

A memorial for

Robert (Bob) John Escudier

30 October 1943 – 18 January 2018

10 February 2018, Beechwood Sacred Heart School Chapel



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

Bob was born in Battersea in 1943, the third of 5 children. It was a working class family, who must have struggled to send Bob to grammar school, but it was not to his taste, and he left school at 15 to start work, first at Battersea Fun Fair and then following his elder brother George, to work in the field which he was to remain in much of his working life, at TE Smith Blinds and Curtains.

In 1962 he was playing darts in a pub when he met Val. His challenge to his mate Albert was "If I beat you, can I take your daughter out?" and presumably he won the game, as he and Val not only went out, but got married, and in due course had three children, Kim, Ian and Brian. And it was during those years that Bob became the great provider for his family that he always was. When he needed more money than he was earning at TE Smith to buy a house for the family, for instance, he spent a year as a roofer, even though he hated heights and even though the roofs in question were high up above power stations and factories.

In the early 70's, he set up a business with his brother George, R&G Blinds, in Upper Norwood. It was a really successful business, winning lots of government contracts, and gaining national recognition for their bomb-blast curtains, which featured on Tomorrow's World, designed to protect government buildings from the IRA bombs which were a threat at that time. He also made the little curtains for plaques that the Queen and other notables would pull when opening a building. When the family moved to Sevenoaks in 1975, he proudly installed electric curtains in the living room – it was a big bay window, and they took ages to close. As the business expanded, he and his brother opened a second branch in Hastings. Because of the poverty he'd experienced in his childhood, he always wanted to be the provider – he wanted his children to be comfortable. And he was really good at that.

Although – or because – he put such emphasis on family, he was rarely home – Kim's childhood memories are of twisting herself round and round on Bob's secretary's chair until she felt sick, and Ian remembers the fright he got when he accidentally started a sewing machine. Kim remembers that at school she was really surprised to find out that other people's fathers were at home at the weekend.

They rarely had holidays, but the children do remember a fishing holiday on the Norfolk Broads, when Ian fell into the water, Brian caught a wellington boot, and the maggots escaped from their tin and invaded the whole boat, even getting into the beds. It was also on that holiday that Ian first beat his Dad at darts – and Bob didn't like to be beaten at any game – this is a man who would "accidentally" upend the chess board if he could see defeat coming.

In 1983, the family moved again onto a smallholding, Bob's latest passion, though not an entirely successful one. The geese didn't like him at all, and Robert got locked in the garage by Gertie the goat. Then there was the time when Bob set the tractor on fire and badly burnt his arms. He bought cattle and got family members to buy one each as an investment – Brian was less than impressed that his died.

In the mid-80's, though, the firm was bought out by a larger company, which Bob didn't enjoy at all – he liked to be in control, and being part of a larger firm was not for him, so he left, and was at a bit of a loss for a while, then he began a building business in the late 80's, about the time his first grandchildren were born.

The family – many of whom he employed in his various businesses - remember him as a great manager, who never shouted at the people who worked for him, though, in Ian's words, "He could make you feel a prat".

He always had a project, whether it was rewiring lamps (sometimes with explosive results), playing the organ, or training his pet cockatoo. His efforts at getting the fish in the fish tank to breed came to a sad end – he had been told that a higher water temperature encouraged them to breed, and ended up with, you've guessed, boiled fish. As a youth, his boxing career came to an abrupt end when someone finally hit him, and he discovered that it hurt. He was a keen fisherman, both locally and in the River Avon.

Eventually Bob and Val parted. In due course, he met Jan and they married in 1998, and moved to Spain in 2002, buying an old farm which they refurbished. Jan had 4 children, Sharon, Terry, Caroline and Stephen, who became part of the extended family who Bob was always so keen to provide for, and they were fond of their step-dad. Not long after he arrived in Spain, he was diagnosed with prostate cancer, a cancer he claimed to have beaten with white wine and Anadin! It's a wonder he didn't end up on Tomorrow's World again, with that miracle cure.

He did enjoy his wine – six o'clock was always wine o'clock, then as the years passed, it became five – but never any earlier. He was never a lunchtime drinker, perhaps it would have interfered with his constant activity. Because he never gave up doing things. He was doing the accounts for family and friends literally until the day he died. His life in his last years in Spain, after Jan died, was conducted in a triangle, with him moving between the computer where he played online games and did the accounts, the kitchen where he had his Suduko, and the TV where he would watch Emmerdale and quiz shows.

He always enjoyed a good argument with the family – he'd play devil's advocate and try and wind up the others, particularly Alice, though she could always defend her corner and have a good debate. He loved to talk about politics and business, and over the years, perhaps because of those family debates, he moved from his moderately conservative views towards the centre – in fact, he told Kim "The older I get, the more of a socialist I become". He never lost his commitment to the work ethic, which he passed on to his children, and he was increasingly unhappy watching the fat cats getting fatter while others worked for little reward.

Alice will now read us a poem she has written about her argumentative grandad!

My Grandad

*It's clear to say that you'll be missed
The good times will be remembered, I do insist.
Today is a day to celebrate,
All the things that make you great.*

*My favourite time with you was in Spain,
After you collected Adam and I from the plane.
We had a week with you sitting the in the sun,
Staying up late, chatting and having fun.*

*You told us stories from the past,
We sat outside and laughed and laughed.
Adam got us booze and wine,
And the three of us had a brilliant time.*

*You told us how you love to debate,
Which ended with us staying up very late.
We started to discuss politics,
A dangerous subject for us to pick.*

*You told me not to vote Lib Dem,
I told you why I had chosen them.
You admired my passion and how strong I am, You told me to be the best I can.*

*You told me how hard you worked,
To give your children all they deserve.
You said that you are so proud of them,
Which is something you would always mention.*

*Today is a day that we will shed a tear,
I'm devastated that you are no longer here.
I think of the occasions that you will miss,
With my wedding day up there on the list.*

*But all the great times I will remember,
All those family times together.
Coming to see you on Christmas eve,
Excited about the presents we will receive.*

*To me you've always been an inspiration,
Finally, I must not forget to mention.
I love you Grandad and always will,
You're be in our hearts forever still.*

*You always told us how proud you are,
Now you're up there as a star.*

Bob had not been well for some time, mainly due to his 60 years of smoking, and had a really bad bout of illness in early 2017, from which he was not expected to recover. But lately, despite being dependent on his oxygen, he had seemed to be very positive and upbeat, and was in the middle of selling the house, now too big and remote, to move into a town house in La Romana.

We often think of death as a cruel enemy, taking away those we love, but for those who are suffering or who have reached the end of their endurance, it can come as a quiet friend, closing the curtains, blowing out the light, and settling us into a last sleep, free from pain and weariness. I hope it was so for Bob, who died at home, having just finished a game of online poker, and with a glass of white wine on the table in front of him. The kind of end which most of us would wish for.

His granddaughter Stacey will now read "He is Gone" by David Harkins.

*You can shed tears that he is gone
Or you can smile because he has lived*

*You can close your eyes and pray that he will come back
Or you can open your eyes and see all that he has left*

*Your heart can be empty because you can't see him
Or you can be full of the love that you shared*

*You can turn your back on tomorrow and live yesterday
Or you can be happy for tomorrow because of yesterday*

*You can remember him and only that he is gone
Or you can cherish his memory and let it live on*

*You can cry and close your mind, be empty and turn your back
Or you can do what he would want: smile, open your eyes, love and go on.*

Thank you, Stacey.