

A celebration of the life of Alan Kendall

9 April 1934 – 2 July 2017

a personal goodbye

Humanist
Ceremonies

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Alan Kendall: Tribute

Alan was born on the 9th of April 1934 in Bethnal Green. His father, John, died very young as a result of being gassed in the First World War. His mother, Ada, worked but was also pretty much a full time mum: she had no less than 11 children of whom Alan was the youngest - and she was 48 years old when she had him. Perhaps she saved the best until last!

As the youngest, Alan was somewhat spoilt by his four sisters. He was their blue-eyed boy and as far as we know he had a happy childhood – even though, as a toddler, he lived through the war years, a time that can't have been easy for the family.

We don't know much about Alan's schooling, but in common with most children of the time it was most likely disrupted by the war, and he would have left school in his early teens.

When he was 18, he did his two years national service. He was stationed in Egypt, where he learned to drive and did some training as an electrician, which he continued with an apprenticeship once he left the army in 1954. He stayed in that trade through to his mid twenties, often working in the West End of London on the big neon signs in Piccadilly Circus.

Alan knew a girl called Joycie, and it was through this acquaintance that he met her sister – Pat. There was no looking back. Alan and Pat soon became a courting couple, and their love for each other blossomed. They married in 1955 at Bethnal Green Town Hall, with a big party afterwards.

The newlyweds first lived in rented accommodation and in 1962 they moved to the Hadrian Estate, in Bethnal Green. During their married lives they moved between the Bethnal Green and Bow areas, settling in Merchant Street in Bow since 1995. Their three children arrived: first Tony, then Carol and Jackie to complete the family - and they have happy memories of this time. Alan and Pat also had good neighbours in the form of Betty and her husband Brian, who became lifelong friends.

Sadly Pat died in 2014 – a devastating blow for Alan. He showed such love and devotion to her when she became ill – he was by her side throughout, and a tower of strength for the whole family. After Pat’s death, his children were a great support to Alan and, if anything, they became even closer. And although life was never the same for Alan in those last few years, we can perhaps cherish the fact that he had 59 years of marriage to Pat and that he had had such a lovely family around him.

After his time as an electrician, Alan had but one career...as a real life “Del Boy”! He was, truly, a character – smart, resourceful, good with numbers and able to turn his hand to most things.

He had a number of contracts with what was then the General Post Office to clear out old telephone exchanges, and he’d put the scrap to good use. In those days, the contact points in the relays – the parts of the exchange that made the connections – often contained tiny amounts of gold or platinum; so if I can borrow a phrase from “Del Boy”: “Lovely Jubbly!”

Alan’s children have memories of sorting through the old exchange equipment to find the precious metals that could be turned into a profit.

Other items - such as old telephones, or bits and pieces recovered from various office clearances that Alan used to do - would be sold on his market stall, either at “The Waste” in Kingsland Road on a Saturday or down Brick Lane on a Sunday. These were good times, and as a young girl Carol remembers helping her Dad out – acting as cashier come security guard for a wage of a fiver, and hoping to warm Alan up so that he’d let her go out that evening. I’m not sure he was having any of it, though!

Later, Alan had an Arch at Shoreditch, which he shared with a good friend called Peter Ruff – who died in 2005. The two of them had a kind of informal partnership - sharing the rent and working together, and Alan really was in his element here.

You can, perhaps, picture him sitting outside smoking a cigarette; enjoying the banter with his customers and colleagues; wheeling and dealing; perhaps turning a cockle into a pony – that’s ten pounds into £25 if you’re not familiar with the cockney slang for money (or should I say “bees and honey”)!

Alan loved this life; he took pleasure from it and it enabled him to support his family - so however humble a career it may seem to some, it was fulfilling and meaningful and it is to be valued.

Alan wasn't always sweetness and light, though. He didn't take any nonsense and was uncompromising in his trading style. So when a customer might come along and offer him less than the asking price for something, Alan may well offer some advice along the lines of where to go and what to do, only in somewhat more robust terms.

Let's take a moment or two now to think about the things that Alan enjoyed in life, and the kind of man that he was.

Alan was very well travelled – he enjoyed holidays in this country and abroad. He visited Spain, Portugal, Malta, Crete, Moscow and Israel – to name but a few. And he was one of the first people to use the Eurostar crossing to France. In the UK, Cornwall was a favourite destination. And one trip to Cornwall sticks in the minds of the children, when they were travelling down in pouring rain and the window wipers on the car stopped working. Undeterred and ever resourceful, Alan attached string to each wiper, passed it through a small opening in the passenger windows and for the rest of the journey Pat in the front and the Tony in back pulled the strings back and forth to operate the wipers – having to be careful to keep in time with each other.

