

A Celebration of the life of

Fraser Simpson

2 March 1950 – 6 June 2024

6 July 2024, The Engineerium, Hove

Celebrant: Felicity Harvest



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Scott, the son of Fraser Simpson opened the tributes given by Fraser's family and friends.

Scott - son

How do you find the words to write about a man that taught you how to feel? I have tried my best and that is exactly what he would have wanted. Because for him if you felt or thought something it was about going ahead and just 'doing it', even if you didn't always quite know how to go about it. ...There is always a way to overcome something, however dark or large and the important thing to remember is not to let anyone tell you otherwise. A positive frame of mind, even in times of sorrow... lift your head up and face yourself into the sun. Because as he used to say, "everything is better when there's sun on it".

I want to start by thanking you all for being here today. Your Fraser, uncle Fraz, sir Fraser, a husband, Pappa, Dad ... a legend. He was a man that loved deeply, with his whole heart and each and every one of you here will know that... and your presence here is because you undoubtedly felt the same way too. You may be wondering why we're all here in this Engineerium, in this very setting at all... You see this space not only has a connection to my dad but also represent parts of his character.

*Fraser didn't do things in a normal way and honouring him with that **true essence** of self is why we find ourselves here - to take some time together to celebrate his colourful and abundant life. About 18 years ago, my dad moved back from Hong Kong where he'd grown up, come of age and matured in since the age of 5. At the age of 55 and after decades of self-made buoyant business beneath him, a life rich with culture and travel, totally fluent in Cantonese and a young family under foot, he chose to leave the mark on the rapidly changing tiny Chinese island nation. Once a place filled with little rules of how to make it, a fountain of opportunity to take hold of and a place that commended you on the spirit of your authenticity, character and honour - of which these things he had in bucket-loads.*

To Hove it was, a place he knew of as summertime holidays, sunshine and barbecues on the beach. Settling himself closer to his four children - myself, Hayley, Taylor, and Cameron. Along with the strength and resilient nature of Susan, our mum, who he loved so dearly throughout their relationship either married or as separated companions acting as sturdy pillars of what great parents can be.

Back to the Engineerium... in the classic Fraser way, as he did with many, he one day struck up a conversation with someone who owned this place and who was also looking to sell it... This random interaction was all done in 5 minutes of meeting him - no surprises there then. Ever the conversationalist, Fraser would see nobody too out of reach or too different to take time to be curious and learn about. I would bet my life on the fact that any Uber or taxi you would get with him, that he would end up chatting to the driver within seconds... and in those same seconds end up respectfully speaking Cantonese at them and that he was actually from Hong Kong, even if some didn't always ask to know.

People often tell me and I agree, that the energy he gave off when speaking to him acted as a sort of olive branch, that made you feel totally at ease and open up to him. You would speak and then he would speak... and sometimes he'd speak for a bit too long... and we all know how hard it was to get in a word with Fraser... but man what I would give to be right there listening to those stories now. The tales that he would share with us, were of thick concentrate, at times almost unbelievable, but he lived a life, his own life and wanted to share the light of what he found along the way with others, no matter what the time - day or night.

He held a room and certainly knew how to hold a party. From Roman-themed rooftop soirees under the pink sunsets of the Pok Fu Lam (yat sam baht/ 138) flat to boat parties on the bright red and yellow self-painted traditional Chinese Junk boat he named the Fire Boat, fitted with water cannons and a wok as a pseudo-satellite. He was all for the ceremony and the joy that he could bring in sharing a moment with others. The light that came from him in creating these things was where he shone the brightest.

Back to the Engineerium again where we have tried to give you that same sense of celebration... So this guy wanted to sell this place and naturally that peaked my dad's interest.... in a true classic Fraser way, of which is something I share deeply with him, he wondered... "well perhaps I could own it". My dad was a true collector, better than I will ever be (and I'm pretty good!), you only had to have to come to his flat in Hove, a distillation of what we actually grew up around to see that. Chinese porcelain figurines of Taoist gods standing 3 foot tall in every corner - classic Fraser.... Tall red Chinese cabinets in every room and blue and white imperial vases beside every bedside - he loved those. Blown 1970s glass fish from Merano in Italy hang from the lights where he did a lot of his 'marble business', snuff bottles from 1800 and whatever, seashells from far flung islands adorning the mantles like sweets in a sweet shop and frog shaped wall pots in all shades of green randomly screwed throughout... and on and on.

