

Dad's Eulogy

SIMON

He will be missed and remembered on the water, in the hills and in our hearts

Our father was born in Witney hospital, near Oxford during a time of war. Despite living in the pre evacuation hospital location in Hampstead, our grandfather cycled the 24 miles to Oxford where he was able to stay in a college room at Balliol since he was a scholar there. It is worth bearing in mind that this was in the winter at Christmas, as dad was born on Christmas eve, the day before his mother's birthday.

Dad's earliest memories are of sleeping under a big iron table, a Morrison shelter, and preserving farm eggs collected when they visited his mother's rural home at Fursdon house. The table made a lasting imprint when he banged his head on it, and he also never developed a taste for bananas. Deeper still though was the connection to landscape which he inherited from his parents, both Owen and Jenefer. This left a deep impression which he has passed on to us. Perhaps his sense of resilience and adventure was gained from travelling off the beaten track with his family around Europe, Scandanavia, and the Ardnamurchan peninsula, making tents and sleeping bags in a time of rationing as part of a DIY family.

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Dad first travelled to Norway as a small child. Uncle Dick recently shared a photo of him standing on the shore of a lake with his teddy bear. This new land with its silver birch woodlands, deep blue fjords and high snow-capped mountains must have been such a stark contrast to post war London. The beauty and majesty of this landscape left an indelible mark on his soul. He craved the solitude and peace of wild mountainous places which were a playground and refuge throughout his life.

Dad was quite a sportsman representing his school, Mill Hill, in rugby, hockey, athletics, cross-country and to my surprise boxing as well. His immense energy and athleticism propelled him through life and enabled him to explore these wild places more than most. Long before Munro bagging became popular, Dad was carefully planning routes that enabled him to summit not only the Munros but all of the tops around them, this he and his friends agreed was not negotiable. In his lifetime he climbed them all at least twice. He returned to Norway a number of times to walk, climb and ski and felt fortunate to have climbed in the Atlas Mountains. The rest of the world he explored and summited from his bookshelf.

He was a keen fell runner and a proud member of the Dumbarton Amateur Athletics Club. He is credited with planning and running a relay race from Glasgow city centre to Fort William. I might add this was before the West Highland Way was a thing. Dad's route was 6 miles shorter and he always maintained the superior route. It took the team only 11 hours, 3 minutes and 44 seconds. Dad ran the mountain stage from the head of Loch Katrine to the Falls of Falloch where in the words of Ron Paton "he descended like a young stag".

The mountain vistas he loved live on in the hundreds of watercolours he painted. I learnt to paint sitting beside him in the heather. He told me that painting was a helpful occupation to slow him down on long summer days in the hills. It was a long time before he slowed down to a pace I could keep up with. I always welcomed time to pause and paint especially in the later years when we swapped mountain ridges for shell sand beaches and coastal cliff tops.

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Everyone who has met him will be aware that he was not a man to boast about his achievements. These were many and diverse though. His parents' academic prowess meant he set a high bar for himself. His intellectual aptitude with Mathematics was combined with hands-on skills. At school he was awarded a prize for high jump and for needlework. He was a Queens Scout like his father before him and he was able to follow his both his parents in their wake to Oxford university

After gaining his degree from Balliol college, Oxford, he looked for a job. I had a passion for painting, with a romantic attachment to natural or mountain scenery and was dabbling with photography” He considered various options but was intrigued with the challenge presented by lens design. Despite his comment that “A career in optics was far from my thoughts. This led him to take up an opportunity in Glasgow.

This involved working at the beginning of infra-red technology and computer aided design. Not just designing products, but the systems used to develop the technology. Barr and Stroud, his lifelong employer, supported him through a Masters at Imperial College London testing Infra-red imaging systems. This was the academic institution he returned to for annual meetings with colleagues, presenting papers and discussing optical topics.

