

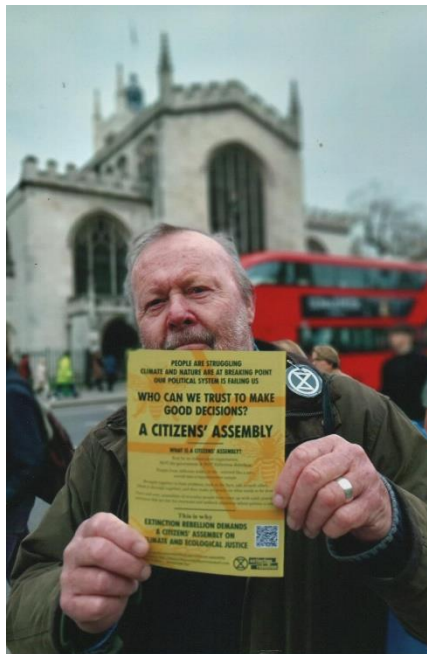
A Celebration of the life of

Richard (Dick) Patrick William Steele

12 September 1945 – 6 July 2024

2 August 2024, Private House, Isle of Wight

Celebrant: Avril Lucas



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Richard Patrick William Steele, or Dick as he preferred to be called, was born to Eileen and William Steele on 12th September 1945, a younger brother to Anna.

Dick (own words) - The Accidental Hedonist

I was born in September 1945 in a small "cottage" hospital in Welwyn Garden City. World War 2 had just ended. Neither of my parents were in the forces during the war, my father having a reserved occupation as an engineer (I don't think he would have joined up as a combatant anyway, like his father he was a committed pacifist) and my mother looking after my sister Anna, who is 10 years older than me.

We lived at 10 Brockett Close in an end of terrace house. Welwyn Garden City was a fantastic place, the brainchild of its founder Ebenezer Howard and the architect Louis de Soissons. Green spaces, trees, open lawns and gardens and development corporation and council houses to rent at, by today's standards, very affordable prices.

My mother and father were struggling financially after the war. Dad was trying to get his heating engineering business established and Mum was looking after the children as well as doing his secretarial work, which in those days, meant shorthand and typing letters and filing.

My earliest recollections are of the stove in the kitchen, coal fired, chickens we kept at the bottom of the garden, Mum getting the milkman to "pull" their necks, throwing tantrums about food and my Mum dragging me to nursery, which I hated. Rabbit stew, baked potatoes, rissoles. My paternal grandad's workshop with all his silversmith tools and his gas bellows and the smell of hot metal. This later became my Dad's office.

My Mum took me to nursery perched precariously on the back of her bike. I screamed all the way, had to be prized away from her and screamed all the time I was there. In revenge, I perpetually wet my bed and had nightmares.

Apart from nursery, life was good, the milkman came and killed the chickens, I have little memory of my sister, she doing her own thing with others much older. I developed and adoration for the Council lawn mower men who mowed the communal front lawns with their massive Dennis lawn mowers. That's what I wanted to be.

At about 4 years old I had a friend, a girl called Christine Roberts who lived in a nearby close. Her great advantage was that she could do my shoelaces up, a task I then found impossible and one that remains a challenge today. These were the years before TV so keeping young people amused must have been much more demanding, toys were also in short supply and austerity ruled both within our households and nationally, rationing was in place, and I can still picture the ration books with their tokens that had to be traded in when purchases were made. I remember visits to my paternal grandma and aunt, the strange smell of old people pervading their house in nearby Attimore Road.

Eventually five years old arrived and I started primary school at Templewood School, Welwyn Garden City, a brand-new school. I suppose like most children, the whole thing came as something of a shock, all these other children, and strange grown-ups telling us what to do. Being organised, doing things when told in groups. Worst of all, school dinners, with unknown horrors such as broad beans (yuk), semolina (double yuk). There was only one place for disgusting concoctions such as these. Avoiding the ever-watchful fierce eyes of the dinner ladies, in my trouser pockets, and then carry out an escape and evasion exercise to the toilets where the sticky mess could be emptied. Sometimes I had to carry the offending evidence all afternoon until I got home, much to the disapproval of Mum who didn't need the extra washing.

