

A celebration of the life of Douglas Keith Smith (Keith)

21 April 1949 – 12 September 2022

2pm, 19 October 2022, Clayton Wood Natural Burial Ground



a personal goodbye

Humanist
Ceremonies

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Keith had a beautiful philosophy of life. He often said that “This is heaven, right here on this planet”. And it seems that all who came into his life shared a bit of his heaven.

Keith’s love of life, nature, rivers, and the joys of fishing seem to be echoed in this Delmar Pepper poem read today by Emma, daughter of Keith’s fishing pal, Gordon.

Gone Fishin’ by Delmar Pepper

*I’ve finished life’s chores assigned to me,
So put me on a boat headed out to sea.
Please send along my fishing pole
For I’ve been invited to the fishin’ hole.*

*Where every day is a day to fish,
To fill your heart with every wish.
Don’t worry, or feel sad for me,
I’m fishin’ with the Master of the sea.*

*We will miss each other for awhile,
But you will come and bring your smile.
That won’t be long you will see,
Till we’re together you and me.*

*To all of those that think of me,
Be happy as I go out to sea.
If others wonder why I’m missin’
Just tell ’em I’ve gone fishin’.*

How does one sum up a life so well lived?

Here is Keith’s story.

Keith was the only child of Cynthia and Ted Smith. You may be wondering about the “Douglas” I mentioned earlier? Well, apparently his parents disagreed about the name, with Cynthia wanting him to be called Keith, and Ted wanting him to be called Douglas. This was in 1949, so of course the father’s wish prevailed, on paper at least. But Cynthia resolutely called him Keith from day one, and it stuck, so she had her way anyway. They lived in Thorne, near Doncaster, where Ted was a park keeper and Cynthia worked in the Darley Brewery, where Keith joined her at times, both of them enjoying the half pint they were allowed at the end of their shift. It was a happy childhood in a close community, and he particularly enjoyed fish and chips with Grandad Smith at his fish and chip shop, and the cakes baked by his Granny Smith.

The young Keith was conscious that he had career choices to make. A school outing to Thorne Colliery convinced him that mining was not for him, and the Brewery did not appeal as a long-term option. So he applied for a scholarship to art college – the picture he painted when he applied is still in his garage. Once there, he specialised in Exhibition Design. His first job was for Owen Owen, the department store in Liverpool which was a bit like the TV sitcom “Are you Being Served?” Some say the series was based on it. Keith was a window display designer there and had much fun. Bizarrely everyone was given a different surname to their own and he became strangely “Mr Squires” just shows how his life sometimes imitated art. He then moved on to E J Arnold the stationers, in Leeds. He married Heather, who he had met at art college, and together they moved to London.

This youthful marriage did not last. They divorced, and in 1979 on his birthday, Keith married Rita. They had met at a party. Rita was on a blind date with another guy, but by the end of the night she was with Keith, and her original date was nowhere to be seen. They were on record player duty – Keith's natural habitat!

Rita and Keith were together for 26 years, and have remained firm friends, as have other members of her family particularly with her brothers, Steve and Chris and their families.

Keith and Rita were very proud parents to their three lovely daughters, Jemma, Becci and Pippa, and Pippa will now talk to us about her Dad:

Duggy Bear, Cushion Man, Smiffy, Keithy or Keithy Weefy. Just a few of the many names we all knew dad by, however one thing was certain was the amazing, kind, funny and generous man he was.

Jemma, Becci and I had the most wonderful childhood and Duggy Bear was the best dad any daughter could ask for. So I thought today as I say goodbye to our wonderful Duggy Bear I would share a few fond memories I have of our childhood.

Well it goes without saying dancing in the living room and kitchen to the Beatles and Jive Bunny was a weekly occurrence and his legendary dad jokes was a daily occurrence, even up to the last few weeks of his life he still managed to crack a joke.

We would what we called 'bungling' on the living room floor which involved the three of us launching at dad whilst yelling "bungle" and try to pin him down.

I also remember many happy holidays in Carnac in France. Dad would go to the bakery for fresh croissants for breakfast and BBQ's for dinner and trips to the beach in the daytime. We met a new family every year and would go away with pen pals to write too.

