

# A celebration of life

## Robert Douglas Williams [Bob]

24 May 1950 – 29 January 2022

1215 – 1315, 21 February 2022, Haycombe Crematorium, Bath



Humanist  
*Ceremonies*

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To my dearest Bob,

You were known to many of your friends as “Big Bob” which I think described your character as much as your size, which was always big upwards, and gradually extended outwards over the years! You were curmudgeonly, opinionated, vocal, dogmatic and argumentative but you were always your own man and we loved you just the way you were.

I want to take this moment to say thank you for all the things that you gave to our lives together, thank you for always being you, true to yourself, steadfast and loyal.

You were big in your engagement in life and the world, your many interests that sometimes led us into strange adventures – if I say “on to Belarus”, some here will understand what I mean!

You took us on mad walks wielding your stick to make paths through the brambles and stingers that small children could pass through; you raised your binoculars and taught us to look for and identify birds. You brought joy into our lives; we travelled the world both in real life and through your fantastic culinary repertoire; we drank weird cocktails, we laughed at your silly T- shirts (no one got the sausage rolls one). Never a picture of sartorial elegance, you were happiest with your motor bikes and steam engines in greasy overalls, swearing like a trooper and teaching our young children some very bad language.

You took fantastic photos, especially your black and white ones; you educated us all with your interest in music which ranged far and wide through blues, rock, jazz, and even a record of Siberian Folk songs – you were always ahead of the curve! And thank you for your informed and challenging view of the world. Never one to suffer fools gladly, you were always a bright lad, but more than being bright, you were always seeking new things to learn and always ready to challenge the things in the world that you thought unjust, biased, wrong or just crazy - SUSTRANS comes to mind!

My dearest Bob, these are some of the things I should have said to you more often when you were here, although I know that you always knew that I loved you very deeply.

Thank you for your big hearted generosity, your kindness to friends in trouble or in need; thank you for always being there for me, and Sam and Allys, always our biggest supporters, our fierce defender against anyone who attempted unkindness or harm towards us.

You were a person with such a strong ethical framework around which to shape your life and this we shared and I think instilled in our children. And there’s another thing which I have to say thank you for – two children that mean the world to us both. You were so proud of all our achievements, small and large although perhaps you could have told us so more often!

I did often tell you that you were my rock, and you would look modestly puzzled, but ever since we met you have been my biggest cheerleader. You believed in me when I doubted

myself, you saw potential in me that I failed to see in myself and you always encouraged me in all the crazy odd work projects that I embarked on in my life.

My dearest Bob you were my other half, my partner, my team mate and soul mate. There is such a big hole in my life now. I will love you always and you will be forever in my heart.

Yours forever

Sooze xx

### **To Bob, from Allys**

There are so many debts I owe you.

My sense of fairness and justice I learned from hours of listening to you argue politics over red wine. Learning how to debate and how to hold firm to a principle.

My love of wide, open spaces I learned from your stories of growing up in Australia. You helped me picture the sprawling bush and baking heat, even from the neat gardens and fences of Southern England.

From you I learned to love food not only for itself, but because there is joy in feeding others and bringing people together. Our house was always full of the smell of spices and garlic because of the weekends you spent cooking. You were never prouder than when Sam and I would wolf down plates of curry.

You taught me to travel to the places no one thinks to go. My most vivid memory from our first ever foreign holiday in Spain is not a resort pool, but the smell of a pomegranate tree and the sound of cicadas. As a family we explored temples, coral reefs and ancient settlements, from Orkney to Darwin, and Hong Kong to the Welsh Borders.

You showed me how Black musicians shaped modern music, and talked about the violence of colonialism, long before it was cool to support Black Lives Matter. From your love of statistics I learned to think about systems and patterns – to think bigger, as well as to spot the tell-tale details.

And I still have so much more to learn from you.

I hope I can learn to be as good a friend as you were. It was typical of you that in your final weeks you made a new mate on the hospital ward, bonding over a mutual love of KFC. You were a loyal friend who had a knack for spotting the good in others while never being sentimental.

I will try to stay true to your refusal to let the bastards of this world get away with it. I will complain when work is badly done, or when someone with power tries to misuse it. But I will always remember that you were at heart a peaceful person – one of life's not-so-secret softies.

I hope I can emulate your greatest skill as a father and remember to let go. You always gave me great freedom to follow my own talents and ambitions, and to be my own person.