I was slow to learn to read and write, for some reason it was not the fashion for parents to do much in the way of tuition at home, indeed, I have little or no recollection of Mum or Dad helping. I do remember, however the fierce some Miss Pearl who was determined to get me to be able to read and write at the age of seven. Against all odds she succeeded.

In the early 50's we moved to 4 Beehive Green, a big house albeit on the wrong side of WGC (East). I had my own bedroom, and our house backed on to open recreational ground. My father played cricket with me and I remember I always had the best of things, a Stuart Surridge cricket bat for example. I was doing OK at school and was, at last, learning how to make friends. The downside was that my paternal Grandma and aunt moved in too, complete with their unforgettable odour. (I wonder if our grandchildren think we smell, though in my case I am told it would be the odour of claret).

I was fascinated by the war and guns and my Dad indulged me with air pistols and rifles. About this time Dad's business was doing well and he and Mum were climbing the social ladder, not in terms of friends or acquaintances, but more in the things they owned (in fact I cannot remember them having any kind of social life). We had a small caravan (an Eccles) which we used to tow on holiday with a big black Ford V8 Pilot, I remember going to a farm near Rye (my Dad's childhood home) for a holiday. Helping the farmer with the harvest, stacking "stooks" and watching the threshing machine. We watched the Coronation on the farmer's television. Dad bought me a copy of Kenneth Grahame's "Wind in the Willows" when I was seven and a half, and amazingly he and Mum read it to me. It opened a world in my imagination that I remain very fond of today (I still have the book). Dad always encouraged me to make things and he had a good workshop with lots of his Dad's tools. I always got into trouble for not putting them back after I had used them.

Mum at this time was working as the secretary to the boss of Welwyn Department Stores (Garfield Weston), a very prestigious job. I remember "mooning" about in the stores, especially the toy department, where amongst other things I coveted an OO-gauge electric train set, which after lots of needling and whining on my part my parents capitulated and bought for me.

Mum had by now managed to re-home Grandma and Aunty Dorothy to a flat above a nearby parade of shops. Space was restored and Mum promptly purchased a grand piano which she would occasionally play very badly, though I remember my sister playing it quite well. Mum always had causes such as the boycott of South African goods or CND which we were all made to take very seriously.

I must have been about nine, and I made a great discovery, how to make gunpowder. My parents did not discourage this, it was after all chemistry, which they believed would hold me in good stead later. Amazingly I could go into the local Boots or equivalent as a nine-year-old with my "pocket money" and ask for 2lbs of Sulphur, five pounds of Potassium Nitrate and 3 lbs of charcoal. I could then, with my school friend Bruce Canadine make our Dinky toy wargames much more realistic with flare-ups and explosions. Happy times indeed.

Jo (daughter)

For those of you who don't know me, my name is Jo and I am number 4 of 8 of Dad's children.

Before me and my older sister Emma, Dad had two children, Sarah and Patrick, with his first wife Jackie.

Dad was a lot of things in his life, but one thing he wasn't was boring. Life was ever changing according to his latest craze or passion which was a revolving door of aeroplanes, farms, boats, houses, cars, dogs, horses and the odd musical instrument thrown in for good measure. It was exciting, sometimes chaotic.

In 1967 he met my Mum Helen at Stapleford Airport, Essex through a mutual friend. My Mum was there, learning to fly and Dad at the time was an Instrument Rating Instructor.

Soon after meeting, they went to Malindi in Kenya and where he worked for a few months, flying tourists to game reserves. They got married on a beach in Mombasa.

They then returned to the UK where he took a job as a flying Instructor at Elstree. They then moved to Kimpton, Hampshire, where he studied for his commercial flying exams.

During this time he bought a Tiger Moth which he kept in a barn on my Grandparents farm - taking off and landing from a landing strip chiselled out of one of the fields.

