

A celebration of life

GORDON STANLEY MARSHALL

30th January 1934 – 13th July 2021

12 noon, 12th August 2021, Banbury Crematorium



a personal goodbye

Humanist
Ceremonies

TRIBUTE

Sam has written Gordon's tribute – with help from his family, friends and former colleagues – and she has asked me to read it for her.

She says:

Dad was born on 30th January 1934 in Shepperton, Middlesex, the youngest of four children - having two older brothers, Norman and Ronnie, and a sister, Jean, who survives him.

He was devoted to his mother, Emily, and throughout his life he would still become emotional thinking about her loss. Dad talked of his childhood as getting into scrapes, fighting and football.

The Second World War broke out and when Dad was 10 he would hear German V1 Doodle Bugs coming in over London.

Dad was a clever boy and passed the 11-plus to get into Ashford County Grammar School at the end of the war. He was proud of matriculating with Distinctions and Credits and took his first job, aged 16, in a construction company in Feltham.

After a couple of years, he was called up for National Service in 1952, serving in the Royal Artillery in Germany and becoming a qualified surveyor, after which he returned to the UK and, under the mentorship of Rowan Crimble, became a Site Engineer and then Site Agent for Hadsphaltic Construction.

Dad was apparently 'not afraid to ruffle feathers' so Rowan helped to knock off some of his sharp edges. Hadsphaltic became Johnston Construction and later Dad became the Director for the Midlands and North regions, with responsibility for major construction projects in the UK and some abroad, such as the runway at Port Stanley that the Argentinians bombed early in the Falklands war.

His former colleagues say that Dad had a great ability to hire and keep good people and was "master of the art of delegation, sitting at an empty desk reading the Contract Journal but with time to think about what might be a problem next week before anyone else".

He was known to almost always report the best regional profit figures at monthly Head Office meetings.

If asked what my Dad did for a living, my Mum would generally tell people, "He is in sewers". And when a friend of his organized a raffle for the Leamington Spa Rotary Club, Dad offered a conducted tour of the sewers of Leamington as a prize. The couple who won it said they had had a great day out and couldn't thank Dad enough!

Dad married my Mum, Muriel. They had had two children, myself and my brother, Paul, when they settled in Barford in Warwickshire in the 60s. Dad was travelling around the country to visit the construction sites he managed.

In the 70s the family enjoyed regular holidays to Croyde Bay in Devon and to new package holiday destinations in Spain where Dad loved to bask in the sun all day, coated from head to foot in Factor 2 lemon-scented sun oil.

Over several years he competed in the Lions Raft Race, held between Charlecote and Stratford-on-Avon. After the first year on a 4-man raft Dad got his pipework team at Johnston's to construct a bigger and more robust raft of pipes with welded capped ends as flotation units, and a platform across so that a team of 6, including my brother Paul and our cousins, Steve and Peter, could paddle it along the Avon to the finish line. It was all a bit crazy but a great day out.

And as always with Dad, it was a competition to be won.

After a long marriage Mum and Dad were sadly divorced. Dad later took early retirement, married Helen and moved to Burmington. He and Helen were fortunate to be able to travel widely, including visiting his brother Ronnie's family in New Zealand where he stayed with my cousins Rosemary and Jasmin.

Dad was part of the Burmington community for over 30 years.

He was Treasurer of the Burmington Parish Meeting for a time and a very entertaining charity quizmaster who took no nonsense from the quiz teams.

He dressed as Santa for the Burmington children's Christmas parties and in a pink bear's costume as "Burmington Bertie" at the village fetes.

He was crepe suzette maker at the CAMEO lunch club on Shrove Tuesdays, when members would cheer him on in the hope that he might succeed in hitting the ceiling with one of his pancakes.

Neighbours describe Dad as 'a highly-regarded and respected member of the village community who will be remembered for his friendliness to all'.

In recent years, after he and Helen had separated and later divorced and he was living alone, Dad had wonderful support from his neighbours.

Thanks in particular are due to Sue and John, Ron and Marie, Sheila, David and Rachel, and Dennis, but I am sure there are others whom I know less about – thank-you to the Burmington community for all your years of friendship.

Thanks also to the wonderful team at Shipston Care whose regular visits and kindnesses, especially during Covid-19 isolation, helped ensure that Dad was able to remain living independently in his beloved home and village in spite of increasing health problems.

He survived lung cancer in 2017, having both surgery and chemotherapy.

He passed away suddenly at home after afternoon tea in good company at the Burmington village hall.

Dad's life was filled with a series of enthusiastic passions. He loved a wide range of music, especially classical and jazz. During his life he built a large collection of recorded music on vinyl, cassette tape and CD.

In recent years Dad was delighted when we could summon up a tune he was singing on Spotify and play it through a mobile phone. But he had no idea how it happened!

His knowledge of classical music seemed encyclopaedic. On car journeys, with Classic FM on the radio, he would quickly identify each new piece. I would check on the radio data and annoyingly find that he was always right.

In retirement Dad had a go at writing his own songs using an electronic keyboard (although he couldn't read music) and he would love to sing snippets to us.