His real pride and joy though were his cars (listening to The Troggs with us riding in them with him). In particular his 60's Austin Healey, like the one you saw outside as you came in today. He gave us a deep love for the old things and those that had character and charm. In school, our friends would be dropped off in shiny quiet modern cars and dad would drop us off in Primrose, a bright yellow wood panelled 70's Morris Traveller. Even if momentarily, some of us found their eccentric dad's lift "so embarrassing!". It's things like this that have given us influence to who we are and shows the power of what a good role model can cultivate inside you.

*On a much more personal note, this is the part of my dad I that I feel the most connection with. **His creativity.** I owe to him the way I create and think. Sometimes excellent and sometimes trapping, but never without the end goal of possibility. Fond memories I have with him are driving around with him in the car, visiting over air-conditioned back street Hong Kong tailors, where he would sit at the table in deep focus, chewing his tongue and broadly sketching out designs with the master tailors: selecting bold drapey easy iron fabrics to embellishing his shirt pockets with his initials a little touch of old-world class. I'd always be fascinated watching him cook up his signature short sleeve shirts and trouser colour combinations.*

*How he worked collaboratively with people to create something was a wonder to watch and I was happy there watching on next to him for as long as he needed it to be. When I was at university, I found myself in Thailand with my now wife Becky on a stop-over to visit him in Hong Kong. I too was starting to grow the obsession for clothes that he instilled in me. This Chinese silk shirt I wear today is his from 1966. I found myself in the tailors most of the days, Becky and my friends swapping it though for sun at the pool. I realised then, that this was truly what made me **spark** and come alive. From that moment I pursued a direction in clothing that he had taught was possible, even if you didn't study for it. The most important part to it all was to have **passion**. "Work kindly with people, respect them, and come with ideas" he used to say. ... I now have a shop in central London with both our names ... **Scott Fraser**... above the door. I travel around the world with my sister working passionately together to make clothes for myself and others.*

*What I find most strength in at the moment, is at no point did I ever stop thanking him for these gifts that he gave me. He taught me how to lean into every feeling I had and how to hone my interests in things that I love, even if other people didn't quite see the beauty in them yet. I made sure that whenever I felt proud of myself that I would tell him, but more importantly that I was proud because he was also part of that process. **He gave us all something and that is where he will live on in us.***

My granddad, Ray, Fraser's dad, was a physics professor and this statement rings today truer than ever – Energy is only but something that is transferable to a different location or object. It cannot be taken away, created or destroyed.

Back to the Enginerium - So over the year or so that my dad knew of this place, he would bring us here, somehow yet classically managing to obtain a set of keys or an all access pass if you will - to walk amongst the space, which we would like you to join us for a drink of gin and tonics (his favourites) in the pump house and the gardens after, followed by a beach BBQ lunch and special surprise back here after. He always had grand creative visions of this place, to bring a new life to this somewhat dilapidated, dusty old Victorian pump house. This vision was perhaps though, a little bit more of a project than he was ready for and after a life of other seismic undertakings and without the teams of people around him he eventually declined this opportunity, although not without his own trying.

With retirement of sorts on the horizon he chose to spend this chapter with family and friends by the sea in Hove. Seeking refuge at Courtney Gate, in his top floor sea-view palace that he gained such pride from. Waiting out the cold dark UK winters, with a great sense of optimism and positivity that the warmth of the sun was only around the corner and the doors of the beach hut would throw open their arms once again for another summer of socialising with us and all that would pass by.

A bonus for him would always be the Chinese exchange students that he would lure over with his barks of fluent Cantonese... engaging with the gwáilóu much to their great surprise and being sent on their way again with his jolly smile.