The plan was for my Mum and Dad to do aerobatic and parachuting displays at airshows however Mum fell pregnant, so they were unable to do this.

Soon after they moved to Bursledon, Southampton where he had a job as a Flying Instructor at Hamble - training BOAC Pilots.

In 1970 I was born and a year later, we moved to Thruxton, the neighbouring village of Kimpton where Dad, after getting bored of training pilots, joined BOAC himself as a First Officer.

For a few years Dad had several different flying jobs, which also included a stint on the loW flying Britten Norman Islanders and with them in 1974 he also got to fly in the Paris Airshow with the Britten Norman Islander.

Soon after that we moved back to Kimpton to live with my Grandparents on their dairy and arable farm and Dad started his new venture of farming.

I have happy memories of feeding warmed powdered milk to weaning calves on freezing cold winter mornings before school.

Being carted around with my sister on the front seat of a minivan with a calf or orphan lamb in the back.

We had pet ducks, geese and ponies and Red Setter dogs.

There were hot summer harvests and days that went on forever. New Zealand farm students and lots of fun building houses out of bales and burning stubble.

In between the flying and farming Dad bought some horses and learnt how to ride and show jump.

Also, his love of cars -

- E type Jaguar,*
- Gilbert Invader Coupe 1975 - he built from scratch in Grandfather's garage*
- Scimitars,*
- Rover,*
- Volvo,*
- Land Rover and many more.....*

He had a passion for anything mechanical.

In 1977 a lucrative job in the airline industry beckoned - a job with Laker Airways, and we moved to West Chiltington, West Sussex.

His love for cars continued with a Dutton kit car he built from scratch and a Porsche 911 S Targa.

Within a year my Dad left, and my Mum and Dad split up and got a divorce.

Dad really did leave.....

As the years went on I was more determined to get to know him and I treasure the memories of the times that I spent with him.

I treasure the relationships that I have formed with Gilly and my sisters and brothers, they are very important to me.

I remember

- Farming in Heathfield*
- Christmas in Kuwait 1984*
- Summer holidays in France 1986 1987*
- Josephine of Hamble*
- Sparkling Spirit*
- Trips to London whilst he was staying at the Dorchester Hotel whilst flying for a VIP*
- Ski trips with family and cousins*
- Salisbury - Broadchalk and Ebble Cottage*
- Godshill Park Farm*
- Lambing in Godshill*
- Bed & Breakfast at Godshill*
- Aberdeen Angus cattle at Godshill*
- Isle of Wight Airport*
- Pie in the Sky cafe turning into the amazing Aviator Restaurant*
- The Air shows*
- The Aeroplanes*
- Aerobatics - going in the Cap10 and waving to my young children on the ground thinking oh my goodness what on earth am I doing!!! (I am scared of heights too)*

Oh and more CARS!! A different car each time I visited, usually with an amazing story behind it.

- Audi S8*
- Subaru Impreza*
- Bentley*
- GT40*
- AC Cobra*
- Rolls Royce*

To name a few - many more

- The Mill*
- Hazelnuts!! Planting those trees!!*
- The holiday cottage*
- This place - beautiful Jerusalem tiles!*

Planes, cars, farms, boats.

Whatever he did, he did it so well, maybe not for very long - maybe through boredom, going onto the next adventure, but all done so incredibly well and with so much enthusiasm.

As I said at the beginning, Dad's life was anything but boring!

With everything that Dad achieved and experienced in his lifetime, one thing is for sure, he had the most brilliant complex genius brain, I am very proud to be one of his daughters.

Dave (nephew) - My Uncle Dick

Nothing I can say will be able to encompass the life of my uncle. Nor can Words construct the depth and multi-faceted feelings of loss I and others have. Grief is intimate to each of us, a companion we have to travel with, one who will at some point be less present but never completely gone.

Yet while I grieve I also want to celebrate the relationship I had with my uncle, the joy, laughter madness and care he offered.