Alan was a fan of boxing, and was actively involved with Repton Boxing Club – rooted in the East End, and one of the most famous clubs in the country. Alan loved being part of this, and he went on trips with the club to New York and to Belgium; and on occasion he drove the bus to get the fighters from A to B.

Alan was also a keen fisherman – and you'll see from Tony's tribute that he has fond memories of those early morning fishing trips with his Dad.

And he loved his football, and was a lifelong Arsenal supporter – going to matches home and away. In later years though he did struggle with some of the players' names – so Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain became “Oxo”.

As well as this, as you'll see from Jackie's tribute, aside from his family, Alan had three passions: drinking, betting and smoking – all pastimes from which he took comfort and pleasure in equal measure. Having a drink was as much a social activity as anything else; the betting wasn't huge – usually small stakes, but something Alan liked to do every day (even when he was on holiday), and he would occasionally go to the races or the dog track at Walthamstow; and the smoking he found calming and pleasurable.

And often, Alan would content himself with a breakfast out somewhere, buy a paper and sit by the canal having a quiet smoke. That is, I think, a nice image to have of him – enjoying simple pleasures.

Even though he was quite a private person at heart, Alan was very sociable. He enjoyed company, and liked nothing better than a good old sing song – be that in a coach on a day out, or at gatherings with friends and family.

Two good friends of Alan were Ronnie and Chris. Ronnie he'd known for some 50 years, but they became close in the last eight years or so – with Ronnie visiting regularly and often going out and about with Alan. And Chris was Alan's next door neighbour – and the two of them helped each other out, doing a bit of shopping or fetching the daily paper for one and other. Friendship is important, it's part of that humanity that binds us all together – so we can be glad that, especially later in life, Alan had these relationships.

In terms of his character Alan was strong, tough and resourceful – a man capable of making decisions and a man who knew his own mind. He could turn his hand to most things – be that DIY, or even cutting the kids' hair if it came to it. He was interested in other people, and would strike up a conversation with anybody – he'd ask someone where they were from and take it from there, often finding common ground and having a nice chat.

He was independent; he continued to drive well into his old age, and he was always a very careful driver. He was known for being punctual – an indication of his respect for other people. He was quite traditional in his ways, yet at the same time spontaneous – impromptu days out were common when the children were young.

And he was known for his disdain for politicians – no matter what party they were from! He was dismissive of them all, and if he'd had his way he'd have sorted them all out and put the world to rights himself.

Above everything, though, Alan loved his family. Testament to that are the tributes from his children, which you can read later in your order of service.

Yes, he could be strict – the children certainly did what they were told when it came from Alan; yes, he wasn't perfect – there were sometimes arguments; but yes, he thought the world of Pat and his children. Firmly rooted in his love for them, he was very protective towards Tony, Carol and Jackie – he cared about their well being, their safety and their happiness. That is in the nature of parenthood, and that was one of Alan's defining qualities as a father: he was loving, caring and supportive. And because of that he leaves a strong legacy in the shape of his family – including his grandchildren of whom he was so very fond; and his great grandchildren, who he didn't really get to know quite so well but who will, I'm sure, get to hear many stories about their great grandfather.

When his health began to fail - really since March of this year – Alan kept his independent streak. It is the mark of the man that he did not complain or moan, and he remained positive and upbeat; as you'll see from Tony's tribute, right up to the end he was even talking about the holidays he was going to have. And his mischievous side never left him – you'll see from Jackie's tribute that he smuggled some cigarettes into his hospital room, got caught smoking and had them confiscated. That itself is worthy of "Del Boy"! And he lived for today, with an attitude to life quoted in Carol's tribute: "I can do anything if I put my mind to it". And he could, too.

We will not dwell on Alan's illness or his final few months – he would I think prefer us to celebrate the long and full life he had, doing all those things that brought him pleasure. He was, to the end, a character; unforgettable, much respected and much loved.

It's fitting to end our tribute to Alan by repeating the last few lines from the poem Tony read earlier:

“Remember not my fight for breath

Remember not the strife

Please do not dwell upon my death

But celebrate my life.”

Alan died on the 9th July, at the Royal London Hospital. He was much loved, and he will be much missed.