

A celebration of the life of

Eric Daniel

30 November 1933 – 12 January 2023

2pm, 17 February 2023, Surrey & Sussex Crematorium, Memorial Chapel



a personal goodbye

Humanist
Ceremonies

Eric was born in 1933, the son of Albert and Margaret Daniel. Margaret was a scullery maid at Oughtrington Hall, the local manor house which later turned into Lymm Grammar School, which the girls attended. Albert was a stationary engine driver in the steel works, which probably means that he operated a crane – it's one of those job roles which has since disappeared. Let's be honest, Eric was spoiled rotten. His mum was 33 when she had him, late in those days, and she tolerated all sorts of behaviour, particularly around food, which may account for his later obsession with mushy peas and custard.

Eric was not academic, and didn't do particularly well at school, though he did love sports, and was an active member of Warrington Boy's Table Tennis Club. He left school at 14, and became an apprentice joiner in Osnath pram works, just around the corner from home.

And there he might have stayed, had he not been called up for National Service at the age of 18 in 1952. As a gunner in the Royal Artillery he was initially based in Oswestry, but then headed off to see the world, or more specifically Germany, where he was based in Osnabrück and Berlin. He developed close friendships with other conscripts, important for someone who had never had a brother, and impressed the officers with his bearing, appearance and sporting prowess, particularly in rugby. He gained promotion to the rank of lance-bombadier. And his eyes were opened to the fact that there were other possibilities in life, other lifestyles, and other languages. All his life he would express astonishment with the words "Gott in Himmel". He became a confident young man.

He ended his National Service 3 months early, because his father became very ill with cancer and the army put him on a train home. And he decided that, good as he was with his hands, he wanted to do something more ambitious. He took classes at night school in law, English and business, and by the time he married in 1959, he was the superintendent of a "clothing club", a then popular method of saving. Through a connection brokered by one of the officers he had impressed in the Royal Artillery, he got a job with Lombard North Central, the finance arm of National Westminster Bank, working mostly with the motor trade.

At first he was in the Warrington branch, then was promoted to Bolton in 1970, and promoted again in 1972 to become manager of the Warrington branch. He turned down a move to Birmingham, because Joan wanted to stay near her family in Cheshire. They bought a big house in Lymm, which was well placed when he got yet another promotion, to the Liverpool branch, where he stayed for 11 years. The girls went into Liverpool sometimes at weekends or during school holidays, and he would take them out to lunch at the Catering College, where Eric proudly told the tale of Claire objecting to a fellow diner smoking. He'd given up the habit with a flourish some years earlier, on the way back from holiday, and picked up a Polo mint habit instead.

The work was a perfect fit for him. He was outgoing, friendly and sociable. He was good with money, and he was a very good salesman.

Eric met Joan in 1955 at a dance, and they began a four-year courtship. The marriage was to last for 62 years, until Joan died in 2021. They owned houses from the beginning of their marriage, and discovered a joint passion for gardening which they applied to everywhere they lived. They created a magical, happy home around them. Claire was born in 1961 and Jacqueline in 1964. It was a household where many games were played – boardgames, cards and word games.

Eric was interested in EVERYTHING. Gardening, sport, travel, politics. Everything. The family went off on adventures most weekends, and they bought a caravan in 1971. Holidays were often to North Wales, where Eric's father was originally from, and also to Scotland, Cornwall, Norfolk, a great grounding in British geography for his daughters. They would do quizzes on the journey, with capital cities one of Eric's specialist subjects. Foreign holidays were limited by the presence and longevity of William the dog, but a package holiday to Ibiza gave Eric and Joan a taste for Spain. Once Eric retired, they used to go to Tenerife for their wedding anniversary every March to soak up the sun while the UK was still shrouded in gloom.

