

A celebration of life

Martin Taylor

23rd May 1952 – 25th December 2020

11.00am 22nd May 2022

Loyd Lindsay Rooms, Ardington, Oxfordshire

Ceremony prepared by Lesley Bottomley Humanists UK

Delivered by Ian Hembrow Humanists UK

a personal goodbye

Humanist
Ceremonies

Humanists UK is a registered charity no. 285987 and limited company no. 228781 in England and Wales. Humanists UK, 39 Moreland Street, London, EC1V8BB, 020 7324 3060

Celebrating the life of Martin Taylor

Just before we hear some memories of Martin, a few more words of poetry – this time from the 17th century English poet John Dryden:

Happy the Man

*Happy the man, and happy he alone, He
who can call today his own.
He who, secure within, can say,
Tomorrow do thy worst, for I have lived today.
Be fair or foul or rain or shine,
The joys I have possessed, in
spite of fate, are mine.
Not heaven itself upon the past has power,
But what has been, has been, And I have had
my hour.*

Martin had his hour, more than a year ago, so there has been a long wait for this opportunity for you all to come together and remember his life. It was a life with an unusual beginning, an interesting middle and a somewhat premature end.

Let's hear some of your thoughts and memories, first from Martin's brother John, read now by Diane.

Martin Chandos Taylor was born in Chelsea on the 23rd of May 1952 to Alfred and Lady Ursula Taylor. Arriving late in their parenting years, Martin was a very unexpected, and much wanted blessing for Alfred and Ursula, and he completed their family of three boys.

Martin's early childhood was spent in Kew, where he and his brothers, Peter and John, built close relationships, sharing in childhood games along with their mother. A notable one, and a firm favourite of little Martin's, was when the boys would hide under their bedsheets and wait for their mother to announce that she was tired and must sit and rest on the little logs that had appeared. Martin would crawl out and squeak like a mouse, and his mother would scoop him up and envelop him in cuddles before bed.

Soon Martin's joyous arrival surprised and exceeded the expectations of more than just his parents. Not long after starting school, and showing his gift of intellect early, in no time Martin was enrolled in academic classes far beyond his age. Whilst all three boys attended a school in Gunnersbury Martin even ended up in some of his brother John's classes, and much to other boys' annoyance Martin was top of his classes too, despite the three year age gap.

At home brotherly antics reigned and lifetime bonds were built, sharing in mischievous escapades such as hiding Miss Wasey's Tiger rug's teeth, (resulting in stern words from the adults), pony rides while visiting Ursula's family, collecting pennies for the guy, and building rafts to try and set sail across the Thames on some kind of adventure or other.

One strong memory the brothers often spoke of was the time when Peter allowed John and Martin to listen to his record collection. John and Martin particularly liked 'What Do You Want' by Adam Faith, and on one occasion when John sang out the final line, Martin followed it with a highly comical shriek, mimicking the fans in the audience.

This sent all three boys into hysterics, and a new performing duo was born. This performance was rolled out to many visiting relatives, to the eventual reluctance of the two boys. Martin's ease at adding humour to a situation, his natural want to be part of a collective, without any intention to absorb the limelight for himself, and his encouragement of others was eventually to play out in his passion for the brass band scene. Martin always seemed to find great joy in belonging, and he brought joy to many with his humour, enthusiasm, humility and inclusive attitude.

While Martin's academic prowess continued to impress it played out that his brains were not matched equally by his brawn, as demonstrated by a story much reminisced by Martin about the time he was entered into sports day with his senior classmates. Martin was given a 200m lead starting line, on the 400m running race, to try and even up the competition. Despite the attempt to give Martin this opportunity to level up, he failed to appreciate the need for a competitive spirit, and instead smiled and waved to his proud mother on the side-lines, while all the other boys rushed past.

John remembers with much fondness that this didn't seem to faze Martin in the slightest. This lack of want to 'out-do' others, his genuine joy de vie, and jovial generosity of spirit were qualities that weaved their presence throughout Martin's life and his relationships with others.

The three brothers each chose a different life path. Peter into the RAF, John travelling the world and settling far from home, and Martin, unsurprisingly, going to university. Time and distance were only superficial barriers, and whilst it would have been wonderful to have been able to spend more time together, they remained close, with a brotherly love that never diminished.

Martin always put family first. He could be depended on to turn to, even if his explanations of mathematics were too complex for his nieces and nephews to understand when they telephoned for help with maths homework. When speaking to family members about Martin it became apparent that smiles were quick to appear, and that the 'warmth without agenda' that Martin emitted during his life is echoed back in the words we now use to speak of him. Martin was unequivocally kind, thoughtful, loving, and with a generosity of spirit that will long be remembered by those who loved him.

Thank you John for writing and Diane for reading, that was absolutely lovely.