*So, as we sit here you may be wondering what this space now is. Well someone else eventually saw the same potential in this space that he did, and it was purchased 2 years ago. Turning it into just what he wanted he would be pleased to know - a space for community, a space to come together as one and a place to revel in its pure grandeur. Just as we are equally doing for him today. Opening up to the public less than a month ago, **we** are their first booking and that brings great comfort knowing he is with us, no doubt with a wry smile, saying that "I told you it would be a great spot". Even if this isn't quite the occasion we all wanted it to be.*

*You see, this was and is the true essence of Fraser. Someone who sees the potential and promise in people, places and things that at times others may not see. **AND ALWAYS**, despite life's many great highs and lows, with an optimistically assured application of my grandma's mind set of the 'power of positive thinking'. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you...*

Once again thanks to you... and thanks to him.

Now go and shine the light on the room just like he did

Kevin Fraser Simpson, known as Fraser, was born in London on the 2nd of March 1950, the son of Gay and Ray Simpson. Both worked in education, and Ray's role as a professor of physics led the family first to Yorkshire, then to Pakistan, and finally to Hong Kong. In Pakistan he was training the army in physics, and they were part of a circle including army officers and academics. They were known for their elaborate parties - which clearly made an impression on the young Fraser and perhaps led to his later huge pleasure in entertaining. Fraser's three younger brothers, Kim, Gerry and Roly were all born in Hong Kong.

Roly (in conjunction with Gerry) - brothers

Being eight years younger than Fraser I don't have any real memories of him as a young child except those that have probably been fabricated by the annual family photos and early slide or cine collection of life in Pakistan. These all show a strong skinny active boy with an eager freckled monkey face. Later holiday snaps show us four boys, typically dressed in matching check shirts and I can see Fraser adopting quite a protective pose towards me.

Reportedly he was a loving sensitive child, the sort that dogs loveand I'm told he persuaded my parents to host many stray dogs at one time. As I came to school age Fraser was sent off to boarding school in UK, spending the shorter school holidays with relatives in Yorkshire or London and just returning in the summer holidays and maybe at Christmas.

I was no doubt the little squirt to be ignored at that stage but in my eyes he was quite cool. He brought back the first Beatles 45's, wore paisley shirts and used up all spare cash to buy up cheap watches and cigarette lighters to flog in the school boarding house. He regaled us with many tales of school life and the army cadets.

It was quite a hard life without much love and he quickly had to develop a tough rebellious exterior to survive and the notoriety of being the most able to tolerate the punishment slipper or cane ...earning him the nickname "steelo"...short for steel arse. It also helped that he was good at sports.

He returned after 5th Form for Art, French and English Literature 'A' levels bringing with him a much sought after experience in rugby and quickly became an established member of the Hong Kong men`s rugby club whilst still at school. He was therefore "in" with the influential set in Hong Kong and it was a natural progression for him to join one of the established business "hongs", Gibb Livingstone (part of the Inchcape group). He was very enthusiastic, brimming with new ideas but also a great communicator and socialite so he got on well.

This sporty, suave, big businessman was my idol in my early teen years and photos show me emulating his big boss posture. He also taught me how to absolutely flatten the opposite fly half which brought me respect in the rugby team.

I then moved to UK to study, and he went on to form his own company, with Gerry joining him too so we lost contact to some extent, but I admired and enjoyed all the things he achieved and created. Fabulous apartments with island views, huge extravagant parties, his boats, classic cars and exciting Far East holidays with his growing family. He really was a strong family man and his arty, bespoke Christmas cards in the style of "The Simpsons" were memorable.

Business went from big to biggest and, together with Gerry, his business became the `go-to` operation for raised flooring and office installations in Hong Kong, always developing and promoting new products. He always had a keen interest in new things and was talking about nanotechnology long before it was well known.

You might have imagined him to be the archetypal hard headed business tycoon but he was not. He was a real softy, genuinely interested in people and how things worked and hence was able to forge deals by his good relationships. He later admitted to me that he was not as good at driving a hard deal as his brother Gerry. He was too soft.

They say that the bigger you are the harder you fall and a crash in the financial credit system, and sadly also in his personal life was hard for him to take but fortunately he had enough equity in UK to allow him to try to rebuild life over here.

It was, however, too much of a struggle to get back into business, although he did try to buy and run this Engineerium, having the vision to see it how it is today. In fact, had it not been for his intervention I believe the land would have been sold off for housing and this marvellous museum of engineering would have been lost. I`m sure he is, right now, really pleased that we are here, celebrating his life.

