

Remembering Dad

by Chris Aldous

This is a tribute to Dad as a father, as a friend and confidant, as a source of inspiration. He was a great dad, with a spirit of adventure, a good sense of humour, a kind and considerate nature and an enthusiasm for lots of things – the outdoors, fishing, gardening, travel, and antiques amongst others.

As for his **humour**, I remember him rushing in to our bedroom one morning at the beginning of April (that's a clue) – telling us that our bikes had been stolen – Rob and I (probably in our early teens) rushed outside only to find them where they should have been with Dad laughing at the window and calling us 'April fools'. There were many occasions when his sense of the comical, his dry wit, made us all laugh.

He introduced Simon, Rob and myself to **fishing** and we spent many happy times at the Lady Lake and Big Lake at Wroxton Abbey (just down the road from here), catching roach, rudd, tench, perch and pike. We had special permission to fish these lakes, because Dad was the GP for the American students there, and we made full use of the opportunity. I remember catching my first pike on a cold day in January and Dad struggling with me to get the hooks out of its bony jaws lined with razor sharp teeth. I think we made a pretty good job of it in the end.

He really enjoyed the outdoors and developed a love for it among us. I remember **family holidays, mainly in Scotland** and one in Ireland, where we walked, fished, ate what we caught, and enjoyed watching the wildlife, particularly the birds. He enjoyed the open spaces, the lack of crowds, the isolation – the bizarre spectacle of fabulous golden beaches on the Isle of Lewis that were too windswept to attract more than a few hardy swimmers. Dad was a great planner and worked out what we'd be doing each day, and only very occasionally would he let the Scottish weather get to him. Generally we just put on waterproof gear and braved the elements. I remember climbing mountains in the **Lake District** with him, both of us inspired by the beautiful landscape on sunny days; and one occasion when we

were sheltering under a wall in the driving rain and thick mist, drinking hot coffee and laughing together as he asked me why exactly we were doing this. I had to coax him along Striding Edge on Helvellyn once when he seemed to lose his head for heights. His love of the outdoors, particularly the coast and mountains, has stayed with us and I have found myself taking my sons to the very same holiday destinations in Scotland – the islands of Arran, Mull, Skye and Lewis – a testament to how much I enjoyed those family holidays, how much I wanted to recreate those experiences with my own children.

Dad was also a great **traveller** with a real wanderlust from an early age. He did national service in Malaya and hitched a ride to Japan in a military transport plane at a time (the early 1960s) when very few Westerners were visiting – I think he went there twice and even had film of some of the tourist destinations I've visited several times in more recent years. He went trekking in Nepal with his sister Susan, and she told me just the other day how energetic and vigorous he was on that trip, often leading the group. He enjoyed countless trips abroad with Jenny – particularly to New Zealand for the fabulous scenery and to South Africa, Kenya and other safari destinations for the amazing wildlife. I know that Jenny loved those trips, all of which were carefully recorded by Dad with the latest camcorder – that was another hobby that fascinated him. He much enjoyed editing and adding voice-overs to his films.

As a child, I mainly remember Dad in the **garden** – that was his great passion. He created a magnificent garden at Stonehouse and he did the same with Jenny at Fiveways, so much so that it was featured in gardening magazines. It was visited and praised in print by no less an expert than Bunny Guinness of Gardeners' Question Time fame.

Dad was an **avid reader**, and the range of fiction and non-fiction he read was impressive – from P. G. Wodehouse, Arthur Conan Doyle, and Edgar Allan Poe to more recent novels and the latest academic studies of the Second World War. He read all the time and that must have been one of the reasons he was such a great **storyteller** – he was particularly good at scary ones, ghost stories were his forte.

He would lift the tedium of long car journeys by telling us stories, Caroline remembers him making use of long walks in eerie locations to tell her a scary tale. She also reminisced recently about when she used to get scared as a little girl in her bedroom all alone that Dad was the one who took her fears seriously and sat with her (maybe he felt responsible for scaring her in the first place!)

Dad was **interesting, animated and engaging** – Rob remembers lively discussions around the kitchen table, and I recall family and friends getting caught up in all sorts of political debates. Dad was always good to be around – the right mix of thoughtful, encouraging and provocative. Above all, I will miss his company and conversation, his kindness, advice and wise counsel, sometimes given at difficult times. Rather than pushing particular decisions, he had a gentle way of prompting them. He was calm and steady, caring and supportive - a positive and enduring influence on our lives in so many ways. Dad was much loved and he will be sorely missed.