Now for some of the interesting middle part of Martin's life.

Having studied five foreign languages at school, including Greek and Russian, moving on to Arabic and Oriental studies at university was a natural progression. Martin knew how languages worked and found learning new ones easy and fascinating.

He left university in the early 1970s and joined ICL – International Computers Limited. Martin was their ideal candidate for computer programming roles with his academic linguistic background – at the time they were specifically recruiting linguists. These were the heady days when computing was a new world and careers could rapidly progress.

He changed employer several times working in the private, public and charity sectors during his career and moved on from programming to IT security. All this while, he moved only a few miles from Newbury to Grove, where he lived for almost 30 years.

Some memories now from Sue, read by her son Matt.

My dearest Martin

I now have to try and put together some words to explain all about us and our lives together so I hope this letter will help describe them. I guess meeting in our middle years ie our 40s meant that things happened so much more quickly than when we were younger, we felt we didn't have time to mess around with a longer courtship.

We were both sure of what we wanted from a relationship and decided very soon that we had found it in each other. We both had teenage sons who were polar opposites in their interests but all of them were supportive of our relationship especially when they saw how happy we were together.

At the reception following our church blessing in 2002 you said that we now had a family of four boys and that was how we wanted to treat them and although technically there were two pairs, a his and a hers, we always felt and tried to act as if they were now all ours. It was not always easy to try and make a single unit out of such different young men but I think we managed the best we could and that they will all agree that meeting each other ultimately had a very positive influence on their lives.

You always made me feel as if I knew your parents as you talked about them in a very loving way and the many stories you told me of your life when you were younger made them both very real to me as people. Your brothers Peter and John, who obviously featured very much in the stories of the younger Martin, and their families also made me feel very much part of the Taylor family as a whole and I thank them all very much for their generosity in this.

You also took on the role of Son in Law fully and created a loving, happy and supportive relationship with my parents and my wider family and in the last few years of our time together you welcomed my Mum into our home and life and let her continue to live at the heart of her family with such love and kindness and I know that love was reciprocated by my Mum, she loved you to bits. I remember with such love and happiness hearing you and Mum giggling away together at breakfast just like two naughty children, it is a sound I miss so much now but it gives me great joy when I remember it.

With you I rediscovered the person I had been when I was younger, I re-established my interests involving music, history and later art, I started to develop a confidence that I had not felt for many years and it is fair to say we started talking on our first date which was supposed to be a romantic dinner but we never got around to eating! and we never stopped.

In fact I still talk to you now so I do hope wherever you are you are paying attention, there will be questions later. You encouraged and cajoled me to do some of the things I had always wanted to do but never felt good enough to try, and I hope and believe I had a similar effect on you and allowed you to find more freedom, happiness and joy in your life.

You are a man with a beautiful soul and I am lucky that I met you, the hole I had in my heart when I first met you was filled with your love, that hole is there again now but so are the very many happy memories of my life with you and they are wonderful memories to have but honestly my heart still hurts that you are no longer here with us.

I think it is fair to say you are missed not only by me but also by the boys, their partners and children they all experienced the love and happiness that having a Martin in their lives brought. You were always so loving and proud of them all and this was very much appreciated by all of us, you were such a loving husband, father, step-father and grandad and we were so lucky to have you in our lives.

Still I find every day something will happen and I will immediately think oh Martin will like that or Martin will be interested in that or even just Martin will laugh at that. I so miss all the silly conversations we used to have as well as the serious discussions about anything you can think of, I cannot think of you in the past because for me you will always be with me.

To meet someone and develop such a love as we had is a very special thing and I am lucky to have experienced such love, you were not only the man I loved, but also the man who always brought a smile to my face and the man who was my best friend I love you as much today as I did when I first met you and I guess I always will. Until we meet again my darling I wish you peace, comfort, happiness and all the music you could want and send you all my love now and forever.

Sue.

Thank you Sue and Matt, that was heartfelt.

Next to remember Martin is Sue's other son, Alastair.

- *Meeting Martin for the first time*
- *How despite being from two very different lifestyle, things managed to work*
- *The interest and care Martin showed to my work and motorsport*
- *The care and love towards my mum during their years together*
- *How Christmas now has two meanings*

Thank you Alastair.

When they left Grove in 2006, Martin and Sue moved home a number times, creeping incrementally westward before landing in Swindon after retirement, when Sue's mother Becca came to live with them.

Martin retired from work when he was 65, but continued to learn, as he had throughout his life. His cooking improved too, but "from a low point" to quote Dave. He remained a good sounding board for ideas and could always be relied upon to tease out the solution to a problem.

Sadly, a long and fruitful retirement was not to be, his last months were difficult, not least due to the coronavirus pandemic, when family contacts for all of us were so restricted. But he made the most of what he had at this time. Visitors were received with enthusiasm, and piles of books were eagerly devoured. In the face of physical decline, Martin sought to grow, remaining a valuable example to everyone who knew him.