He told us that when he was young he reckoned he had a pretty good singing voice and went to a local recording studio in London to cut a vinyl 45 of himself singing a popular song of the time. When he played it back he thought it sounded so awful that he hurled it into a local lake in disappointment, where it presumably still is to this day.

We entered today to a piece by one of his favourite composers – Beethoven's 6th symphony, the "Pastoral".

Here is a wonderful song from his all-time favourite singer, Mr Frank Sinatra, whom Dad was able to see live in London towards the end of his singing career.

Frank Sinatra & Count Basie Orchestra - Fly me to the Moon

Dad adored dogs from his boyhood to late in life. Between them Rusty and Pippa gave him 35 years of close companionship. Both were from the Dogs Trust rescue centre in Honiley.

After Pippa died Dad formed a new bond with Harley, our cocker spaniel. I think he was often more excited to see Harley on our visits than he was us. Harley adored Dad right back.

Another of Dad's big passions was sport – playing soccer, badminton and squash in his younger years, and golf, which he only started aged 36, but which gave him a lifetime of enjoyment and satisfaction.

At different times he was a member of Lutterworth, Burton-on-Trent, Brailes and Broadway Golf Clubs, becoming an honorary member at Broadway after 50 wonderful years.

He was extremely proud to have achieved a handicap of four and to have shot his age on two occasions. If you aren't a golfer you will have to ask someone who is why this is such a big deal. He also achieved a Hole-in-One at the eleventh at the Jack Nicklaus course at St Melion in Cornwall.

Golf provided both challenge and a great social life with a large group of friends whom he knew and loved for many years, including sharing memorable golfing holidays to the Chateau at *La Bretesche* in France, and *Vilamoura* in Portugal.

When the spirit was willing but the body became weak it was Sky Sports TV that entertained him. He watched a wide range of sports avidly and he even became persuaded of the merits of women's soccer in recent months.

Although perhaps it was the long legs and the distant hope they might swap shirts at the end of the match!

Happily, Dad lived long enough to see his childhood team, Brentford FC, make it into the Premier League for the 2021 season.

Dad never held back in extolling to others the virtues of daily exercise according to the 5BX programme, or his latest discovery – using biorhythms (a sort of mathematical horoscope) to compute if today was a good day to do anything important, or not, a vinegar diet, a food-combining diet, copper bracelets, magnetic bracelets, high-dose daily vitamins. You will all know his absolute certainty that he had developed a horse-race betting system to beat the bookies and make a fortune but he didn't have the time to apply it every day.

Throughout his life Dad considered spirituality but many years ago gave up any ideas of organized religion, concluding that a supernatural creator almost certainly does not exist.

In earlier life he had, perhaps surprisingly, enjoyed, and regularly quoted, the writings of the ancient Persian astronomer-poet Omar Khayyam. His well-thumbed copy of the *Rubaiyat* shows his reflections on the central philosophical theme of "seize the day".

Although it must be said that there are a lot of verses about drinking wine, which he also enjoyed immensely!

Sam's tribute to her father.

For our reflection today on living life well, Sam has recorded the poem, *Desiderata* by Max Ehrmann, which she found saved amongst Gordon's most personal papers.

Desiderata

Go placidly amid the noise and the haste, and remember what peace there may be in silence.

As far as possible, without surrender, be on good terms with all persons.

Speak your truth quietly and clearly; and listen to others, even to the dull and the ignorant; they too have their story.

Avoid loud and aggressive persons; they are vexatious to the spirit.

If you compare yourself with others, you may become vain or bitter, for always there will be greater and lesser persons than yourself.

Enjoy your achievements as well as your plans.

Keep interested in your own career, however humble; it is a real possession in the changing fortunes of time.

Exercise caution in your business affairs, for the world is full of trickery.

But let this not blind you to what virtue there is; many persons strive for high ideals, and everywhere life is full of heroism.

Be yourself.

Especially do not feign affection.

Neither be cynical about love; for in the face of all aridity and disenchantment it is as perennial as the grass.

Take kindly the counsel of the years, gracefully surrendering the things of youth. Nurture strength of spirit to shield you in sudden misfortune.

But do not distress yourself with dark imaginings.

Many fears are born of fatigue and loneliness.

Beyond a wholesome discipline, be gentle with yourself.

You are a child of the universe no less than the trees and the stars; you have a right to be here.

And whether or not it is clear to you, no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should. Therefore be at peace with God, whatever you conceive Him to be.

And whatever your labours and aspirations, in the noisy confusion of life, keep peace in your soul.

With all its sham, drudgery and broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world.

Be cheerful.

Strive to be happy.

Max Ehrmann, 1948

Perhaps these are words of wisdom for the next generations. Gordon was intensely proud of his grandchildren, Andreas, William, Stephanie and Daniel - as they have become adults and started on their own paths in life.

William is here today and would like to say something about his Grandad.

WILLIAM:

Hi everybody. When Auntie Sam first asked all the grandchildren if they wanted to say a few words or share some memories here today, my gut reaction was a combination of guilt and regret. In recent years as myself and my brother have got older we did not spend enough time with grandad. I felt as though it wouldn't be right for us to share our stories or memories. Unlike Andreas and Stephanie, the majority of memories that myself and Dan have of grandad go back to when we were a lot smaller.

