

A Celebration of the Life of

David Taylor
17 August 1943 – 5 July 2024

15 August 2024, Huddersfield Crematorium
Celebrant: Hannah McKerchar



Humanist
Ceremonies™
by Humanists UK

Isabel's Tribute (daughter)

Thank you so much for coming – me, my mum and my brother really appreciate you being with us today.

I've been thinking a lot over the last few weeks about what I could say today to do my dad justice, but the truth is that whatever I say, I won't be able to do that.

But when I've been thinking about what I definitely need to say, two things keep coming up. First, that he was an incredibly kind man, he cared deeply and would do anything to help anyone – and that was not only something he did throughout his life, but also something he passed on to my brother. And second, that he was – quite frankly – the most argumentative person I've ever met, and that argumentativeness may actually be something he passed on to us both.

We saw his kindness in big ways and small. He did so much for our old high school, the local community centre and as a Labour councillor because he truly wanted to make things better. But I also think he was genuinely incapable of saying no to anyone who asked for help, and I know he touched the lives of many people because of this.

But he also had very strong opinions about almost anything. And if he didn't have a strong opinion, he'd soon find one so he could have an argument about it – often accompanied by a pointing finger. Many of these arguments were about the most trivial things, some were even about things we could easily prove to be incorrect, but his commitment to defending anything he decided to argue about was second to none.

And when I say he could argue about almost anything, I do mean anything – once, when I was living in America, we ended up having quite a heated debate in one of our regular phone calls. In fact, it got so animated that my friends – two floors below me in our shared house – were getting a little concerned. It wasn't exactly easy to have to explain to two mid-westerners that we were just discussing bus services in West Yorkshire.

I suspect that a lot of people who speak at these services say that they wish that they'd had fewer arguments with someone who has died, but in all honesty, I wish I'd had more, and I definitely wish that I could still argue with him today.

Some of the arguing was, I think, just for his own entertainment but a lot of it was because he was also fiercely loyal. He knew which side he was on – whether that was in politics or in football or in anything else – and he was going to back it to the hilt.

He could never really understand why someone wouldn't support the Labour Party, because its values and principles were so obviously right to him. In fact, he considered asking someone if they were a party member to be a suitable ice breaker and the often inevitable follow up of "Why not?" to be an appropriate conversation starter. This caused one or two awkward moments for the rest of us.

And when it came to football, his main concern was Bolton Wanderers. For other games he watched, he had clear principles about who to support; he would always support the team in red (except for when he didn't), and he would always support the most northerly team (except for when he didn't). But he was always able to justify his decision-making process, at least to himself. He also showed remarkable consistency in his approach to the laws of the game – he thought almost every opposition player should be sent off, and every penalty claim for his team should definitely be given.

There are so many stories I could tell today, and I would laugh and cry for hours, but I have been very keen for this to be a real celebration of his life, so here's a couple of stories about how I want to remember my dad:

At some point when I was very little, I realised that the world didn't stop when I fell asleep so I appear to have decided that I just wouldn't go to sleep because I didn't want to miss anything. At first, when I was very young, I'm told he'd follow me around, waiting for my eyelids to start to close and catch me as I fell asleep before I hit the floor. I was too young to remember that, but I do remember being a few years older when I still struggled to sleep and he'd stay right next to me until I drifted off. To be honest, he often fell asleep before me, but I knew he was there if I needed him.

And then, many years later, when I was in high school, I remember him coming home one day and calling for me to see something. He'd left the house that morning in shoes from two different pairs he left by the front door. He wasn't just not embarrassed by this, but he was actually getting more people to laugh with him about it. And his ability to make fun of himself when he did things like that meant I didn't find it quite so difficult to laugh it off when I did the same thing 20 years later.

But the thing I want to remember more than anything else is how content he was. He loved being a civil and structural engineer, and he regaled us with stories about the projects he'd worked on, pointing out the things he'd helped to build as we drove around.

And while he didn't exactly embrace modern technology – he was not convinced by the internet, he still missed his fax machine and he only switched his mobile phone on when he needed to make a call to one of us – he very much enjoyed his Sunday Gin and Tonics with Tim and Jane that were only made possible by the wonders of FaceTime. And he got so much joy from spending time this last year with Andrew and Laura back up north, and not just because of their new dog Pickle.

There was not a day of my life that I doubted that he loved us. In fact, me and Andrew learnt when we were quite young that he valued us very highly indeed, because he once left us as collateral when he had to go back home to retrieve his wallet so he could pay for the fish and chips we'd just eaten.