The proximity of the factory to the canal tow path, where he could take lunchtime walks by the water, was probably not the only reason he remained with Barr & Stroud throughout his career. Dedication to providing stability for his growing family, and an early discovery of “the Blue train” to Helensburgh, Balloch and the hills were also a strong influence. Barr & Stroud worked with Glasgow university to develop computers, and our dad wrote software routines which could run calculations that previously involved a whole room of slide rulers. As the company business model changed, he gained the kudos of publication. He presented results at international conferences allowing travel abroad. He was therefore published, and you can still look up his papers in the Society of Photo-Optical Instrumentation Engineers (SPIE) digital library. He was even addressed as Dr on occasion, which is understandable, if not formally recognised, given the level of research he carried out. He is also credited on two patents.

I appreciate having had the opportunity of an encounter with his professional world, at his retiral celebration. The respect and affection his colleagues had for him was obvious both in their conversations and the custom hat they had designed to block annoying bright light and sounds in the new open office. My memories of the factory at Anniesland otherwise would have mostly consisted of memories of works Christmas parties as a child, or stories of parallel servers and c-shells.

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Dad met his wife and lifelong love Naomi, whilst living and working in Glasgow. They did not meet in the city but in the Cairngorms. Mum, a keen skier, was enjoying the newly opened Cairngorms ski area and staying in a nearby hotel. Dad and his friend were camping and on a visit to the hotel for dinner, met our mum, who was later shocked to find out that he was sleeping in a tent in the hills.

Back in Glasgow their relationship developed, as he called in to see her for supper after evenings spent volunteering with a local charity, which supported disabled young people. Their shared love of sport and the outdoors, as well as their christian faith drew them closer. Standing on the hills looking out towards Loch Lomond, above Drymen and not far from where we are today, he proposed to her and was quickly married in Derby where her parents lived at the time. Together they set about making a home and starting a family. For the next 25 years they devoted themselves to the task of raising the four of us.

Mum was taught to ski and became a proficient ski instructor. Dad in contrast was self-taught and learnt through experimentation. He wrote, *“I learnt to ski by perseverance and was introduced to the heady winter atmosphere of Strathspey, white snow hills against the dark green pine forests. Later I bought skis and camped out, aspiring to communion with nature and to become a hard man immune to the weather, fired by stories of the Creag Dhu.”* Dad’s approach to parenting was similar. His philosophy was almost always to get us going and then to watch with interest what we did intuitively and only then to nudge, direct or stretch the boundaries if required. Whilst he encouraged risk he was always watching. He took us skiing. Observing us take off down the hill on our first set of skis, he recalled his relief to note that we quickly learnt to head for a patch of heather to halt our descent and ensure we did not end up in the burn at the bottom of the slope.

He was a mentor and father to many. Over the past few weeks I have greatly enjoyed learning how he has made his mark on many lives. He shared his life, skills and experience with anyone who was willing to listen, to learn and to have a go. I know he would have been delighted to learn that Tim now owns, maintains and sails his own mirror dinghy with his children like my Dad did with him.

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He has consistently supported the Church with a deep faith that should not be overlooked. Like the beauty in the heather on the hillsides and awesome sight of snowcapped hills it was obvious to those who looked for it, but he would leave enquiring minds to find out about it, rather than present his beliefs unasked. Whilst he did lead teaching sessions his main contribution was hand on and practical. At a basic level he repaired the lead in windows and practiced everyday love God through loving his neighbours. He was also very supportive of those in positions of leadership of congregations he belonged to, especially while at St Silas church in Glasgow during its transformation in the 1980's

Through Scripture Union's 'broadreach' he introduced many children to the joys of messing around in boats. He wrote about his over adventurous introduction to boating in 1948. Whilst staying with his family at Solvang in Norway he set out on his own and was rescued from a drifting boat. Myself and Aline had a similar experience on Loch Ard when trying to row a wee "Argo" with no rowlocks. This did not put him, or our family, off learning to sail. We spent many hours exploring the loch over the following years. He taught sailing skills as well as optimising his own enterprise dinghy to race competitively and help him seek out the variations in the winds that blow down the hills. A physical challenge to complement his mathematical tracing of infra-red ripples at work.

When he moved to Kilcreggan in the 1990's his sporting ambitions increasingly involved sailing. He raced in the 'solo' travelling series, as well as on the Gareloch with friends from the Royal Northern. True to his generous nature he also volunteered with cadets at Cove and Kilcreggan sailing club.