I want to do this in relationship to love. As I experienced everything about Dick framed by love. Dick did not just say he loved, he did love. It was an active form of love whether in relationship to an idea, He loved ideas and putting them into practice, whether this be organic farming (before his time), an airfield, nut orchard and a myriad of others. Or political positions, even if his love of some made him somewhat less tolerant of others. He loved a glass (or bottle) of wine. I am still in awe that he could fall asleep glass in hand and not spill a drop. His love of cars and at one point speed. Scaring me shitless in a Morgan. Planes, he loved flying and planes. He gave me my one and only experience of flying upside down over the Isle. I needed to lie in a dark room for some time afterwards. Although all of these are loves, they shrink into specks compared to his love of others.

He loved his sister and despite at times protestations to the opposite she loved him. He never stopped asking how she was, never stopped phoning when he had not heard from her or checking her progress when in hospital.

They could argue likes cat and dog, no quarter given or asked. But the love never left the relationship.

His love of Kate and Rosa was like a light that always held hope in the darker times. Offering a visit to hospital, an escape to the country, experiences they will always remember, boats on the pond, learning to drive the mule, shooting (despite my objections) but mostly the acceptance of who they are and who they could be. His care for Kate in the scariest times meant so much to us.

However, even this love, is put into perspective by the love he had for his children. You may not know how often he would phone to talk through worries about you. His desire to find ways to help, support and be alongside you a constant theme. He so wanted each of you to be happy and fulfilled.

Talking about Dick and love could not be had without talking about the love he had for My aunt Gilly. Whether in the little looks of adoration he would give when he thought she or others would not notice or the times he would talk about his hopes and worries. Every hope had Gilly in it and every worry was about how he could lessen these for her.

I guess it is not the wealth, the possessions, titles, jobs that define a life. It is the gap that can't be filled, the ache that won't be soothed, and the love left behind that defines the quality of a life lived.

Dick leaves a huge gap, I and my family ache, he was and will be loved.

Dick lived to love and was loved while he lived. What else can one ask for.

Graham (colleague from Twinjet)

Dick and I worked together at Twinjet when he joined as Chief Pilot just after me in 2002, making an immediate and really positive impact on day-to-day life for us all.

I was a First Officer with very little experience and Dick took me under his wing, becoming both an inspiration and a mentor for what was to become the happiest years of my flying career.

We soon found ourselves flying around the world together, with him sharing his encyclopaedic knowledge of the Airbus along with his reasoned opinions on current affairs, both of which never ceased to amaze me, given as I never saw him reading anything but Classic Car Magazine.

Dick would recount tales from his time at BOAC, Airbus, Kuwait Airways and Virgin, telling me how he'd taught an Arab prince to fly, and then latterly flying him into Las Vegas and having to explain to customs officers why they were carrying \$25 million in cash. In his usual charming way, Dick told the Officer, "I wouldn't worry sir, he'll have blown the lot in two days' time."

We also had our own adventures. Of our many interesting passengers, we flew a VIP to Tripoli to meet Colonel Ghaddafi, and a famous actor to meet Nelson Mandela in Johannesburg.

Our last flight together was taking home a VIP after a spending spree in Paris. Scheduled to leave Le Bourget airport before it closed at 10pm in the evening, our passenger failed to arrive in time, leaving Dick, myself and the crew to enjoy the fine Parisian dining that had been ordered plus, of course, a nice bottle of red too. We eventually left the following evening with the hold filled with designer suits, fine wines and a treadmill. The VIP was also taking home vast quantities of toilet paper!

There are of course many other tales that I shall save for later, including how Dick managed to be locked out of his hotel room at The Zagreb Sheraton and stood at reception at 1am in only his underpants while our passengers (who happened to be staying at the same hotel) watched on bemused from the adjacent hotel bar. The lead passenger that day was someone high up in the Chinese government and doubtless that sight will have stayed with him for a long time afterwards.

Dick would also talk fondly of Gilly and the family, telling me about the cars that would come and go, and how much he enjoyed flying light aircraft, at Sandown, here on the Isle of Wight, clearly missing home life when we were overseas.

Finally, I would like to share some words from former Twinjet colleagues who are unable to be here today...