Even in our 40s, he worried more about me and Andrew than he really needed to. But while he may have expressed all of these worries to my mum, he never told me I was wrong to make the choices I made in life, even if he didn't really understand them.

And though he probably told me this more than my mum, he would tell me how lucky he was to be married to her. When they were first getting married, he told her that it would only be for 25 years because no man in his family had lived past 47. I'm honestly not sure if that was meant to be a pro or a con, but it was actually more than twice as long and he'd wax lyrical to me about the holidays she organised, the food she cooked and even – every now and again – her driving.

So that's why today, we want to remember my dad as a happy, kind and loyal man – even if arguing was his love language.

Some of the best times we had with my dad were driving around – usually, but not always, with him in the passenger seat, navigating along as many minor roads as possible. He'd be enthralled by the things he could spot out of the window – with anything being built along the side of the road of particular interest. When music was on, he'd be drumming on the dashboard and singing along – sometimes even with the right lyrics. Especially when we were kids, this was often to Chuck Berry and nothing sums that up more than this song 'No Particular Place To Go', so this, and the happiness we shared in those moments, is how I'd like to remember him.

Celebrant

When I spoke with Isabel, Andrew and Ann, it was very clear how strongly David's Bolton roots were embedded, from his childhood growing up there with his sister Anne-Marie, four years to the day younger than him, and their parents Charles and Nellie. He was brought up on Bolton Wanderers, and developed his independence of spirit at an early age too, taking the train to Cornwall with his friend Billy on a cycling holiday at the age of just 14. David's socialist outlook was an intrinsic part of his make-up, that saw him join the Young Socialists at 20. And of course it was the Labour Party that brought David and Ann together, bonding over a shared love of canvassing and spending most of their date nights at branch meetings.

They did their best to book their wedding for the 15 October, as that was the anniversary of the general election that saw Harold Wilson become Prime Minister, but logistics meant it was actually Friday 28 October 1966 when they tied the knot, accompanied by their parents, Ann's brother Andrew, and David's sister who had ducked out on her lunch break for the ceremony. They may not have enjoyed a honeymoon, but they did have a new mattress to take with them as they moved into their new flat in Baildon.

David had worked hard to qualify as a civil engineer, taking a sandwich course aged 16, and going on to become not only a chartered civil engineer, but also a chartered structural engineer, an achievement of which he was rightly proud. His work with Borough Engineers brought him and Ann to Huddersfield, and he was a highly-respected colleague at West Riding County Council, and the Electricity Board. David used to joke, with only a hint of bitterness, that he 'got privatised twice' by the Tories, once when the County Council was abolished, and again when the utilities were sold off.

David put the same level of precision and acumen to work on projects the size of Sellafield and the calculations for a friend's extension. And he brought his principles and insights to bear in his roles as ward councillor for Holme Valley South, governor and Chair of Governors at Holmfirth High School, and trustee for Wooldale Community Centre. Whatever David put his mind to, he carried out with wholehearted commitment and meticulous attention to detail, as the planning officers at Kirklees knew all too well!

He also managed to make his work fit around his family; Andrew and Isabel said how he was there to take them to school three mornings a week and took them on many a trip out (mostly, according to Andrew, to see big things blown up!).

And of course both David and Ann passed on their loyalty to Bolton Wanderers to their children; even when Andrew lived down in London he would regularly be back up for football matches with his mum and dad.

Before David and Ann had their family, they had explored the world, visiting the likes of California and Cuba. Scotland and Wales were more usual destinations when Andrew and Isabel were small, and more recently Portugal, Italy and Greece. But for many years Gascony has been a second home to the whole family. David and Ann's great friend Tim is going to tell us more.

Tim's Tribute (friend)

This was the last thing we wanted to be doing today! We should really be sitting on the terrace in La Philippiere drinking red wine with our dear friend David and with Ann.

We first met David, Ann and the children over thirty years ago when they came to stay in "The Little House", which was the annex of the house we were looking after for the summer in Auriebat in France. They liked it, a magical place, and they came back every year (except the second one) to stay with us and to our delight years later they eventually bought the house. It became their second home and a place David loved to be. We have been lucky enough to spend every summer and many New Years since then with them and we have many wonderful memories of David in France and at our home in Wales.

In the early days we remember sightseeing trips into the Pyrenees, dragging reluctant teenagers with us, Andrew in particular, up the Cirque de Gavarnie or up to the Pic de Midi because David thought the experience would be good for them, even though they would have preferred to lounge at home. We had picnics in a little village on a nearby ridge or on the front lawn if the children really didn't want to go out!

Later, when he retired, we explored the area at a gentler pace, stopping at places of interest which invariably had a church so that David could explain the architecture and construction to Jane at great length whilst Ann and I tried to find somewhere for a quiet drink and waited.

