

Mike Lipscomb, OL Olds 1953–1958 (March 2017)

We were saddened to hear of the recent passing of Mike Lipscomb OL (Olds, 1953–1958). Mike's son Tim has kindly shared the eulogy, below:

Dad was born in 1940 at the beginning of the War. Despite the austerities and privations of that time, Dad's early years were as full of love and generosity as they could be. The roots of his character emerged early on – he was always his own man, straight as an arrow and with a great sense of what was right and wrong. If there was something Dad had decided he was going to do - he would take no prisoners in getting it done. If that thing involved physical exercise or the outdoors, then so much the better. And if he could win at it, then that was the best.

A story from school springs to mind. Lancing had a famously severe cross country running course, the Five Mile, and Dad, by dint of sheer effort as much as native talent, had become a valued member of the cross country team: he enjoyed the exertion and the sense of being alone on the South Downs. The annual school championship in 1957 was held in the most appalling conditions: a blizzard with a high and biting wind. Unusually, many competitors that year failed to complete the course, but not Dad; he won. Before the race, and for days afterwards he complained of a pain in his leg and it was found on X-ray that it had a hair-line fracture. So far as we know he is the only person to have won that race with a broken leg.

After school, Dad decided to follow his father into the army, choosing to serve in the Royal Engineers where his intellectual gifts could be put to best advantage. He graduated as the top Sapper from Sandhurst, and went on to take an in-service degree at Cambridge University where he achieved First Class honours in Engineering. He sailed through the Staff College Exam to win a place at Camberley, and moved steadily up the Army: upon his retirement he was awarded an MBE. The army was the perfect forum to meet other similarly determined, competitive and outdoor-focused individuals - and he spent much of the spare time in his bachelor years walking and climbing across the country with anyone who would keep up with him, which was usually just his dog, Gambol. One summer expedition he led was to Norway's Lofoten Islands inside the Arctic Circle. When asked by his family: Why? The answer came: Because it won't get dark, so you don't have to stop climbing.

Through the army, and very fortunately, Daddy met our mother Rosie. It happened in Northern Ireland at a cocktail party. Mummy very quickly made up her mind that they would make a good team: she recognised his moral fibre and strong faith in God. With Dad's bachelor years behind him, the canine companion was replaced by children, and Norway was replaced by the North Downs. However, his love of the outdoors was not diminished. "Welly boots and anoraks" was the battle cry when Daddy would round up the four children and take us out walking at every possible opportunity. It didn't matter whether it was bucketing down with rain or whether we were kicking and screaming - Daddy would administer the dose of fresh air and exercise. There was no such thing as an "off-games" note in our house.

Sometimes these expeditions were unintentionally exciting. I remember one such occasion on Meon Hill near where we lived in Stratford upon Avon. It was early Spring, and we were on the return leg of our walk, heading across a field of cows and calves. I was in a Karry-pack on dad's back: being too young to walk was not a sufficient excuse to avoid the hike entirely. We were close to the field gate when a cow started to run at Daddy. He must have walked between the cow and her calf. The other children made it through the gate, but I vividly remember the cow knocking Daddy to the ground, me still on his back, and Dad rolling in the mud. He picked himself up (and me with him) as if nothing had happened, and carried on through the gate.

His family was relatively forgiving of these foibles - but people beyond the family less so. When I was 11, I recall Daddy treating my French exchange to a Mike-style cycling holiday around the Isle of Wight. Poor Guillaume wasn't prepared for the 50 mile-a-day itinerary riding my sister's very heavy pink bike over the Surrey hills and down to the south coast. I can't blame Guillaume for not wishing to continue with the relationship as a result of this experience and neither do I hold him responsible for the deterioration in my written and spoken French from this point. It's fair to say that Dad had more success with the local ramblers – although I think this is a friendship which blossomed once Dad slowed down and his leaving the rest of the group behind became a less frequent occurrence.

But despite subjecting his children to such trauma and excitement, Daddy's loyalty to his family was unfaltering. He would do anything for us. When we were at primary school, he cleaned our shoes every day, such that Naomi and Tim's headmaster would remark on their shiny shoes in morning assembly. And his determined streak to complete a job was more evident than ever if it was for our benefit. He used to tell with pride the story of how he picked up a speeding ticket on the Woodstock Road in Oxford as he was rushing to deliver one of Naomi's essays before a deadline, but of course the deadline was met. And for a man who wasn't a big fan of spending time couped up in the car or the environmental consequences of burning petrol, he was an extraordinarily diligent supporter of me in my school rowing career. He followed me up and down the country to bellow support from the river bank and took huge delight whenever we returned from a regatta with a trophy.

His support only grew as the family got bigger, and the same loyalty he showed to his children he extended to our partners. Beth's husband Anthony even benefited from the legendary shoe cleaning service the evening before their wedding.

And he took absolute delight in his 8 grandchildren. Sometimes his sense of loyalty to them could take him above and beyond the call of duty. Last February half term he was with Beth and Anthony's children, Ella and Eddie. They were having a great time kicking around their cherished Watford football. But at one point the ball sailed past its intended destination and landed in a stream. The children were inconsolable, but not for long. Undeterred by the icy water, Grandad waded into the stream up to his thighs, and to the sound of cheers from the bank retrieved the prized ball.

While he had had the occasional 'silly' streak as a father - with wheelbarrow races round the garden and tickling us to within an inch of our lives while he read us Mr Tickle - it was his grandchildren that made this playfulness a dominant trait. I had never seen him on a bouncy castle until he had grandchildren. The garden - having been the preserve of Dad's carefully-tended roses, apple orchard and vegetable patch with rows of beans, parsnips and potatoes, suddenly sprouted swings and slides once the grandchildren arrived. And visits from Grandad would be accompanied by endless games. He could always be relied upon to blow a raspberry on a tummy, or feign indignation bashing through an empty boiled eggshell. All of this to howls of delight and inevitable hiccoughs from an adoring crowd shouting for more. He taught his grandchildren all manner of bad behaviour - and they taught him that it was ok to let someone else win a game for a change.

That was true to a point - of course, because he still loved to win. You could always tell when a game hadn't gone his way at the bridge club, or indeed when it had. He even turned his cycling commute to the golf club – where he worked for 17 years until he was 75 – into a competitive sport. He would triumphantly tally the number of cars sitting in traffic that he passed on his bike on his way to work, and proudly claimed that he would cover 2000 miles a year on his bike.

While it is a great sadness to us all that Daddy has gone while he still had so much to give, it is a huge comfort that he left while he was still enjoying life to the full. He was filling life with his family, the

garden and bridge, and he would not have relished the prospect of giving up any of these. He leaves us not only with happy memories but also the values of perseverance, a combination of stamina and determination and utter moral transparency. As his brother David recently said, you were only ever talking to the real Mike: what you saw was what you got – he never pretended to be anything other than – Mike.