So, he had to adjust to being retired and although his legs stopped him walking much, he enjoyed entertaining in his lively flat and holding court outside the beach hut..... just like our dad!

He was fortunate to have his loving kids staying or visiting regularly, especially in these later years as his health deteriorated..... and of course many friends and acquaintances made through his willingness to chat to anyone, without any prejudice.

He was very interested in and accepting of everyone (a trait undoubtedly from our mum), even if he would sometimes teasingly adopt the other perspective. (a trait he probably got from our dad!)

He was a loose cannon, with a strong self-belief who, despite knowing that the cards were stacking up against him, refused to contemplate or discuss such matters.

That was his way, and I am happy for him that he got to remain in the lovely flat that he created, surrounded by all his Asian paraphernalia, and enjoying the company of old friends, his close family and not forgetting his pet seagull, Steven.

Kim - brother (read by Roly)

Very sorry I can't be there today.

My fondest memories of my dear older brother are from the early days when we were in our teens or early twenties. We seemed to get along well and most of the time I loved being in his orbit.

I saw him go from a fifteen-year-old boarding school boy mad about racing bikes to a characterful sixth former at King George V school who was an aspiring fashion guru outside of school. After getting a job in Hong Kong he left home and became the "dashing man about town". During this period it was fantastic to run into him late at night in some nightclub or other when he would invariably slip me some cash knowing how skint I was at the time.

Finally, the summer after I finished university, Fraser and I went on a 2-month trip around Indonesia and Malaysia. I remember Fraser charming people wherever we went and making them laugh. It was at that time I saw he had a huge passion for Asian antiques and art because of the number of hours we spent looking!

There was one occasion, though, when I know he really appreciated having me around. That was when we tried a magic mushroom omelette. Fraser soon found the whole thing amazing but way too overwhelming and needed me to keep him calm. We laughed about this incident numerous times later in life.

Vincent - friend (read by Roly)

It was invariably charming and pleasant to meet up with the larger-than-life character, Tai Pan Fraser Simpson.

We would easily slip into the old days when we were children/teenagers/young parents/old parents and then young pensioners. To go to Preston Street for Dim-Sum or to sit by his beach hut with fish'n chips and tea at his apartment would take us back to various points of our common lives in Hong Kong, Dim-Sum in Wellington St, fish'n chips in Wanchai, socialising in the FCC, the Godown, Kowloon side bars, the Czarina or Chung-Kee; sometimes at Aberdeen, Big Wave Bay or Shek-O, out on boats or off to Lantau to hike and laugh, swim and snack.

Like Fraser, we also enjoyed the good life that Hong Kong offered and then made the most of the good life in England.

Fraser always set out to enjoy; this infected us with his same intention.

He was a good friend, we will miss him.

Fraser worked hard, he worked late, and he got on with people. His perfect Cantonese, and his connection with Chinese colleagues in a way which was very different from some of the colonial attitudes of older men, meant that he was liked, accepted and successful.

Fraser was the proud father of four children: Scott, Hayley, Taylor and Cameron, all born during his marriage to Susan.

The siblings talk fondly about wonderful times growing up in Hong Kong as children of a father who took them to all sorts of interesting places, and threw wonderful parties. He was particularly fond of a party with a theme and dressing up, and would spare no detail in creating unforgettable experiences for his friends and families. There was the Roman party, for which Fraser commissioned special Roman coin bread, and had to buy 100 loaves even though he needed only 30. You've already heard about Fire Boat, which the family went out on every single Sunday, hosting everyone from the children's headmistress to business contacts. Only Fraser would paint a junk bright yellow & red - you could spot it from a mile off Hong Kong harbour! And let's not forget the giant water pistols fixed to the bow of the boat to fire jovially at neighbouring boats.

He was a creative and enthusiastic man - qualities evident to all. One of their friends wrote, on hearing of his death "Your Dad was one of the most fun adults I remember from childhood".

He travelled a lot, of course, particularly to Italy to source marble, and he would send faxes to the children with little drawings of mice running around the Italian countryside. When at home, he took them to all sorts of unlikely places in his classic cars, seeking out antiques and curios, some of which you will have seen in his Hove flat.