Of course David was not allowed to drive on these occasions. We learnt early on that he had a habit of turning around to talk to the passengers in the back whilst going along. Very disconcerting!

We had favourite places to visit every year. David and I would always have a road trip with him directing me around many back roads. We would always end up with a meal together often at the Cafe de Sport in Bassoues. David also liked to go into Marciac when the jazz festival was on to sit in the square and enjoy the music and a beer. Vic Market on a Saturday was a must, where we soaked up the busy atmosphere and patiently waited for Ann and Jane to try on shoes or dresses, hoping there would be time for a coffee and croissant somewhere. Friday was moules and frites day at the supermarket cafe and if they weren't on the menu then - Duck. Duck was his favourite meal wherever we ate and luckily in Gascony duck is always on the menu!

Every year we went out for a special meal to celebrate his birthday and our anniversary. The one that stands out in all our memories is the one when we went to The Hotel de France in Auch. It had a famous French chef and was really rather nice. David was tasked with choosing the wine so he leafed through a box of cards listing the details of each bottle. We were a bit perplexed to see that he didn't appear to be enjoying the meal. It turned out that he thought that he might have chosen a three hundred euro bottle instead of a more acceptable thirty euro bottle. He, being an honorary Yorkshireman, was worried. When the bill came he breathed a sigh of relief.

We have lovely memories of delicious and sociable meals at La Philippiere with David and Ann and sometimes other visitors who were always made very welcome. Gin and tonic on the back terrace first and then evenings spent putting the world to rights over a bottle or two of red wine. David had very definite views on the things he felt passionate about, like his political views and of course football. Debates were often heated, there was much finger wagging and we all noticed that he was always right when clearly he wasn't, but that didn't matter a bit! David had a strong sense of right and wrong about a lot of things but the straw that broke the camel's back came when the local supermarket put the price of his favourite wine up from two euro sixty to three euro! Appalling!

He said, his words not mine, that he was a typical Yorkshireman. David hated waste and Ann and Jane became experts on getting rid of food that was most definitely past its sell by date when he wasn't looking, like baguettes that were only good for rounders bats which went over the fence for the birds. The local farm dogs knew which side their bread was buttered so to speak. David and to be fair, Ann, made sure that anything that was left after a meal was saved for the dogs - they loved him! He was the expert at getting jam out of a jar which as far as the rest of us could tell, was empty!

Everything that could be used or reused was kept and nothing was thrown away. He was the original eco warrior and up-cycler and this included his many French shirts. Jane, who loves ironing, had been ironing some of these for nearly thirty years and needless-to-say the patterns had disappeared, but they were still too good to throw away according to David.

Our favourite picture of David is of him in a yellow shirt that I had bequeathed to him when it didn't fit anymore and he had said he liked it. He wore it for gardening. He enjoyed the garden and typically insisted on going out to wage war on the weeds in the middle of the day. This particular day was really hot and so he was dripping but triumphant as I expect he'd managed to get his quota of weeds onto the compost heap. He took "mad dogs and Englishmen" to a whole different level.

David was kind and polite, he could always see the good in anyone and in everything. Polite - well, my memory of this will always be the night of the fire in the little house. We were there working on their bathroom in the big house so David took to the bedroom in the little house. I was woken by a knock on my bedroom door and David saying quietly, "Tim, I wonder, could you come and help please, the little house is on fire." Anyone else would have been shouting and panicking! I did as I searched for a pair of underpants!

New Years' celebrations in France were always something to look forward to. Log fires, wine, special meals of seafood including traditional oysters and of course - Duck. Trips up to the ridge to see the snow on the Pyrenees. This was the pattern - except for the millennium year. At some stage between starting celebrations with Australia and those much later in London the wine changed to whisky and I was responsible for introducing Isabel to the joys of Talisker. Luckily David didn't seem to mind that Isabel wasn't drinking lemonade because as he had sampled a few wee drams himself, he didn't notice. Buckets were needed that night beside the bed and this story is now part of Taylor/Exell legend.

In the last few years New Year has been spent in Wales with us. The same pattern followed - trips out for the boys - me driving of course - Ann and Jane looking for bargains in the sales, and then meals which always include - duck, plenty of French wine and above all good company.

Finally a word about time keeping. Never David's forte. Always running late for planes and ferries or picking up keys (that's another story) and generally keeping us waiting. We wish that he had kept us waiting for this day. Jane and I and our family are truly grateful for all the happy memories of our kind, gentle, generous, and dearest friend who always made us welcome. He made us smile, we loved him and we will greatly miss him.