

A Celebration of the Life of

Edward (Ted) Arthur Swift
13 February 1923 – 4 September 2024

9 October 2024, Hastings Crematorium
Celebrant: Felicity Harvest



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Ted was born in 1923, the eldest son of Edward Swift senior. Four other children followed, Ernie, Brian, Murray and Jen.

A lot of the information you're about to hear about his early life comes from a letter he wrote to the children at Claremont School, after they'd congratulated him on his 100th birthday. This is what he told them.

They had few toys. The boys wore short trousers year-round, with wellingtons or boots, a scarf and gloves in the winter, and a cap with a button on top. They played cowboys and Indians, making their own bows and arrows. They made go-carts from old pram wheels, rolled a bicycle wheel using a stick, and did a lot of skipping ("probably to keep warm" said Ted).

The family kept rabbits and chickens (to eat, almost certainly) but also had a black and white cat called Tom. They grew their own food, and Ted was tasked with sowing the seeds, as he was more supple than his Dad and Grandad, and nearer the ground. When he got a bit older, he was responsible for chopping firewood and bringing in the coal.

He started working at a young age. At the age of eight or nine he helped his Dad to grind the food to feed the Shire horses at the coal yard where both his father and grandfather worked. He went out with his grandad on the horse carts, delivering coal. When the round was finished the horse knew his way back and would stop outside the pub so his grandad could get a pint of beer and sometimes a lemonade for Ted. The horse would have a drink of beer too!

Ted left school at 14, as most people did in those days, and went to work in a bakery. He had to deliver the bread on a bicycle with a big wicker basket on the front. If it rained and the bread got wet, he would take it back to the bakery and they would put it back in the ovens to dry it out. On Saturdays he also delivered cakes and if there were any leftover he would be allowed to take them home. There were never many left though.

His next job was in a grocer's shop. The dry goods would arrive in big sacks, and Ted had to weigh them out into smaller bags, which he then delivered to customers using a two-wheeled cart drawn by a horse. Then he worked as a trainee gardener at a big manor house, the start of his love of gardening.

Ted was 16 when war broke out. He trained with the Territorial Army at Scotney Castle. They were given rifles, bayonets, grenades and ammunition. Ted had now started working at the Post Office, and they had to guard the telephone exchange. Working as a postman, he had his afternoons free, so he took another job driving a laundry van. And it was while doing that second job that he met Cynthia, who was working in the laundry. They got engaged when they were 18 and married when they were 19, on the 24th April 1943. No less than 78 years of happy marriage followed.

Once he was 18, he was declared medically unfit for military service, so he joined the Fire Brigade – scary work as there was lots of bombing in the London and Sevenoaks area. Cynthia went to live in Pagham for a while, out of the path of enemy bombers, and Margaret was born there. Ted cycled from Sevenoaks to Pagham to see them – a distance of 73 miles. Google maps says it would have taken him six hours each way. That's love!

Once life had settled down after the war, along came children Mike and Marilyn, and in 1951 they moved to their new home, Crossways in Westfield, and then on to Church Fields in 1953. Ted did various jobs in this period, mainly working on a farm, but also being a wedding photographer in his spare time (it's in the genes!), taking formal photos of families in the front parlour, and then moving into the building trade where he prospered, eventually having his own business installing swimming pools.

He built pools for local schools and for the rich and famous including Roger Daltry, and Catherine Cookson. He met John Lennon. He was proud of his pools and continued to maintain one, at Tilton House in Catsfield, till he was 98 (with a little help from Darren). He worked all over the country, building swimming pools from Wales to Yorkshire, from Norfolk to the Isle of Wight. Mike describes the pleasure of a job well done: *"Lovely to see a finished pool filled exactly to the rim of the border tiles."*

In 1965 Ted and Cynthia bought The Haven in Westfield, where Marilyn and Derek still live, so it's been a family home for nearly sixty years.

He was a great Dad. He loved his family and worked hard for them – after all, remember he'd been working from the age of 8. He would come home after a hard day's work, pop into the house to say hello to Cynthia and the kids, and then be out in his garden. There are still some tomatoes in his greenhouse right now.

Ted and Cynthia used to dance together wherever they could, be it at events like Darren and Jade's wedding, or at home with the radiogram on at full blast. And then there were the dogs, Drifter the goldie, and the two Kims. Ted loved his cars, owning over 30 of them in his long life. He only gave up driving at the age of 98.

Holidays meant camping in the West Country when the kids were young, the two of them caravanning once the kids had left home, and big holidays with the extended family later to the Channel Islands, Portugal and Ibiza.

Meanwhile the family was growing, with grandchildren Jackie, Marie, Nicky, Claire, Darren and David, followed in time by great grandchildren Martin, Jamie, Liam, Charlie, Jasper, Juniper, Olivia and Eliza.

And of course Ted was a fantastic grandad and great-grandad, loved by all of them, always there with his biscuit tin, and his words of advice to those (usually Darren) who were doing little practical jobs for him.

Mike picked up many of his own practical skills from watching and learning from Ted, including electrical work, plumbing and plastering. Ted taught him how to drive by showing him how to drive a dumper when he helped on site.

For Ted was a practical man, who owned every possible tool and knew every building technique, and this poem by Edgar Albert Best sums him up:

It couldn't be done

*Somebody said that it couldn't be done
But he with a chuckle replied
That "maybe it couldn't," but he would be one
Who wouldn't say so till he'd tried.
So he buckled right in with the trace of a grin
On his face. If he worried he hid it.
He started to sing as he tackled the thing
That couldn't be done, and he did it!*

*Somebody scoffed: "Oh, you'll never do that;
At least no one ever has done it;"
But he took off his coat and he took off his hat
And the first thing we knew he'd begun it.
With a lift of his chin and a bit of a grin,
Without any doubting or quiddit,
He started to sing as he tackled the thing
That couldn't be done, and he did it.*

*There are thousands to tell you it cannot be done,
There are thousands to prophesy failure,
There are thousands to point out to you, one by one
The dangers that wait to assail you.
But just buckle in with a bit of a grin,
Just take off your coat and go to it;
Just start in to sing as you tackle the thing
That "cannot be done," and you'll do it.*

When Ted retired they decided they wanted a change and moved to Shaftesbury in Dorset. They stayed there for fourteen years until Ted's ill health made them feel they wanted to be nearer family, so they returned to Sussex, first to Fairlight, then to Parkstone Road.

And above all Ted and Cynthia (or Cindy, as he called her) were a devoted couple throughout their marriage. When she spent weeks in hospital, after several falls, he'd go and sit with her all day every day, and later, with the help of carers, he was determined to keep her at home.

Marilyn says *"He was an inspiration to us all, a strong and independent man. He wanted to stay in his own home and he managed to do that right to the end. Above all he loved his whole family. It broke his heart when mum died in 2021."*

The family worried that Ted would give up at that point, but no. They regularly took him out for lunch, to The Hub in Bodiam for smoked mackerel and to the Smokery in Flimwell – for well, smoked everything. He'd bought himself an electric wheelchair and was looking forward to speeding up and down the seafront with a great grandchild or two aboard, and when he bought his new TV this summer he took out a three-year warranty. *"Well, that's optimism."* said Marilyn.

Marilyn spoke to him at 10.30 on September 4th, and he was in good form, though grumpy that the doctor had asked him to come to the surgery rather than dealing with stuff over the phone. She went round to help him get there, arriving less than half an hour later, and found him dead. A great shock, but a peaceful end, in his own home, as he wanted.