However, thinking back to my childhood, the feeling of sadness lessened somewhat. I realised that these memories, although older than we would have liked, still have had a lasting impact on us.

I thought back to visiting Grandad's house in Burmington as a child, spending time in the garden playing in the hammock, trying not to fall out, feeding the fish and being strangely confused about having tortoise as a pet. The 8-year-old me failed to see the appeal. Grandad introduced us to darts and taught us how to play three-oh-one in his garage. All of which are really fond memories.

I think the things that have and that will stay with me the longest however, were Grandad's love of his dog Pippa and his passion surrounding his favourite sport, golf.

Pippa was the first real exposure that myself and Dan got to a dog. Every time we arrived at St Barnabas Barn she would scare us silly as she heard us pull up, barking away. That fear would soon go though as Grandad opened the door.

We'd go on early morning walks with Grandad and Pip along the country roads and through the woods, something that I would always enjoy about our visits. I still remember Grandad getting us all to sing 'Pippie's got the paper' each time she came into the kitchen having patiently waited at the front door for the newspaper for what seemed like hours, as well as Grandad getting her to howl down the phone each time he rang to sing happy birthday. All these experiences definitely contributed to what would be my future love of dogs.

The last thing I want to share today is my memory of Grandad encouraging both myself and Dan to start to play golf. Obviously, this was something that Grandad loved, was very passionate about, and of course, very good at. At the age of 7 or 8 I must admit that both Dan and myself definitely leaned towards other sports - football, rugby and cricket.

With that said, I remember Grandad visiting us in Ravenshead shortly after we moved up there. He took us both to a local pitch and putt course which was good fun. We then came home and we wanted to carry on practicing. He turned the lounge into a putting green and gave us some tips. "Get your head in line with the ball, keep the ball forward in your stance, and make sure you have a smooth swing," he would say. At the time I didn't really pay too much attention to it, I just wanted to hit a few balls around.

However, I recently started playing golf a little more regularly and found myself picking up the putter again in April this year and practicing in the same front room. The first thing I did was get my head in line with the ball and get the ball forward in my stance so it's obviously something that has stuck with me.

Unfortunately, I have to report that much more practice is required from me to get to anything close to be considered respectable. But hopefully I can channel some of Grandad's passion and put his tips to good use. If I can get to be half as good as him I'll be very pleased.

Stephanie is unfortunately in Covid isolation and unable to be with us in person today, although she is with us online. She has written a few words on Gordon as a Grandad and asked me to read them for her. She says:

Gordon was a fun and caring Grandad throughout my childhood, and I have so many happy memories of our time spent together: writing and singing songs, exploring the countryside and sharing our love for our furry friends.

His silly humour and jovial nature lifted me at times when I needed it most. Grandad and I shared a lot of simple pleasures in life and we bonded over many of these. Playing pool and sharing music. Sunbathing, cooking and eating great food, drinking and laughter. He was a kind, loving and sociable Grandad who delighted in long chats and big hugs. I'll remember fondly his upbeat personality, many passions and stories.

Stephanie's memories of Gordon.

Andreas, who is also with us online - from Australia - has recorded his own words for us today.....

ANDREAS:

I can recall at least one conversation with my Granddad where we concluded that it is extremely unlikely that there is any life after death. However, just in case we were wrong and he is listening from somewhere, I'll start how he would want me to start... "I cannot think of one personal positive attribute I have that I did not directly inherit from Gordon Marshall."

In honesty I am sure that I have inherited many of those attributes, in particular his passion for daily exercise, the joy of swinging a golf club and an uncanny ability to soak up the unpredictable English sun. These things have however, come along-side a need to ensure that my outfit matches before leaving the house, too much time spent looking in the mirror and the need to always be proven right (something I am sure many of you have endured at some point over the past 87 years).

I wouldn't be surprised if you are thinking he is definitely his grandfather's grandson... but unfortunately, I haven't got a sure-fire horse-racing formula to beat the bookies and I don't think the penalty area on the football pitch needs adjusting.

I have many fond memories spent with my Granddad, particularly over the last decade. I would stop by for a day or more on my drive home from university and we would watch sky sports, eat well and talk about life. He introduced me to drinking Whiskey Mac's as I learned from his experiences. His lows and deepest regrets, of which I know he had many; but also his highs and successes, some exaggerated of course. Did you know that he shot his age on the golf course? Of course, you did. I just think he would have wanted me to remind you.

Thinking forward I can only aspire to remain as active as he was late in life.

Despite the daily vitamin tablets, he was able to let go of the dream to live forever and in the past few years I feel that he developed a deeper love and appreciation for the people around him. I will always remember him as a warm, proud grandfather who was the life and soul of the party. I am happy to think that my Granddad was somebody who loved the joys of life and lived a lucky one.

We have met to pay our respects to Gordon at the end of a long life, lived to the full, a mixture of triumph, happiness and disappointment, but with never a dull moment. Thank you all for coming today. We hope that it will provide comfort and an opportunity to smile together about the Gordon that you knew.