

A Celebration of the Life of

Sidney (Sid) Harvey Siegel

27 December 1944 – 22 October 2024

22 November 2024, Wealden Crematorium

Celebrant: Felicity Harvest



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The grief present in this room today would not be here if you had not loved Sid, and he had not loved you. His younger daughter Katie will now read us a poem about the interaction between love and grief.

Afterparty - Becky Hemsley

*I held a party the other week and grief came.
She wasn't invited but she came anyway - barged her way in through the door and settled down
like she was here to stay.
And then she introduced me to the friends she'd brought with her - Anger. Fear. Frustration. Guilt.
Hopelessness.
And they sang in the loudest voices, took up space in every corner of the room and spoke over
anyone else that tried to talk.
They made it messy and loud and uncomfortable.
But finally, they left.
And long afterwards, when I was all alone,
I realised there was still someone here.
Quietly clearing up after the rest.
I asked who she was and she told me, "Love."
And I assumed that's why she looked familiar - because I had met her before.
"Or perhaps," she said, "it's because I've been here the whole time."
And I was confused then because I hadn't seen her all evening.
But when I looked more closely,
when I looked into her eyes,
I realised quietly that she had been here.
All the time.
She'd just been dressed as grief.*

The circumstances of Sid's birth could hardly have been more dramatic. His mother, Dorothy, a 'Land Girl', had met a GI, Sidney Reuben Siegel, an academic, probably at one of those dances where young English women seemed to meet GIs during the war. It was a whirlwind romance, and they married early in 1944. She was 19, he was 24. Just imagine what she thought their future would be! But Sidney senior died in action on D-Day in June 1944, months before their child Sid was born on 27th December. It must have been a bleak Christmas for Dorothy, even though she had family and friends around to support her.

Happily she then met Alan Oates, and they married in 1946, meaning that Sid became a watchful older brother to John, Peter and later Sherry. Alan was in the Navy when he met Dorothy, but she convinced him to leave the Navy and run The Red Lion, a coaching inn, in Wirksworth. The Red Lion is still in business, now described as 'The Red Lion Hotel, Feather Star Alehouse, Umami Restaurant & Haarlem Gallery'! It was a very busy and popular inn and every room was usually booked, so brothers Sid and John slept in the attic, which was apparently freezing. Every day their Dad cooked them a full English breakfast to set them up for the day ahead – whether that was school or a day out playing

It's not clear what Dorothy felt about the full English breakfasts - Katie and Claire described Dorothy as a "health enthusiast" – terminology they developed as children when she gave them nuts rather than chocolate eggs at Easter. They don't have many fond memories of her sugar-free jelly either! But Sid and his siblings thrived on healthy food and healthy holidays, often walking in the Lake District, and holidaying with the family dogs.

Because they were running the hotel, life was constantly busy for Dorothy and Alan, and Sid remembered how his Mum needed to find ways to save time. She would iron the front of their shirts and not the backs and instruct them not to take off their jackets at school! The children were expected to be self-sufficient, which meant they had lots of freedom, and Sid often found himself rescuing his brothers, John and Peter from various scrapes.

His closeness to John, which lasted all his life, was forged in those years. John and Brenda wrote movingly to Katie and Claire about this closeness:

"Sid has been John's lifelong friend, best mate, a loyal and devoted brother, a confidante who always had his back, and saying and doing all the 'correct' things when John's only answer was 'fisty-cuffs' against a harsh world. Sid had lost his Dad, John was isolated by his dyslexia, which was never understood, and together they supported each other through tough times. Sid has always been John's literal 'best man'."

At the weekends and in the holidays, they would leave the house after breakfast and come back when it was dark. They spent their days fishing, playing football and cricket, scrumping and sitting with the Day Watchman up at the local lead mine, who gave them tea and a biscuit while they chatted. They often went to the cinema together on a Saturday and once a month they went to watch Derby County play at home. It cost them sixpence to get in!

Sid loved fishing and pre-figured his later challenges with DIY by making a very poorly designed cart to carry his fishing gear. It didn't pivot at bends, so every time the road turned, cart and fishing gear would end up in the hedge.

They ran away from home once, aged ten and seven respectively, to their Grandma in Derby and told her that they were going to live with her and that their Mum and Dad said it was fine. They were quickly returned home.

Sid and John went to Woodlands private school in Matlock where Sid did his 11+ and passed.