Cameron - son

Those of you who are gathered here today may remember my dad as 'Fraser the amazer', 'King Kong of Hong Kong'! In which that came the cars, boats and the women.

That's all well and good but to me that's not the Fraser I know; I knew my dad as the man about town in his Renault Espace in his bean-stained Slazenger tracksuit. This was to me his rawest form, no glitz, no glam, just my dad Fraser Simpson.

After his retirement, the businessman in Fraser could never let go. For example, shopping with him was a nightmare! He would feel the need to buy 10 of every item, everything had to be in bulk, just look at the four of us.

My dad's bulk buying urges hit another level when he discovered television shopping.

With music playing in the background, Cameron presented a series of 'True' or 'False' statements with gifts awarded for the correct answers. Cameron ripped off a tablecloth to display the various gifts:

1st Statement (Cheese Toastie)

My dad created the first baby doll of his royal highness Prince Charles (True)

2nd Statement (Vegetable cutter)

Fraser was on the verge of supplying boots to the Nigerian army? (True)

3rd Statement (LED lights)

Fraser played a game of rugby for England against France? (False – He played in the England Youth Team)

4th Statement (Air Fryer)

My dad was driving back from a party in his Austin Healey and crashed into a lamp post destroying the passenger side. In a drunken state he left the car and jumped in a taxi. The next day the police asked Fraser where he hid the body as he left his shoes and coat in the passenger side. (True)

5th Statement

Fraser was the most generous and kind hearted man to have ever walked this planet. (True)

When many of you remember Fraser you will most likely remember him at home in Courtney Gate. It was in this last chapter of life, after moving back from Hong Kong, that the children, in their teens and early adulthood, cemented a deep friendship with him, so much more than a parent-child dynamic.

He was known to the children's friends as Papa Fraz. Opening his home and his arms to everyone in need of a bear hug, a good laugh, a bit of a debate or to regale them with stories of his life! A wholly non-judgemental man; Fraser was a forgiver, encourager, deeply caring for those down on their luck or in need of a boost.

Papa was also how he known by his grandchildren, Dylan, Teddy and Cleo. And what a wonderful grand-papa he was; so enthralled with every milestone and celebrating of every quirk. Hayley fondly said “the moment Teddy came along, I was yesterday’s chip paper” – he had a very special bond with his grandson, and loved to drive up and down the seafront with Teddy on his mobility scooter.

Down on the seafront, many a good time was had at his beloved beach hut. “The Lawns are my garden, the sea is my swimming pool and the beach hut is my garden shed” he once said. And he’d sit in that “shed” every day sunning his friendly face, reading the paper and chatting to passers-by. His endless curiosity and generosity made him a magnate for people.

Hayley – daughter

Be Like a Sunflower and Turn Your Face to the Sun

*Life is mysterious with its bends and turns
And we often are at crossroads with major concerns
Don't be disheartened and turn your face to the sun
Victor's cup only goes to those who dare to run*

*You are stronger than your doubts and fears
Situation may not be as bad as it appears
The clouds of darkness will have to dispel
Have a little faith that all shall be well*

*You may stumble or even fall
And if walking is tough, just try to crawl
The journey may seem to be uphill
But remember, all can be resolved with determination and will*

*So make the best of everyday
Without bothering much about what people say
Be like a sunflower, and turn your face to the sun
Experience warmth, happiness and be a light to everyone*

Taylor - daughter

My favourite place is your home, always found comfort in the place you roam.

Precious memories spent together inside, you'd take us all in with so much love & pride.

We could talk all day or sit with the most comfortable silence. Dinner and TV. Happy when it's just you and me.

Our favourite times spent people watching at the beach hut and eating ice creams, now hold an even more special meaning and live on in my dreams.

I'd often tell you how comforting this home is to me, which made you happy, I could always see.

It's now known as clear as can be, that it's not the house that brought such comfort to me.

It's the person who lived inside, my special dad, who I'm now trying to find.

And as I search you, I realise you have moved.

Moved firmly into my heart forever, both now beating together.

You're in my mind & every movement whilst you live in my chest, a place for you to rest.

My poppa Fraz you are my home and I wish you were here, but in my heart I'll forever keep you near.

