

A Celebration of the Life of

**Victor Joseph Pike**  
**9 June 1946 – 2 March 2024**

13 April 2024, Siobhan Davies Dance Centre, London  
Celebrant: Tamiko O'Brien



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Vic's family came from South London originally living just off the Borough High Street. Due to the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, they were displaced, and Vic was born in Amersham on the 9<sup>th</sup> June 1946 though the family soon moved back to London and lived in Deptford.

Vic's Mum Maggie had Irish heritage and was a clerical assistant, while his dad, Joe, was a cabbie and one-time professional boxer. Vic was the second oldest of four children with an older sister Valerie, younger brother Michael and younger sister Josie. In the 1950s Deptford was considered a slum area and Vic's family were in the second generation to be moved by the London County Council to a new estate in Downham near Bromley.

Vic's parents were socialist, and the council estate would also have been described as left leaning, and Vic would follow the way of his hero Tony Benn who was famously referred to as "immaturing with age"

Vic would later refer to himself as 'cosmopolitan', he was an enthusiastic citizen of the world believing in open borders and warmly welcoming the mixing of cultures. He often said that if he were to bother with the lottery and ever became a winner his aim would be to pay off as many mortgages as he possibly could.

Like Tony Benn, Vic's passionate belief in equality and opportunity for all strengthened rather than diminished as he grew older.

The roots of this were Vic's schooldays, marred as they were by his undiagnosed dyslexia. Having dyslexia in the 1950s and 60s was not for the faint hearted. There was very little understanding of the condition and children with dyslexia tended to be written off and treated poorly by their teachers.

It must have been really challenging for Vic who was clearly intelligent and quick witted. He remained undiagnosed until 1998 when he was fifty-one. Joe has inherited the letter with his formal diagnosis that was, proudly and somewhat defiantly, framed and hung on the wall in Vic's flat.

At Primary School Vic met Paul Jones (aka Jonah) who went on to become a great friend. Vic and Jonah lived around the corner from each other and, though they were in different classes at school, they often walked to school together and were in and out of each other's flats.

Vic also made great friends during his time at the local comprehensive where he met Micky French aka Frenchy and the 3 of them were close friends throughout their teens.

Vic was a serious and dedicated amateur boxer in his youth. He left school at 15 without any formal qualifications and at that time his dream was to be a reporter for the Boxing News. With modern technology and better understanding of dyslexia this would now be possible, but at that time it was not to be.

Jonah's elder brother worked in Spitalfields market and found Vic and Jonah jobs in the market; Vic's first employment was as a banana ripener. He continued boxing and even had the opportunity to become professional after following his dad's success by becoming the South East of England Divisional Amateur Boxing Champion in 1965 as a member of the Fisher Boxing Club in Bermondsey.

But even though he loved boxing he didn't like the culture of the professional sport and knew this wasn't for him.

Jonah had meanwhile joined the Merchant Navy and returned with great stories of his time in Tahiti, Acapulco, and Hawaii. So, in the mid 1960s Vic was one of a small army of friends who were inspired by Jonah to join the Merchant Navy, with their first trip on the SS Iberia setting off from Southampton to Cape Town.

Jonah and Vic were both waiters which inevitably involved keeping tables and floors clean. Jonah recalled that Vic was indignant about scrubbing floors and wanted to abandon this new way of life once they reached Cape Town.

In an early sign of his entrepreneurial acumen, Jonah swapped a pair of Levis, for "a great big bag of *gear*" with one of the dock workers in Cape Town. The next shift, after smuggling the dope on board, Vic and Jonah were so stoned, they kept having to leave the main dining room, to laugh hysterically, and Vic decided to stay on as a merchant seaman!

Jonah found some more opportunities for them in 1968 when the pair of them worked as DJs in various clubs in Benidorm for two glorious summer seasons.

After this memorable time living "the good life" they returned to London and set up a commune in the basement of Greenwich Market where they ran *The Greenwich Family*, a hippy clothing store in the market.

With his great passion for music, Vic went on to run his own record store based in a shop opposite called *Black Market*. They lived the archetypal beatnik life of the late 60s and early 70s wearing the coolest hippy clothes and sporting impressive beards and big hair.

And then one night Vic met Janet in a night club, and they fell for each other. After this first meeting Janet never went back to her former home and they were pretty much inseparable. In 1973 their first child Joe arrived. It's around this time that the basement where they lived was burgled and many of Vic's prized records were stolen. Soon after they moved out of the commune and settled into family life in a new home in Sidcup.

Vic was smart, adaptable, and up for a challenge. He could turn his hands to most things when needed so it's not surprising that he and his friend Jeff Russell spent 1977 and some of 1978 working in Dubai and Abu Dhabi as construction workers. It was here that Vic met another close friend Ray Rowson who later moved to London and stayed with Vic and his family before moving to Canada (in fact Vic was best man at Ray's wedding in Toronto in 2006).

Janet and Vic married in 1978 and in 1979 a daughter, the indomitable Jessie arrived. At this time Vic was running a fast-food van in a layby on the A20 serving bacon and egg banjos to lorry drivers and other passing trade. At weekends he could be found serving hot food from his van in Trosley Country Park in Kent, (although Joe told me Vic really was a terrible cook).

In the early 80's Janet and Vic took over the running of a corner shop and deli in East Greenwich, around the corner from a clothing shop run by Janet's school friend Jackie Cook. Their youngest Karl was born in 1984 and a few years later the family moved to Ramsgate with Vic commuting to London for work on construction sites.

Sadly, in 1991 the marriage broke down and Vic and Janet divorced. They both continued to live in Ramsgate, with Jessie choosing to live with Vic in his flat, while Karl lived with Janet. At this time Joe moved to London to take a degree in Fine Art.