Shortly after brother Peter was born, they left the Red Lion and Alan went to work as an auditor at the Brewery in Derby while Dorothy looked after the children at home. This job change meant a house and school move for everyone. Two years later when Sid was 13, Alan was promoted by the Brewery and the family moved to Oxfordshire, where Sherry was born.

Sid attended Witney Grammar School. This was an ancient foundation which celebrated its tercentenary while he was there. Unlike many grammar schools of that period, it was co-educational, and young Sid was popular with the girls, although there was one girl he did not meet there despite the fact the school had only 350 pupils at the time – the young Monica Benfield.

However, Sid and Monica were following similar paths. He became a clerk at the Midland Bank, she a clerk at Lloyd's Bank. In those days, if you made what we would now call a bank transfer, the cash might well be actually transferred, from one bank building to another, and it's likely therefore that Sid and Monica's eyes first met across a crowded bank hall as they ran errands as the most junior of clerks.

They married in 1966, and lived first in the bank flat in Witney, where Monica's elder sister Valerie lived with them for a while. They later moved to Chinnor in Berkshire, where Claire was born, and in 1975 to Farnham in Surrey, after Katie was born. They travelled back to Witney every month to see Monica's family, who have always made a point of telling Claire and Katie how fond they all were of Sid.

Sid worked in several branches of the Midland Bank in this period, rising up the ranks. He was proud of the fact that when he was at the Esher branch, The Jam were his customers.

True to his upbringing, Sid remained keen on physical exertion, and played cricket until the late 60s, but his real passion at this time was hockey. The girls often went with him to matches, and due to the fact that his cars were 2 seaters at that time, if they both went one of them had to crouch in the footwell. Claire said she only went for the Battenberg cake. We'll come back to sport later.

In 1985 they moved from Farnham to Southborough in Tunbridge Wells, when Sid became the Regional Personnel Manager for the bank, based in Maidstone. It was a longer commute than he wanted, and it was even worse when he got moved to Chatham. At a bank social event, though, he met the manager of the Tunbridge Wells branch, who lived in Chatham, and although this didn't fit at all with the protocols of the bank, after a few months they were able to arrange a swap, with Sid taking over the Tunbridge Wells branch.

Claire and Katie remember him as a loving father, who was as engaged as he could be, given his job. He didn't get home till 7pm, and they waited for him for dinner every day. At weekends, he took them off Monica's hands for a while, running them to dance classes and taking them to the market to get fruit and veg and sometimes a milkshake at Billy Bunters. He was always there to pick them up if they were out late, not only running them home but providing a taxi service for their friends, even if they lived a long way away. He was always interested in what they did, gave helpful advice but was never judgemental. In later years they found they could be 100% themselves with him, and tell him anything.

The only thing he never really mastered was DIY. He insisted on creating flat pack furniture without following the instructions, meaning that he produced various bits of furniture which just didn't work, though he did rescue Claire once by painting her ceiling after she had got paint in her eye when she bought her first flat.

When they moved to Southborough, he was delighted to find that a ride-on mower came with the house, and he loved to create beautiful straight lines on the lawn. He was mowing the front lawn one day with Monica, Claire and Katie watching him through the kitchen window, when there was a huge bang, and he fell off. It turned out the engine had exploded, though for a minute he thought he had been shot – though drive by shootings are somewhat uncommon in Southborough! They had a great social life there, making many lifelong friends along the way.

Most of the family holidays when the girls were small were to holiday parks in the UK. They always took the dogs with them, though most parks banned dogs in those unenlightened times. They used to hide them under blankets in the car as they arrived and left, and Sid would walk them at the crack of dawn when there was no one around. Other holidays included trips with Monica's brother Nigel and his wife Susan and their boys, or with Grandma and Grandad Oates – again with all the dogs in tow!

It was all change again in 1992. Monica and Sid separated, though they remained good friends with a strong sense of family. Later that year, Sid was made redundant. He made a momentous decision and bought the Post Office and shop in Edenbridge. He knew about post offices. Dorothy and Alan had, in later years, run a Post Office in Green Lane in Leicester, and he would occasionally cover for them when they went on holiday. He already had strong links to Edenbridge too, because his golf club was there, and it turned out to be a perfect move for him. It was like going back to what banking had been when he started his career, when you could get to know your customers and help them solve their day-to-day problems. Everyone in the village knew him, and he loved his staff too, helping what he called 'his girls' to develop their own careers.

He was there for around 15 years, then the Post Office closed the branch along with 55 more in Kent. He thought of keeping the shop, but finally decided it was time to actually retire. He had been working part-time for some time, playing golf several days a week and relying on those 'girls' he had trained so well.