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At Oaklea he had time and space to pursue his love of gardening on a grander scale. He worked hard to remove the moss from the front lawn which persisted in destroying his effort to create a firm, smooth and predictable playing surface for croquet. A game which he was cunning and crafty in playing.

His humble allotment was replaced by a sizable kitchen garden. When we returned home from the various parts of the world we had scattered to, we were often welcomed with home grown fruit and vegetables, that is if he had managed to successfully defend them from the deer. On one occasion I watched with amusement a frustrated Dad herding a flock of sheep out of his vegetable patch and down the drive. A grand new wooden gate was duly made, the name of the house adorned with acorns carefully carved into it.

Inspired by the peaches enjoyed at the Garelochs summer BBQ's he set about constructing a glass house from a salvaged conservatory, in which he planted and proudly tended a vine, peach and olive tree. In spring he eagerly anticipated the peach blossom and in autumn he looked forward to harvesting his plums. He taught me how to pollinate peach blossom with a paint brush and detect the first signs of a saw fly invasion on a gooseberry bush. We shared the success and failure of our gardening efforts. I still chuckle when I remember his frustration at finding his potential strawberry crop devastated by the squirrels who had carefully harvested and organised his still green berries into neat mounds.

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As well as on the water and in the mountains, he is remembered in our hearts. Although consistently described as kind, and a gentleman, he also took gleeful delight in seeing our reactions as he expanded the boundaries of what we felt was safe. For example, when the wind gusted and the boat we were in heeled over. He showed us that leaning out of the boat is the way to find an even keel, rather than hunkering down in the bilge.

He encouraged us to set consistently adventurous targets. Climbing mountains, and skiing on them when there was snow or finding a sheet of ice to practice using an ice axe on when there wasn't enough snow to ski. He returned to "The Lidwell rock in Ardnamurchan" and we would spend holidays living in tents learning to cook over an open fire. He even towed the mirror dinghy, Heffalump, to sail in Fascaidale bay. He gave us the freedom to pursue our interests and develop unique characters.

If we faced mathematical problems he would help but also use the opportunity of a simple exercise to open our minds to the intricacies of ray tracing. Walks in the hills were also lessons in history and geology. Map reading was the start of enquiries into the meanings of the names of things and the rich linguistic tapestry of the modern, and ancient, landscape.

He was constantly adventurous himself, not simply racing around the lochs near home, but also taking part in an expedition to sail to Bute and windsurfing from various beaches. On one occasion having windsurfed too far out to easily return to his launch point of Tayinloan he decided to carry on and catch the ferry back from Gigha.

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Stuart, a family friend on hearing of Dad's passing said, "He was one of the most remarkable people I have ever known, not least in how he combined intellectual brilliance and extraordinary achievements in life with an essential humility and gentleness towards others."

This gentleness and kindness of heart was very evident in the last years of his life. He was devoted to Naomi and to caring for her. The strength of his love and commitment to her was so clearly demonstrated in his resolve to keep their home and life together going.

For me Dad is always there in the night sky. He mapped out the constellations on my bedroom ceiling with glow in the dark stars. He built a telescope so we could observe distant stars and planets. When camping we lay together waiting and watching for shooting stars. I can hear him in the wind and in the gentle ripple of water running past the hull of a boat. He is there in the heather clad hills and glens and in the sky larks call. In his mountain cathedral, where we walked together, I am reminded of his strength of character and deep faith and encouraged to join in that.

At the start of this year I turned 50. I asked Dad what he would have said to his 50 year old self. He said, 'To do what you can while you can'. There are so many facets to who he was, far too many to have shared. He lived and loved well and I am inspired to do likewise.

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If you visit any of our houses there is a golden thread of "Lidwell" style to be discovered. Perhaps you can catch a glimpse of it when you look at the order of service you are holding. Like our father though, you will need to sense beyond immediate impressions to discover the underlying spirit which it makes tangible. Something which we invite all of you to do, whether you are gathered with us today in person, or online.