I am so sad that Sid will not remember her Dodo. But I promise to pass on as much of your spirit as I can. I will give her hell when she listens to rubbish music. I will make her finish her maths homework. And I will take her to see steam trains and point out the things of this world that you loved.

There are so many debts I owe you, that I am sure these small promises barely scratch the surface. But luckily for me you never saw them as debts and would never have wanted them repaid. Thank you for everything you gave me so freely.

### **Bob by Sam**

Writing this is incredibly hard as it somehow makes things real, but Bob wouldn't have wanted this to be a sycophantic, disingenuous tribute, I think he would've preferred an accurate critique of his life and of him as a person and certainly one that was backed up by the proper research and facts. So Bob, I will do my best!

For some reason for me it is easier to start from the end. The amount of messages and tributes I have been sent about my Dad since we shared the sad news of him passing away have been incredible and overwhelming. His influence and impact spread much farther afield than I am sure either me or him knew. These accolades have ranged from him being described as warm and welcoming, of being principled, having exceptional music taste and even to him being somewhat of a niche fashion icon! Sooze, Allys and I have had a number of chuckles about the last one that's for sure!

One of the things I will always be hugely grateful for is Bob's love and interest in music. Many of my friends likened him to John Peel, in both looks and his eclectic music taste. I think a common memory for many of Bob's friends and family are of him listening to horrendously loud Jimmy Hendrix through his giant KEF speakers whilst cooking something spicy in the kitchen at Cheapside, or at the Cottage. But what I personally really loved was when he, as a 50 something old bloke, was introducing me as a teenager to people like the Chemical Brothers! Again normally at volume 11, there is a theme there.

Apart from the obviously sad times we are all going through at the moment I think being grateful is actually one of the main things I have felt, or tried to feel, in the last few weeks. It is always the way at these times that you think of the things that you perhaps didn't say enough when you had the opportunity, but I really do want to say thanks to my Dad for some of the sacrifices he made for Allys and I. In particular slogging out that commute in a suit and tie to and from London 5 days a week, sometimes more, to make sure we were being provided for and got the opportunities in life that he, and we, felt were important. As someone who rarely seemed to wear shoes, let alone a shirt and tie, in his younger hippie years in Australia and Indonesia I can only imagine how much more difficult that sacrifice was. To be honest those early starts and long commutes could make him a grumpy sod at times but, especially now I am older and a father myself, I realise how much of a big deal that was. So thank you Bob.

I am also grateful that his grandchildren got to meet him. Their memories of “Dodo” their grandfather will be hazy at best I am sure, but they will be in there somewhere. Once they got over their initial apprehension, Big Bob did have a habit of unintentionally scaring small children, you could see the love and intrigue already there and this is something that would have only blossomed over years.

We have been reminiscing over old photos and the amazing times we had together a lot in recent weeks. And so many of those for Bob and us, revolve around food and drink. From Jakarta to Slovakia or Hunan we were treated with such a wide range of culinary delights that I felt seriously spoiled. Things didn't always go exactly to plan in the kitchen, sometimes due to one too many pre dinner tipples! And there was always an absolute bomb site to tidy up afterwards, but I thought it was always worth it!

Talking of tipples that was also one of Bob's little pleasures in life, and his enthusiasm for good food and drink was infectious. Whether it was a pre-dinner G&T or a Negroni (done properly of course), a nice bottle of Rioja with a meal, or indeed a whisky night cap or two he, and we, very much enjoyed those times, although the morning after slightly less sometimes!

What often came with these moments was conversation, discussion and debate. Bob had his opinions and wasn't afraid to share them, whether it was politics, music or cycle paths he would seek out passionate debate and stick by his guns even if heavily outnumbered. He also somehow had this ability to disagree most vehemently with his closest friends and family and they would still love him! I know for sure there are a number of topics that Bob and I would have never agreed on, and actually, he taught me that that is ok.

There is so much more I could write/say about my Dad, Bob, but today is just one day and we will continue to talk about fond times for the weeks, months years to come. Many of us will feel that he buggered off far too early, but in Bob's own candid way he always told us that he'd probably not make it passed 60 so he's probably felt like he actually had a pretty good innings!

He was a great and somewhat unconventional father, he stuck by his principles, he pretty much ate and drank what he liked and although he went through some tough times, do you know what I think he generally had a bloody good time! Love you Bob you will be very, very sorely missed but always remembered. And rest assured we will be raising a glass, or perhaps two, in your honour later today.