By now he had met Denise. They both kept their own homes, which really suited them both. They met as neighbours in Crowborough, but soon forged a closeness which lasted 25 years.

They travelled together to France, to the islands of Greece and Spain, and finally a couple of trips to Croatia – you'll see some photos from that time during the refecton – adventures for both of them, as up till then they had never travelled abroad as adults. Denise would sit in the sun, but Sid would stay in the shade, reading about watches. When she came back from her swim, he'd usually found someone to chat to, because he always did. He developed a fondness for museums on those trips, not necessarily because he was interested in the displays, but because they had air conditioning. And on the flights he would of course chat to whoever he ended up sitting next to.

At home, they went frequently to National Trust properties. "I'd drag him round the houses" said Denise, "But he was really there for the tea room".

He was of course proud of his daughters – bursting with pride when he got to walk Claire down the aisle. And he remained close to his siblings – he and Denise would go on holiday with them to Devon, where the men would go fishing and the women would go shopping. He got on well with Denise's family too, joining them for many family events, and supporting her at family weddings. "The world's a poorer place without him" she said.

Sid loved all sports and would watch anything. Derby County was dear to his heart, a passion he shared with John, and they would have that football pundit conversation at the end of every match. In fact they talked every day, and Sid would tell Denise the day's Derby County news over dinner. He loved motor racing and rugby. He even watched cycling, though he said it was only because he enjoyed seeing the riders fall off. But of course, his great obsession in later years was playing golf, meeting up with Bob, Chris, Roy and Hans at Edenbridge Golf Club.

And let's talk about cars. Sid bought his first car, a Standard 10, for £50 and was very proud of it. One day when he was driving with Monica and John, he braked hard at a junction and John noticed a back wheel had come off and had passed them on the road. Later, when he had what his daughters described as his 'pre mid-life crisis', he bought a succession of MGs, including an MGB GT V8 and his Frog-Eye Sprite. Later, he moved on to Mazda sports cars, including a Mazda MX5, an RX7 and an RX8 with winged doors. June, with whom he played golf, had a Mazda 323, and they used to race each back from Edenbridge to Southborough. But as the cars got smaller, and he and his golf clubs could no longer fit in, he bought his soft top Saab, though rumour has it, he's left his RX7 locked in his garage.

Then there were the watches. He bought them, researched them and even fixed them – his DIY skills were apparently better on a smaller scale.

He was known as Satellite Sid by the girls from when he became an early adopter of Sky TV, and in later years he mainly watched sports, and UK TV Gold, endless re-runs of 'Last of the Summer Wine', 'Fawlty Towers', 'Only Fools and Horses' and "Allo 'Allo!".

His interests and knowledge spread far beyond this. He had a fantastic memory and could see the likely socio-economic impact of all events. He was always fascinating to talk to and many a dinner table conversation with family and friends would include hot global topics, events that had happened historically or current affairs.

Sid's US relatives (his Uncle David and his two sons) tracked him down in the late 1990s and made contact. They came to the UK and the family spent a week with them in Florida. It was a very emotional reunion as his Uncle David was very frail and had always wanted to meet his big brother's son. He got his wish.

Claire's husband, Martin, will now read us a poem which really sums up Sid.

The Measure of a Man – Grady Poulard

*The measure of a man is not determined
By his show of outward strength
Or the volume of his voice
Or the thunder of his actions
Or of his intellect or academic abilities
It is seen rather in terms of the love that he has
For his family and for everyone
The strength of his commitments
The genuineness of his friendships
The sincerity of his purpose
The quiet courage of his convictions
The fun, laughter, joy and happiness he gives to his
family and to others
His love of life
His patience and his honesty
And his contentment with what he has*

These sentiments are also echoed in John and Brenda's words to Claire and Katie:

"We will miss his contact, his family attachment, support and leadership, his love and his laugh. I so miss his laugh."

Sid was very calm about his diagnosis. Katie and Claire think that he had known for some time he was poorly but had perhaps ignored the symptoms which crept up on him over time. As usual, he did it his way, only taking action when his symptoms could no longer be ignored.

We often think of death as a cruel enemy, taking away those we love, but for those who are suffering or who have reached the end of their endurance, it can come as a quiet friend, closing the curtains, turning off the light, and settling us into a last sleep, free from pain and weariness. Sid knew the end was coming, and it was a peaceful Sid who Claire, Katie and Denise could sit with after that end had come. He had taken his foot off the gas for the first time in his life.