In the recession that followed Vic found himself unemployed and struggled with his mental health. The charity MIND offered him valuable support and he was forever grateful to them and would go on in later years to volunteer with the charity in various ways, including assisting people with learning difficulties to learn new skills such as furniture restoration.

Vic even became a member of the charity's board of trustees for some years and helped them fundraise. Meanwhile Vic's 'good eye' and talent for furniture restoration became just one more of the many things he could turn his hands to.

Here is a quote from one of Vic's heroes the world champion boxer Muhammed Ali:

*"Impossible is just a word thrown around by small people who find it easier to live in the world they've been given than to explore the power they have to change it. Impossible is not a fact. It's an opinion. Impossible is potential. Impossible is temporary. Impossible is nothing."*

That reflects Vic's own attitude, because he wasn't one for sitting back and putting up with injustice, he was an active campaigner. Alongside the stories of how he made his living, of his family life and of the music he loved to listen to, is a parallel story about the many marches he went on: marches against apartheid and in support of the miners' strike; marches against social injustices such as the poll tax, and marches against the Iraq War. For Joe and Jessie, it wasn't unusual to join their Dad on a march or to come across him in Ramsgate town centre, handing out leaflets, or selling the Socialist Worker Party newspaper.

Vic read all of Tony Benn's diaries (these chronological decades of Ben working as a Labour minister and politician and his post parliament years working as an anti-war and social justice campaigner).

Vic was proud to have met Tony Benn in the early 2000s after hearing him talk at the British Library, so, here is a short recording of Tony Benn talking about the philosophy behind the establishment of the NHS from the film *Sicko* by Michael Moore...

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Vic was an absolute believer in that final statement by Benn, *"If we can find the money to kill people, we can find the money to help people."*

Between 1997 and 1998 Vic enrolled on a Foundation Diploma in Welfare Studies and it was at this time that he was finally diagnosed with dyslexia. Soon after finishing this course, he returned to the world of work as a Probation Officer. Vic's life experience and his socialist values made him supportive and empathetic, qualities that suited the role well. Vic recognised that the people he worked with needed help to turn their lives around, and he made a difference to many people through his commitment to his work.

Joe remembers how it was to walk through Ramsgate with Vic. Quite often they would be stopped by someone enthusiastically approaching and asking, "*alright Vic how are you?*". Later when Joe enquired about this, Vic would explain that he had worked with that person when they were in a dire situation. These were some of the people Vic had quietly helped, and the respect, trust, and fondness they showed towards him was reflected in his warmth and interest towards them.

Vic seemed content with his new job until in 2008 the family received the devastating news that Karl had taken his own life. Joe remembers Vic speaking so movingly and eloquently about mental health at Karl's funeral.

We are now going to hear *Nature Springs* by The Good, the Bad and the Queen...

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Joe remembers hearing that track in 2011 when he and Vic went to a fundraising gig for Greenpeace at the Coronet in Elephant & Castle, just up the road from here. The band were headed up by Damon Albarn, more famously known as the lead singer of Blur, he was someone Vic respected not just for his music but for his political views.

Vic wasn't remotely materialistic and was more likely to be found giving things away than shopping. He was perfectly content to live in a small flat and gave up driving as soon as a car was no longer a necessity, much preferring to walk. In fact, Vic was a great walker and walked everywhere, often finding a way to walk along the coast en route to other places he needed to get to. He was quite content in his own company and found walking helped him straighten things out.

Vic had always been a person of action, so after he retired at 65 it seemed only natural that he would be busy volunteering. He donated his time and energy to the Garden Gate Project in Margate, which was an initiative set up by Thanet MIND.

Their objective is to promote inclusion and reduce prejudice by bringing people together and supporting adults with learning disabilities or mental health needs. This was close to Vic's heart, and he supported a wide range of individuals to engage in meaningful educational, creative, and social opportunities.

There were two luxuries Vic did allow himself later in life, both have a Cuban connection. Firstly, acquiring a print (thanks to Jonah) of an artwork by Cuban/American artist José Parlá which he bought in 2009.

The second was a relatively modest package trip he made to Cuba in 2016. This was his personal pilgrimage to the land of Fidel Castro. Vic had been a lifelong admirer of Castro and appreciated Castro's adoption of the Marxist-Leninist model of development, and his embracing of environmentalist and anti-globalization principles.

In 2017 Vic downsized, moving from a smallish one bed flat into an even smaller one bed flat, he felt this was an ideal opportunity to relieve himself of some more possessions. The same month saw Vic's granddaughter Rosa born, and this brought much joy into his life.

We are now going to watch a slide show that Joe has prepared for us today. He chose *Dear Mr Man* a track by Prince who Vic admired for both his musical genius and his work as a social justice warrior...

Here is something Jonah said about Vic:

*"Since meeting at 10 we kept in touch our whole lives - the last few years we visited him many times, latterly in care homes which was heartbreaking, I'll hang on to the last time we visited him in his little flat in Ramsgate. We had the best evening, with a bottle of fine whisky and snacks, and never stopped laughing about the good times we'd had together.*

*He was politically astute, and always cared about people less fortunate than him. I had the best of times with Vicky, a fiercely loyal, reliable, and dependable friend."*

We have remembered the quietly extraordinary and unique life of Vic Pike, a person of great integrity that in his own quiet way made a positive difference to the world. His legacy lives on in his family, his friends, and the people whose lives he touched through his volunteering, his work as a probation officer and his many acts of kindness and compassion.

The final track is *Gimme Shelter* by the Rolling Stones, a track they played at their famous concert in Cuba in 2016. It reflects Vic's love of music and recalls his last great adventure when he visited Cuba aged 70.