

Denis Kelly / Dad Eulogy – 17th November 2020

“A lovely man and somebody I really enjoyed working with”, “A really nice guy and I loved working with him”, “One of the truly good guys”, “Such a good and positive guy -- always quick to pass the credit on to someone else”. These are all brief extracts from some of the lovely comments which Clare and I were sent by various people after losing Dad a couple of weeks back – it was amazing to see how the “lovely, kind man” theme resonated amongst all who knew Dad, or Denis. In theory I could end this eulogy right there as I think that sentiment wraps things up perfectly – Denis Kelly was a lovely kind man indeed.

Born on 29th January 1946, Dad was perhaps the ultimate Baby Boomer, just one week later would have been exactly 9 months after VE Day. Growing up in Middlesbrough, Dad always regarded himself as a Yorkshire product despite my attempts in recent years to lure him into following Watford FC around the land. Growing up with mum Betty, father Harry and sister Eileen – he was a great lover of continental camping holidays, he felt he was exposed to grass roots experience of so many cultures, cities and countrysides– something which would heavily feature in Clare and my childhoods in later years and indeed surely this provided the foundations for the passion for travel that Dad would keep well into his retirement.

Following in his father’s footsteps, Dad studied Physics at university, moving down South to London to do so. Despite his parents’ desires for him to return to the North East post graduation in 1967, he chose to stay in the capital, working for Kodak Limited in Harrow, earning the princely sum of £1,100 per annum in his first job. Little would he know he would have the same name at the top of his pay cheque nearly 40 years later.

Also joining the Kodak Graduate Induction course at the same time was a certain Jill Wood, a chemist with a degree from Westfield College. Very quickly they became an item and it was also at this time that Dad was introduced to Jill’s friends from Westfield, a loving friendship group which still meets annually over 50 years later.

Denis and Jill were married in July 1971, in the tiny Catholic church at Burnham-on-Crouch, Essex. Dad always speculated that perhaps the North-South divide was finally healed here.

About the same time Denis had been plucked from left field to leave Kodak’s Harrow research lab to move to the Colour Processing Division in Hemel Hempstead. Their first house was in Grove Hill and cost a whopping £7,000. In 1974 Clare arrived on the scene, and I’ll always be grateful to Mum and Dad for the fact that in March 1977 I too was born. My arrival was coincident with a move to a house in Peascroft Road in Hemel, which has remained the Kelly Castle even to this day.

Concurrently with building his professional career, now leading Kodak’s southern England technical sales team, Dad had a passion for football refereeing. His performances had been finding increasing favour with the “system” such that his next step would have been to be a Football League linesman and maybe eventually a referee there. He recalled supervising players like Jimmy Greaves, Geoff Hurst, Martin Chivers – and has regaled his grandsons many times of the day he refereed Watford at Vicarage Road. In keeping with Dad’s personality – as the demands of refereeing became more demanding, he chose to put his family first and retired his whistle, but to think of what might have been.

That sales manager job kept Dad busy for over 10 years – then the end of the 1980s saw the development of the One Hour Photo processing network – notably with one of Kodak’s most demanding customers in Boots the Chemist. He described this period of his career as “having a red

hot phone day in / day out" as Boots' hastily assembled installation programme struggled with reality. We know how satisfying and enjoyable he found it though.

In 1993, as Clare and I were either side of heading to University Dad moved into Kodak's digital Motion Picture organisation. Together with the travelling he still enjoyed, Dad sat on so many panels at exhibitions, conferences and the like, his public speaking was a thing of wonder. I personally remember him giving a reasonably serious talk in October in a witch's outfit – he knew perfectly how to grab an audience's attention.

After Clare and I graduated, started our careers and got married – Dad retired in 2006. He had many many plans, not least from a travelling perspective, of how he was going to fill the next few decades with our Mum. Sadly this was not to be. Hardly within a year of Dad's retirement Mum was diagnosed with an illness which would take her life in 2008, something Dad obviously found amazingly hard.

Clare and I were so impressed at the way he rebuilt his life though. Whilst always clearly missing Mum, he threw his newly retired, newly widowed self into a wide variety of activities. From Probus to U3A Money Matters and Creative Writing groups to leading Walking Excursions around London to giving regular presentations on topics ranging from Lighthouses to John Franklin's boot eating expeditions – Dad rebuilt himself a thriving social life. And of course as you have already heard, this Parish and the people within it meant so much to him.

He also found a kindered spirit in Annie – herself bereaved way too early, and together they found a wonderful companionship for the last decade or so. Annie shared in Dad's passion for travel and they enjoyed trips all over the World – Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, the US, endless Cruises and European breaks to name just a few. It was so comforting to Clare and I to know that Dad was enjoying his retirement.

In fact many of those who have been in touch have made mention of Dad's love of intrepid travel; a passion which he had until the day he died and which he passed on to both Clare and I. From the highs of watching shooting stars over the Canadian Rockies to the slightly less enjoyable, but no less memorable, experience of a day trip to the Rhône glacier with a blaring car alarm, Dad took as much pleasure from the planning of our family holidays as he did from taking them with us and inspiring us, in our turn, to show his grandsons the wonders that this world has to offer for those with the appetite to explore them as he did.

Back to his retirement - it was in this period of his life that an event from 1982 came back to haunt him. Nearly 30 years on from when he first chose to take me to Vicarage Road rather than White Hart Lane or Highbury (or even Kenilworth Road) – I managed to return the "favour" by awakening a passion in him, or maybe at least an interest, for Watford FC. I mention this for two reasons – again it highlights his adventurous side - unlike some of the players, he was never put off by travelling for a January Tuesday night away day in the likes of Burnley or Stoke. But also it's the perfect segway into his grandparenting life.

Dad would often be found sitting with one of James, George, Charlie or Tom at a Watford game – whether it be at Vicarage Road, an away game or even Wembley, their support of the Hornets is a burden they will now have to wear for the rest of their lives, but will always evoke memories of their wonderful Granddad. They all love him dearly – he was so kind and generous to the boys and they will miss him terribly. Seeing him with the boys often made me think back to my own childhood memories of Dad caring for me – I'll never forget the endless mornings he hauled himself out of bed at stupid o'clock to sit by a stuffy chlorinated swimming pool to watch me plough up and down for

hours. Again a reflection of just how kind he was – there was never a grumble or complaint about tiredness.

It was always so lovely to see him fuss over family birthday and Christmas presents too – with Dad you never get the token present that many males over a certain age (ie mine) would rely on – he always strived to find presents with a little personal touch. He loved to find just the right gift, again an indication of just how lovely a man Dad was.

What better way could there be in closing than reading you a couple of paragraphs of Dad's own words. We found a document entitled "Denis Kelly's Potted Life History" at home – which obviously made my task preparing this eulogy so much easier – again testament to him, always looking to help others. These were the last two paragraphs he wrote:

"So here we are. Denis in his mid-seventies, with four lovely grandsons growing and developing more personality by the day. Jill missed so much by dying at age 62, meaning that the boys never got to relate to her as a Grandma. And of course Clare and Mark, along with their other halves, who offer continued love and support of which any family would have been so proud. Denis also crafted a replacement social and travel life once he met his friend Annie; they travelled widely and Annie shares much of the same experience of losing a loved companion – nay an absolute best friend, as Denis did with Jill.

Time to sign off. Writing this makes me realise how varied a life I have lived, despite being a 39 year employee of just one company, and being in a 37 year long marriage leading to parent and grandparenthood. Yes, there are some very sad aspects, but from childhood to life's conclusion I can't really complain."

Denis Kelly was a lovely kind man indeed.

Thanks for everything Dad, we love you.