accompanied by a snoring dog as well!*

*On my wedding day, I will always remember the moment when it was just pa and I before the wedding car arrived to take us to Twineham Church; there I was in my splendour, (a couture champagne coloured wedding dress.) I thought this was the moment that dad would tell me about how proud he was of me and some of the deeper stuff. Instead he made us clear up the lunch from earlier and insisted that I loaded the dishwasher!!! .... He wasn't joking!*

*True to most dad's his dad dancing was a particular worry, and I will forever be deeply scarred by his dad dancing to Kylie Minogue's - 'I should be so lucky' in the Far East.*

*But for us as a family growing up sport and running was always on the cards. Whilst most families would be opening presents on Christmas morning, Ivan & I would be 'encouraged' to go for a quick Christmas run up on the Downs at Black Cap, (for those of you that don't know it, it is very, open, chilly and hilly!)*

*Running was always a huge family pass time, one year we all entered the Lindfield family fun run, and needless to say we won it. Ivan came first, my pa was in the top 15, myself in around the 50<sup>th</sup> position, and all my mum had to do was get across the line! Hashing was always a lot of fun and Phil and I used to join pa on a Monday night when we lived at mum & dad's post travelling. Although one Hash that my pa had laid in Horsted Keynes ended up with me being helicoptered to the Princess Royal Hospital in Haywards Heath with a snapped leg! Oh the joys and japes.*

*For Ivan, he remembers the triathlon/duathlon and time trials that they did together all over the world, with the greatest memories for him being them both winning at the same events. At one event Ivan was the overall winner and dad won the Veterans prize.*

*When I went into my class of 9-10 year olds on Monday 19<sup>th</sup> July, the morning after my pa had passed away, I sat with them after registration and shared with them that my dear pa/dad had unfortunately died the evening before. I went onto share with my class some of the values that my Pa had shared with me and in turn that I had tried to share with them over the previous two years:*

- **Firstly**, to make the most of every day you have and seize the opportunities.
- **Secondly**, to never give up, even when you find things particularly tricky as there is always a way around it & if you make mistakes then you know what didn't work and the devil is always in the detail.
- **Thirdly**, you are never, ever, ever too old to try something new or different. I talked about my Pa competing for his country for over two decades in both duathlon and triathlon, (which he started in his late 40's and early 50's) running his fastest marathon when he was in his 40's and building a railway in the back of their garden with his dearest Chris, in his mid 70's (although if history serves me correctly, I think dear Chris did most of the leg work and the back breaking work too!)
- **Finally**, anything is possible if you want it to happen and you work hard enough for it or at it.

*For me, I hope that these traits live on with his grandchildren;*

- *Scott, has followed in his granddad's footsteps with a technical mindset of problem solving and starts at Aviation College today in Finland to become an aviation technician.*
- *Joseph, a rugby player, lover of watching Formula 1 and their strategies and more recently getting into the running genes.*
- *Nikolaus, a fearless biker and also sharing the smooth, charm of the Luck's. James Bond has nothing on him compared to our Nik.*
- *Lettice, the favourite granddaughter, (and I might add the only granddaughter) her diligence and perfectionism in her studies with a matching dry sense of humour and wit that her grandpa would have so loved to continue to see.*
- *Grandpa or Grandad will be greatly missed by all four of them.*

*For Ivan, Sanna & myself my dear Pa enriched our lives with skills of striving to do our best, a working hard ethic and mentality, and the stamina not to give up, even when the going gets tough.*

*For me, my Pa was my hero, a man I respected and loved even if we didn't see 'eye to eye' on everything, I had the opportunity and privilege to share my feelings of love and respect with him over these last weeks, months and years and I know that others weren't as fortunate as me, but the love was there from both near and far, and my dear pa knew that too.*

*Thank you for believing in me pa and for loving and believing in all of those dear to you too.*

*I'd like to end with a reading from Timothy: "As for me, the hour has come for me to be sacrificed; the time is here for me to leave this life. I have done my best in the race, I have run the full distance, and I have kept the faith."*

In his 70s, Bob went through a series of illnesses and operations, which would have floored a less resolute man, but with Chris's support, he bounced back again and again. But from March this year, he was stuck in EGH until he finally made his escape to Oaklands Court, where he spent his last couple of weeks. There he was finally able to have a cup of tea in the courtyard, after so long in a hospital bed. When he and Chris went back inside, he said "That was a really good day". "Shall I make it better then?" she replied, producing a bottle of Harveys Best.

Throughout this period, Chris defied covid restrictions and managed to spend most of her time at his side, and Helen was able to make regular visits. Bob died, as he had wished, in Chris's arms on the 18<sup>th</sup> July.