But back to Eric's career. His business commitments and the social life-associated with it – mainly conducted on the golf course - did to some extent keep Eric away from the family in those working years, but he made up for it later. In 1983 another promotion took them to Essex, which they really disliked, but a year later he moved to the Redhill branch, and they bought their house in East Grinstead, a brand new bungalow with a big garden. In moving South, they left Eric's mum behind in Warrington, but she visited twice a year until she died in 1988.

He retired in 1992, when he was only 58, and together he and Joan enjoyed the long retirement to which his hard work and head for business had entitled them. They played golf (Joan managing to hit a hole in one before Eric did), and there was of course the garden, for which they won awards in East Grinstead Britain in Bloom. They used to help run a plant stall in Turners Hill each year to raise money for St Catherine's Hospice in East Grinstead.

Along came the grandchildren, James, Alastair, Isabelle and Sophie. And then came the great grandchildren, Zoë, Emma and Rupert. He was so proud of them all! He revelled in his role as the head of the family, and loved to be surrounded by crowds of them – on the odd occasions when Claire or Jacqueline couldn't be around for Christmas, he sulked. In retirement, they regularly visited Claire in the Peak District and then Scotland, and helped Jacqueline with the children when they were young and she worked full-time. And when Claire moved down south, he of course helped her to establish her garden.

He loved his grandchildren (to be honest, not so much as babies – he preferred them to interact and appreciate the knowledge he was passing on). He was generous with his time and knowledge, taking Alastair fishing, helping and inspiring James with his model railway, and dutifully going to watch the girls in dance shows at the Hawth.

He became a silver surfer, learned how to use an Apricot, an early computer, at night school, and became interested in share dealing, using Ceefax.

He joined Probus, becoming president in due course, and organised garden tours and European trips for them, as well as running an investment club. In retirement, as in work, he was every bit a manager.

For someone who was generally so in charge of everything, Eric had an extraordinary number of accidents – on his motor bike, playing rugby, during routine surgery, and even accidentally drinking bar cleaning fluid in the golf club.

Eric had a great sense of the correct thing to say and do. The girls were always required to eat properly, talk properly and not to whistle. And one of the things he felt it was proper to have – but only if you were a boy - was a middle name. Unfortunately he didn't have one. But this didn't deter him, and on formal correspondence he frequently styled himself Eric Albert Daniel, using his Dad's name.

From 2013 on, Eric was not as well as he had been, with a series of little TIAs, and a tendency to depression as the years went on. There were still high spots in life: the boys' weddings, the girls' 18th and 21st birthdays, Joan's 80th. But there was also a feeling that life was beginning to go downhill, and Eric, who had always been so much in control, didn't like that. They moved from East Grinstead to Copthorne, to a house with a more manageable garden, in 2007, but Eric was never sure about the move, describing himself as having "post-purchase remorse".

From his time as an apprentice joiner onwards, Eric was always good with his hands. Claire and Jacqueline have fond memories of the doll's cots he built for them, one in pink, one in white, with Joan of course contributing matching bedding and dresses for the dolls. And there was very little he could not turn his hand to.

This poem by Edgar Albert Guest sums him up beautifully:

"It couldn't be done"

*Somebody said that it couldn't be done
But he with a chuckle replied
That "maybe it couldn't," but he would be one
Who wouldn't say so till he'd tried.
So he buckled right in with the trace of a grin
On his face. If he worried he hid it.
He started to sing as he tackled the thing
That couldn't be done, and he did it!*

*Somebody scoffed: "Oh, you'll never do that;
At least no one ever has done it;"
But he took off his coat and he took off his hat
And the first thing we knew he'd begun it.
With a lift of his chin and a bit of a grin,
Without any doubting or quiddit,
He started to sing as he tackled the thing
That couldn't be done, and he did it.*

*There are thousands to tell you it cannot be done,
There are thousands to prophesy failure,
There are thousands to point out to you, one by one
The dangers that wait to assail you.
But just buckle in with a bit of a grin,
Just take off your coat and go to it;
Just start in to sing as you tackle the thing
That "cannot be done," and you'll do it.*