Finally, let's hear from Dave.

The COVID pandemic has given this event strange timing. We are here nearly a year and a half after Dad's passing, a date chosen to align with what would have been his 70th birthday tomorrow, and also a date chosen over a year ago in the hope that all would be back to normal at this point. That hasn't quite worked out, but we are much closer to acting normally than we were then, at least, although we must still take precautions.

In usual service, we collectively remember a person shortly after their passing. Memories are fresh and raw, and have had no chance to fade. This much later, things are different; some grief was unavoidably left unprocessed, and now is a chance to deal with it. Holding it in stasis for so long is a peculiar thing indeed.

How do you sum up a parent? What are the words that need to be said to sum up what they have left you, their child, with? These questions are too deep. Too much meaning attaches to them, spread over too long a span of time. But we can easily talk about what a parent was to us.

Dad was many things. A clever man, startlingly good at languages, someone who easily built a career in a science-based subject despite heavily weighting his studies to the linguistic subjects he loved. A caring man, one who needed to be needed, even sometimes to his own cost. A musical man, one who found greatest joy in the making of music with others, fully embracing the ethos of amateur music-making: "music made for the love of it". A practical man, capable of attention to details that could really make things happen.

Perhaps most deeply, a family man, someone who found deep fulfilment in children, stepchildren, and step grandchildren. Someone who came to realise that kindness being present is the thing of ultimate importance and made that an increasing centrepiece of his life in his last couple of decades.

He was somebody who grew emotionally throughout his life. The child of parents from extremely different life experiences, he was always reticent to open up about his early years, to me at least. I am told that his childhood home was sometimes not the happiest place, although his mother's deep love for her children was always obvious.

He married first at 25, to my mother Ruth, and following that, first I and then Alec appeared. Fault lines grew in that marriage, slowly over many years, and both parents eventually became much happier for separating, and both found greater fulfilment and self-knowledge in subsequent remarriages.

Most of Dad's adult life divided quite neatly into two marriage-defined segments; at 49 he was much more ready for the challenges of a life partnership, this time with my stepmother Sue, than he had been even only a few years before - it was an instructive and slightly bizarre experience to watch him grow at this time!

Where others set rigidly as they age, he always tried to maintain flexibility of thought, and at 65 I found him much easier to admire than I had when he was 45. Some of that was due to my youthful arrogance and the natural passage of time, but much of it came from a sense that he'd made his peace more effectively with who he was and how that related to other people.

As I said, music was a big part of his life. The open-mic singer who accompanied himself on the guitar at Newbury Folk Club in the 1970s (where he met Mum) in early 1988 discovered the joys of brass banding, taking up the tuba with the Wantage Silver Band, who you can hear this afternoon in a free concert celebrating Dad's memory.

Dad stayed with Wantage band until his lung condition meant he couldn't play any more, playing for various levels of their large organisation, and helping to organise many things for both them and the Oxfordshire and District Brass Band Association, whose chair he was for several years.

He was a great reader, rapid and wide-ranging in subject matter, a pleasure that happily stayed with him until the very end. Our childhood home was full of books, showing both myself and Alec from a young age the joy that can be found in reading.

He was keenly interested in computer hardware, and parts of that house often resembled a computer scrapyard, with multiple ancient machines in various states of disassembly lying around.

Raised a Catholic, he stepped away from that as a young adult, rejecting religious worldviews. The ideas of Humanism came to informally define who he saw himself as - emphasising the joy and responsibilities of a person as an individual contributing to a collective human whole, and so he requested that this event be run as a Humanist event.

He deserves a lot of credit for how he approached the step fatherly responsibilities that remarriage presented to him. Anyone who knows us at all will agree easily that the four of us children and stepchildren are each very different people, with very different interests and personalities! Blending this group presented its own particular challenges, not least on account of our ages - we were all teenagers (or close) at the outset, myself and Ali finishing up our school years, Alec early in secondary school, and Matt around his GCSEs.

Each of us brought unique sets of hang-ups and issues to the family dynamic! Dad embraced the broad tent that this produced, and sought to be a father to Ali and Matt in the ways that they needed that from him as much as to Alec and myself. This wasn't without tension over the years! But I don't think anyone ever thought that he wasn't trying his best to do what was right for everyone. He was a deeply sincere man, and that always shone through, even when one disagreed with him.

Husband, father, stepfather, reader, musician, programmer, linguist; Dad was many things, and could have been many other things had he chosen to. Allied to a deep sense of responsibility, he had a gentle kindness and a curious mind that cared passionately about topics, one that wanted to find out why things were so. There should be more people like him in the world; it would be a better place.

Thank you Dave, that was insightful and full of love.