

Colin Buckland

"If there is one of you who has not sinned, let him be the first to throw a stone at her".

How to sum up a life like my Fathers'? I should probably get his less well-known accomplishments out of the way first...

For example, his attitude to health and safety was probably best described as robust – I remember once while painting the house in Cambridge he had used a large screwdriver to stir the tin – a screwdriver that Sarah decided was a lollipop... an incident that precipitated crashing the car as he rushed her to A&E. According to family lore, the only other time he had a car accident was when my mother was in labour with Sarah... which puts me in mind of a possibly apocryphal family legend about attempting to induce mum's first labour by riding around a roundabout the wrong way on the motorcycle he owned at the time. The only time I remember seeing my Dad panic was when he thought one of us was hurt. Dad, I'm sorry for the screwing the dart into my shoelace hole and the safety-pin through my finger...

His health and safety record was perhaps only surpassed by his somewhat notorious fashion sense – many of his former students will remember his salmon-pink polo neck jumper which he insisted on wearing to school, much to the horror of his teenage children. He made up for this by insisting that we actually did the dangerous experiments in his physics lessons – many will remember his famous "Hydrogen Bomb" which was sometimes more spectacular than planned.

I don't think Dad ever bought anything that he could attempt to make himself. He was a gifted woodworker, and made much of the furniture that we as a family still use. He constructed radios, Hi-Fi systems, kitchen cabinets, desks, bookshelves, cars and central heating systems (with a little help from his four and six year old children; Sarah and I were apparently just the right size to run  $\frac{1}{2}$ " copper pipe under floorboards). He taught me a lifelong love of tools and their use, along with a tolerance of spiders.

As evidenced by the hydrogen bomb and the plumbing, Dad's teaching style was rooted in practical demonstrations, but his lifelong love of adventure meant that his teaching career started in West Africa at CKC in Bo, Sierra Leone, where he met Ann. We have had many warm messages of love from friends and colleagues of Dad's from that time. When they returned to Cambridge, he took up a position at one of the UK's leading schools, the Perse. I'm not sure that this (at the time) very traditional school quite knew what they were going to get with Dad what with his large beard, unconventional dress sense and love of folk music, not to mention the motorcycle he commuted on, and he moved on to a job and pupils that he loved deeply at Parkside Community College soon afterwards.

We owe our great fortune of having spent many years in, and now being citizens of, Luxembourg, on my Father applying for a job at the EEL in 1979. At the time I was six, and the biggest impact on our lives were the abrupt cessation of our plumbing apprenticeships and the arrival of a new car. I always felt that in many ways the European School reflected Dad's philosophy. A place of great variety, with inevitable conflict, but enormous richness. A place where he tirelessly sought to acknowledge and bridge differences, learn from others, encourage dialogue, build consensus and collaboration for the good of the next generation. The word is overused, but we have been overwhelmed by the hundreds of ex-students and colleagues of my fathers' who have shared memories and sent condolences in recent days. Most often, people share that he was their most inspirational teacher, that his fairness was universally recognised, that his dedication to all his students, both in his

teaching and his shaping of the Schools' activities and administration, illuminated everything he did and all of his interactions. Above all, he is remembered with fondness and love.

Dad was a true Catholic, a man of profound and robust faith that was secure enough to tolerate his highly-intelligent, scientific mindset and the human fallibility of himself and others without judgement or condemnation. I remember as I grew up that every so often a new level of his groaning bookshelf would become accessible to me and I might find a new seam of poetry, philosophy, art, science and spirituality, not to mention occasional spy novels of questionable quality and, sometimes increasing raciness, particularly as I scaled the higher shelves. Dad's bookshelves were like his mind: tolerant, well-informed, strong and broad.

Dad was a joyful man with a highly-developed sense of humour (though family members subjected to his great love of puns at the breakfast table may beg to differ) most strongly characterised by intelligence and warmth, although he was not without a mischievous streak – I've still not forgiven him for shaving his beard while I was away on a school skiing holiday then just walking straight past me when he arrived in our car to pick me up. His sense of humour was also much in evidence socially, as he was a great storyteller. In his later years he told me that he felt great social awkwardness. Even now, I cannot quite credit this, having grown up with a constant stream of visitors, house guests, dinner parties and the overwhelming evidence of the affection and high regard that his many friends held for him.

His love and skill for music defies description. The people and music, some of which we are privileged to have with us today, that he leaves behind are testament to that. How to eulogise him in this regard? Perhaps in the playing of his guitar in church, perhaps in the sitting of his Grade 8 piano exam once he retired, perhaps with the memory of one of the many choirs he participated in... perhaps best in that he was said while conducting to be able to bring in the sopranos with his left eyebrow while keeping the lid on the basses by glowering at them with his right – all the while keeping perfect time with his hands. He sang to both his children every night and his was the only voice that managed to soothe Luc, his youngest grandson, when he (and we) were desperate with his reflux. Dad sang to him until 1 AM. Sarah and I both still sing the songs he sang to our kids.

A great comfort over the last few days have been the words that have been used to describe him by the many, many people who have written to us to share their stories of Dad. Polymath. Inspirational. Kind. Intelligent. Fair. Non-judgemental. His musicality. His voice. His warmth. His humour. His faith. His generosity. His love. His humility. His legendary eyebrows. These qualities endured through the cruelty of the dementia that eventually overtook him (although on the plus side, helped his grandchildren to beat him at board games). These will endure in our memories of him.

His grandchildren will remember especially his beard – he was “Tickle Grandad” to them – and his highly popular love of ice-cream – the son of one of his close friends was particularly joyful when he asked Dad for ice cream for breakfast one morning and got it; even in dementia he enjoyed the ice cream taste test that his granddaughters organised for him – he couldn't remember the names of the flavours so called everything vanilla, on the presumption that one of them eventually would be.

Both my wife and Sarah's husband remember especially his warmth and welcome, as well as sharing (different!) memories of his embracing of Luxembourg's naked sauna culture. My personal memories of my Father are his unstinting support for almost all of what I did, even when it was anathema to him and his beliefs. Dad gave me an enduring passion (if not his skill for) photography

and Sarah and I will always cherish the music he brought into our lives. He set me on the path of my career in Medical Engineering. He set an example for us in the best possible way.

Finally, it will not surprise anyone to hear that Dad was also a romantic and had a deep love of the sea and sailing, eventually holding a Yachtmasters' ticket in sail. He could quote poetry by heart (and often did, sometimes to our despair) at the drop of a hat. I will finish with one of his, and my, favourite poems that evokes much of my personal memory of my father. Thank you, Dad, for all the joy, wisdom and love that you brought to all of us.

### Sea Fever

John Masefield

I must down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and the sky,  
And all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by;  
And the wheel's kick and the wind's song and the white sail's shaking,  
And a grey mist on the sea's face, and a grey dawn breaking.

I must down to the seas again, for the call of the running tide  
Is a wild call and a clear call that may not be denied;  
And all I ask is a windy day with the white clouds flying,  
And the flung spray and the blown spume, and the sea-gulls crying.

I must down to the seas again, to the vagrant gypsy life,  
To the gull's way and the whale's way where the wind's like a whetted knife;  
And all I ask is a merry yarn from a laughing fellow-rover,  
And quiet sleep and a sweet dream when the long trick's over.