- A Kind Man*
- A Good Man*
- A Lovely Man*
- A very Fair Man*
- So sad to hear the news*
- Heartbroken*
- A big loss*

To me Dick was all of these and more. He lived life to the full and for five fabulous years took me along with him. And whilst we'd not seen each other for some time, we stayed in touch and chatted by WhatsApp video from time to time.

But for now Dick, I'll look forward to seeing you on the other side with a nice bottle of red. And I have no doubt that after tasting it you'll utter those immortal words.....

"Well Graham, let's hope the second bottle tastes better." And so the evening will begin just where we left off.

Dick, Thank you for Everything and Rest in Peace.

Harry (son) - Taking Risks (Anon)

*To laugh, is to risk appearing a fool,
To weep, is to risk appearing sentimental
To reach out to another, is to risk involvement,
To expose feelings, is to risk exposing your true self
To place your ideas and dreams before a crowd, is to risk being called naive*

*To love, is to risk not being loved in return,
To live, is to risk dying,
To hope, is to risk despair,
And to try, is to risk failure.*

*But risks must be taken, because the greatest risk in life is to risk nothing.
He who risks nothing may avoid suffering and sorrow,
But he simply cannot learn,
and feel,
and change,
and grow
and love
and live.*

*Chained by his certitudes he is a slave, who has forfeited his freedom.
Only a person who risks is truly free.*

Andrew (son)

Dad gave the greatest hugs.

His love was so genuinely pure and honest that when he hugged you, you felt truly held. His hugs would sometimes bring me to tears they were that good.

The most genuine, honest, down to earth and trusted person I've ever known.

Dad took risks. To say Dad wasn't afraid to take risks would be an understatement. He lived life to the fullest and always had stories to tell of incredible adventures.

Whether that was leaving a comfortable job with an airline and moving his family and life to another part of the world to a new uncertain job, or jumping off a tour boat into the sea to film a box jellyfish close up with his underwater camera just because it was so beautiful.

Dad relished a challenge. I vividly remember the time Dad decided to build a 16-foot sailing dingy in our medium sized UPSTAIRS lounge. Now I'm sure you can already see some of the challenges this would present. One being the whole house filled with the fumes of varnish, paint and epoxy glue - which I actually love the smell of today thanks to Dad. The other being the fact that when the boat had been finished Dad then had the challenge of getting it from the upstairs lounge to the water. The first step was how to get it outside. Luckily the lounge had a balcony. Mum and Dad came up with the genius idea of throwing a party for all of the local aircrew expats to help them to lower the boat to the ground. From the looks of the photos they all had a great laugh in accomplishing this task. To this day I'm still not sure if Dad knew how he was going to get the boat out of the upstairs lounge before he started the project and that's one of the things I loved about Dad his determination and can-do attitude - a 16-foot boat and a 12-foot drop to the ground wasn't going to stop him.

Dad didn't live by half measures. He had high expectations of himself and always wanted to do the best he could. Mum and Dad bought a farm on the Island and proceeded to passionately transform it into the first organic farm on the Island. This meant a lot to Dad, a supporter of the Green Party and Extinction Rebellion he had strong unwavering views about preserving the planet for future generations.

When buying an airport, it wasn't enough to just buy the airport he wanted to improve it and share his love of aviation with others by putting on a huge annual airshow, a 1940's dinner and dance, building the Aviator Bar and restaurant from the ground up, which we ran as a family.

Of course, none of his greatest achievements would have been possible without the unfaltering love and support of Mum, who has been throughout the most flexible, tolerant, and understanding co-pilot through life's adventure. The last few months demonstrated her commitment by not leaving his side from the day he was in hospital till his last day with us at home. Their love for each other and us all is deeply inspiring.

I've got time to tell another couple of Dad's stories. One of Dad's adventures included flying an Islander aircraft in freezing conditions at high altitude over the Alps with no heater or oxygen just because he wanted to take a short cut to get their quicker to cut down a 3-day journey to 1. He had been told by the other pilots this couldn't be done and he wanted to prove to the person he was flying for that it could be done in a day.