A fond bath time memory I have with Dad which is something I occasionally do with my daughter Maeva is the Woody woodpecker hair. When I was very little I used to shout to dad that I was ready to wash my hair. He would soap up my hair and shape it into a point on the top of my head and sing the woody woodpecker theme tune and make me crack up with laughter.

But most of all I can still now close my eyes and be transported back to the best hugs on the sofa on a Sunday afternoon watching the Antiques Roadshow and Last of the Summer Wine.

Now I started this with telling you the nicknames we all knew dad by but of course we had them too. Jemma is jelly bean or jembo welly wash, Becci is speckly Ann frying pan and I was always noodle fadoodle, skippy miff or normally he would just simply say 'my mate'.

We will all miss you Duggy Bear more than words can express and will always love you

Love you mate Skippy xxx

Meanwhile in his long career Keith made many really good friends, who he kept in touch with. Their booze cruises to France were a fixture in the calendar, particularly with Colin, Richard, Andy and Gordon, who he met when he was promoted as a manager to the SEGAS Display and Exhibitions department. Lynda, who much later in Keith's life become his civil partner, worked as a fellow designer for a little while.

Keith took redundancy from British Gas, after 25 years, and he and his friend Mark, another SEGAS work colleague, set up their own business, DEX Partnership, and later formed another company, Mark One Exhibitions. After 46 years of working together, sharing banter and camaraderie, there are quite a few stories to tell. One such story from Mark can give us true insight to Keith's remarkable caring character:

It was about 2008 as I remember. I was upstairs in the office at Sutton doing the VAT and was on the phone while looking out of the window, Keith was downstairs, and I saw him standing in the car park - staring up at the roof of our building - with a grimace on his face. He then disappeared from view... a couple of minutes later I could then see him walking along past the bus stop with a pair of extension ladders on his shoulder...what the hell is he up to now I thought, as no doubt did the queue of people at the bus stop. He then set up the ladders against the wall and climbed to the top... all became clear when he started to release a swift that had become tangled under the eaves. He climbed down the ladder - took a deep bow - folded the ladder and returned to whence he came... mission accomplished. I really should have guessed what he was up to... after all he was crazy about birds, butterflies etc. as you know!

When his British Gas pension became available, though, Keith decided to retire.

In his retirement, he loved helping "old ladies" with gardening and odd jobs. They loved him, he never charged enough, and true to his generous nature he gave them most of his fish. There are probably quite a few friends here today, missing his enormous generosity when distributing his catches of the day amongst you.

His love of river fishing was a major feature in his life. For years he did weekly trips with Andy and Gordon, all across the rivers of Sussex and at Arlington Reservoir, and sometimes they went on fishing holiday trips to Ireland, Cornwall and Wales. You may not know he fell in the river at least three times, to Gordon's knowledge and once, after one incident ended up in the pub in with little more covering his immodesty than his waders! Keith would never let a good dousing spoil a good lunchtime pint with his pals!

Keith and Lynda, on their very first holiday together in the summer of 2005, discovered a mutual love of art where they found themselves painting on the banks of the canals, something they each had not done in years.

As their relationship grew, Lynda discovered this beautiful calm man who could come up with unique solutions. When Lynda made a faux pas when arranging a holiday and forgot to book the luggage, Keith's response was "Oh we'll wear all our clothes. It'll be fun!" And so they did, arriving in steamy hot Tenerife, like a couple of very fat Michelin men, much to the amusement of the other passengers! On their various trips, fellow travellers and locals quickly became new friends after Keith engaged them in his friendly chatter. They found themselves invited to an evening socializing into the early hours in a like-minded Catalanian's apartment in Barcelona. In Turkey, Keith had the rest of the hotel in hysterics with his version of belly dancing. He was always the first person to get up to dance.

Then 2020 arrived, and holidays were no longer an option, especially with Keith's health vulnerabilities. However Lynda felt so blessed to be locked down with the kindest, most positive man in the world.

While Lynda was working, Keith's selfless random acts of kindness became apparent, when at the end of the day she'd return home, discovering the garden tidied, washing out on the line, a repaired fence or a cleaned car. And it tickled him, if she hadn't spotted all his secret good deeds until a day or two later.

Their plans to travel the world were first put on hold when, on the first day of Lynda's semi-retirement, Keith was diagnosed with colon cancer that had already metastasized to his liver and lungs. In the next five years of treatment, Lynda saw her remarkable Keithy demonstrate enormous courage and positivity and exclaiming he was the "come-back kid" after each operation.

In August of this year, they felt it was probably about time they should solemnize their very happy seventeen years together in a beautiful civil partnership. Lynda would like you all to know that her dear Keithy's joyful spirit will be wedded in hers and your hearts forever. She'd like to thank every one of you for your wonderful, support and let you know how moved she is by your kind acts and beautiful words. She hopes it's OK, Tonya, if we read your words:

'My dear Lynda, it was with enormous sadness that I learnt of the passing of your beloved soulmate, Keith. He was a giant of a man who bore his illness with great dignity, fortitude and positivity. He loved you and all his family with a passion deep, and a profound love. He was a kind and considerate gentleman who was liked and respected by all who knew him. Although your time together was cut short, I know from seeing you together, the obvious love you had for each other and that will always be with you. I hope you can find comfort in the knowledge that Keith will sleep gently in the arms of the Lord, free from pain, suffering anxiety and indignity. May his gentle soul rest in peace.'

You all knew Keith as a kind loving man with a huge welcoming smile for everyone he met. He would strike up conversations with strangers while out, and end up as a friend for life. He loved everyone, but especially his family and girls, Jemma, Becci and Pip. He was a man with a giant heart who thought of everyone before himself. His life's work was to make everyone happy. His daughters describe him as the life and soul of the party, always ready to dance to his beloved Beatles, to talk to people and to make them smile and tell dreadful jokes.

Keith was an enormously proud Grandad to Ben, Maeva, Jasper, and Nate. The grandchildren all adored him, with his silly jokes, songs, funny reading voices and the 'best hugs ever' as Maeva said recently. He always had time for them, always had patience, and enjoyed the silliness they revelled in. He did the tried and tested teasing, jokes and generally being silly which he had used on his daughters. The grandchildren loved it and Jemma, Becci and Pippa loved seeing them having fun together.

To round off this tribute, Jemma is going to talk to us about some of the things she learned from her Dad.

After Dad died, I had a coffee with a dear friend to get me out of the house and to talk. She said something that has really stuck with me. She said you know Jemma your dad will always be there with you. In the things you have learned from him, his mannerisms, and approach to life and in your own child and your nieces and nephews.

This has been a great source of comfort to me over the past few weeks and will in future, as we all come to terms with losing Dad in the physical sense.

It is true, us girls do have his looks in different ways and his outlook on life. Sadly, or possibly happily depending on how you look at it none of us have inherited the dad joke gene! But there is hope one of the grandchildren may pick up the mantle. The grandchildren have most definitely got plenty of Dad's looks and ways in them, I see it all the time when I am with them. It will bring us all happiness in a time of sadness to see this.

When I think about all the things, I have learnt from Dad it is varied and rich and I will find new things as time goes on. But overwhelmingly it is his zest for life, his joie de vivre. He never took himself too seriously.

When I have had moments of heartache or frustration, I always said to Dad, I need to fix it, what do I do. His first answer usually was come to the pub and have a wine or two, and everything will be better. But joking aside, he normally said something along the lines of 'It will all work itself out Jem, it always does'.

He did not rush things, try to make sense out of the nonsensical. He just was and could just be in the moment.

If I can manage a fraction of that relaxed approach I will be doing well. It will certainly help me balance myself out and be a little less serious and a bit more fun.

So, in the spirit of Dad, I would like to think that we will all dance when you can especially when in a kitchen and the Beatles are playing, have a drink with family and friends and just take it all in. Because you only get one life, and it is sometimes shorter than we would like. We need to seize it with both hands and enjoy it.

And now we'll hear, *A Good Friend*, written specially for Keith, by his friend, John Charlish:

*Sadly I shall miss this great friend and wit
A man who spoke his mind and lived by it
His fishy tales, his corny jokes
Made loads of friends with many folks
Underneath that grin, that cheeky smile
Was a man who'd go that extra mile
For family and friends, a pint or three
You'll all miss this, as well as me
Our sadness and sorrow tempered with joy
For the life of Keith
A good old boy*