And that was Dad. He trusted himself, understood and respected his aircraft, was full of adventure, comfortable with taking risks and wasn't afraid to try. One of the things he always said and modelled to us throughout our lives was "If you don't try you'll never know". Thanks Dad - still inspiring me today, with that enduring advice.

Asking Dad for advice you would always find that he had just the right thing to say he'd always deeply considered his response even though sometimes you didn't like the advice probably because It meant doing something that you already knew you could be doing yet was outside your comfort zone.

My final story for now is one that Dad may even have realised at the time; it is about how he set such a good example. We were lucky enough to grow up as children with a beautiful biplane called an N3N, which was in the family for about 20 years. My earliest memories were of only being able to see the dials on the dashboard but being able to look out of the side window and see the world upside down! But my lasting memory is of the way Dad could talk to the plane, and really was one with it. What flying skill I have is down to the days I spent shadowing him in the cockpit, and when I was able to fly the same plane over this home a few weeks ago for Dad, maybe he realised that he actually taught me through his example. This is just as true in so many aspects of my life, and not only with flying. Dad was reliable, consistent, steady as an ox, and set an example that I will always look up to. A real pillar of strength.

I'll finish with some words of advice from Dad that really stuck with me..

*"You know... If you don't have a go at it you'll never know"
"If you are unhappy, change something"*

Last bit of advice he gave me:

I said to Dad.. "I've been thinking again About Doing Some Of the Light Aircraft Association Engineering Courses as you know I love vintage aircraft and perhaps I can create a business For restoring them and maybe get a chance fly some"...

Dad replied... "That's a great idea, so when are you going to book them? I think you need to do more doing, and Less talking about it... don't you think?"

With those words Dad had gently challenged me to make that genuine commitment to myself, to follow my dreams rather than talk about it.

And on that note of less talking more doing.

Mind how you go Dad.

Beulah (daughter) - Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening (Robert Frost)

*Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.*

*My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.*

*He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.*

*The woods are lovely, dark and deep.
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep*

Colleagues - Quotes

Dick was a member of the Labour and Green Party's and had made many friends in both. Here are quotes from four of Dick's friends, starting with Lynn Lister from the local Labour Party.

"I loved Richard's willingness to stick his head above the parapet whatever the consequences. He was a special man and I can't believe he's gone. We need people who are prepared to be brave and do this and it's something I always admired him for."

"When we think of Richard we think of his wisdom, clarity, kindness and compassion. We think of his innate sense of social justice and his willingness to speak the truth to power. We will also remember the twinkle in his eye and his sense of fun. It is a huge loss to all of us that campaign for a better future for our children and grandchildren."

"He was a bloody good egg!"

"I remember him as a warm, feisty, larger than life person with an incredible life-force."

Sabah (granddaughter) - No. 55 (Jay Levic)

*When I die,
my atoms will come undone
and I will become space dust
once again.*

*The wind will carry me;
scatter me everywhere;
like dandelions in springtime.*

*I'll visit worlds and alien moons.
It will be so very poetic -
until I land on your sandwich.*

Being here today, together in a home that Dick built for Gilly, his adored wife of over 40 years, we have honoured Dick, a brother, husband, father, grandpa, uncle and friend to many. We have heard about his amazing life. There are no words that can adequately describe this man who lived life to the full, took risks, but believed in his own abilities and if that belief was mistaken, he would pick himself up, dust himself down and stride on to another adventure, learning from his mistakes but always sticking to his beliefs.

In his lifetime Dick influenced many people. Through knowing Dick, some people have had their own lives changed significantly, sharing his many adventures, or listening to and being involved in his political views and actions. Others have been touched by his inclusiveness and generosity and his desire to do what he considered the right thing to do. His sense of justice and respect meant he reached even people he did not know. Acting on his beliefs he stood up to make a difference for others, now and for future generations. Being a humble man and not one for the limelight, Dick would not be looking for recognition. He 'just got on with it'.

Safe landing, Dick!