

ROBIN KAY: TRIBUTE

I would like to start by thanking Rev Kim for welcoming us into her church today as we are neither regulars here nor even from this parish. She has shown true Christian grace in allowing us to say goodbye to my father in this lovely setting and I am very grateful. And I would also like to echo her in thanking you all for coming today. Your attendance is so very much appreciated. Given the number here today, and that I know many of your journeys have been long, not to mention the current absurd price of oil, it does show what my father meant to you all that you are here and that is testament to the man he was.

Like the hundreds of cards my mum, Natalie and I have received, which overflow every surface, the donations to Cancer Research and the flowers that have come to us and to OKAY Engineering – all of which have left us speechless in their continued message of kindness – they are a sign he was special.

It's hard to know where to start. I was writing this yesterday and thinking how long can I reasonably go on for, and whether I should serve some food and drink half way, because he wasn't just a high achiever but an all-rounder with so many facets to his life, and with different people in each of these who were all very dear to him.

First must come my mother and their very happy 55-year marriage. From meeting in New Walk in Leicester to a lifetime shared together with children and now grandchildren, it has been a wonderful life. She loved him for his manners, his gentleness, his good looks, his clever mind and his sense of fun. Although, that sense of fun meant it nearly wasn't 55 years of happiness after the time, one sunny afternoon in the 70s, when mum was hanging out nappies to dry and it was a time of snow on the ground... As she laboured, he thought what would make her laugh would be to hurl a snowball in her general direction. So he scooped up the snow, compacted it hard and fired it her way. It was a very long garden and he always swore afterwards that it was an accident. But in that moment he watched with growing horror as the snowball lasered itself onto the back and side of her neck and then exploded. It wasn't just the marriage that was lucky to survive but probably him as well. She said he actually ran for it! But, aside from this hiccough – Oh! And the time he hid in the pantry to jump out at my mum for a laugh when she was eight and a half months pregnant with me – my parents' marriage was a very happy one. He was generous, kind, supportive, loving and faithful. A good husband and a good father and I hope all the happy years with him can sustain her now.

For Natalie and me, as a father, he was so willing to help us that we almost had to police ourselves not ask him for too much as he would always say yes. He picked Natalie up from nightclubs in Nottingham at 2am. Who would do that?? He collected me and my friends endless pubs in random locations so we could all have a drink and a laugh. And they all adored him. Sometimes, his sole payment for these lifts would be for his shy inner guitarist to use the fact we were three sheets to the wind to pluck up the courage to play to us. My friend Sally and I had swayed our way into the kitchen one time after he drove us home and were chatting away when dad appeared at the door with his guitar. He gently asked if we minded if he played a bit. We were two drunken students up who happily let him take a seat in the rocking chair to play a tune. He then played the most beautiful version of the Dire Straights song *Romeo and Juliet* she or I had ever heard. We went from chatting and giggling to listening intently to him play that song so perfectly. I still remember the moment of hush as the final note faded before Sally whooped and cheered like a true fan. He was really good. And he was all self-taught. Just as he was at French and German which he conquered to become fluent in both. It's funny, life. I look at my own life and see I too speak those some languages, love history like he did, and Country Music, even try and play a ukulele. I see that I have become like him. I told him only last month that my long-term Sales colleague and friend, Chris Battle, had told me teasingly at the office that day that I was turning into him. When dad heard that he smiled a beam so big, it completely melted my heart.

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All my OKAY colleagues who are here today, both former faces and the current team, know him directly or by reputation. He was a good boss; always fair and friendly. And he was a complete workaholic. He had such energy to drive the Company forward. It isn't easy running OKAY some days, so it almost beggars belief that he ran it for 50 years through recessions and bad contracts and even a brush with the Mafia. All that stress and complexity and the never-ending in-tray. And he didn't even retire because of cancer. He went through intrusive surgery twice, hospital stays, chemotherapy and STILL came back to the office, in his suit, in his Jaguar, aged 78. It was only Covid that put him in the high-risk category and he had finally to retire. Yet he remained was popular in the trade. My notice of his passing on LinkedIn has so far attracted 130 messages about him, which is all the more remarkable, given most of his contemporaries retired years and years ago. It shows the businessman he was and the legacy he has left.

And speaking of work, I would like to add here the surreal but true fact that, somewhere in Holland, there is a family of caterpillars that is absolutely thriving because of my father. Again my dear colleague Chris and I were travelling with dad on a business trip to Germany stopping in Holland on the way through. In the hotel that night, we were each served a side salad along with our meal. Suddenly, in my father's bowl, climbing slowly over the frizzy leaves, with cute antennae twirling, appeared a fuzzy little caterpillar. Chris laughed. I said they'd clearly not washed the salad and he should send it back. But his response was, 'No, because then they'll kill it!' So he picked up his bowl of salad, carried it past bemused diners and waiting staff in the restaurant, past staring guests in the lobby and out the main door where he gently placed the caterpillar in the greenery at the front. He then brought his salad bowl back into the restaurant and, with no remaining evidence of why it should be sent back, proceeded to eat it contently. That was the man he was. Kind, gentle and uncomplaining.

He was also a true animal lover, never once questioning the rather high number of rescue dogs or cats I might ever have. Instead, he loved them all as super-hairy grandchildren. So much so, even when badly stricken with cancer, he found the energy to drive over to our house in January to say goodbye to our lovely dog Vera sitting with me and her until the unwanted hour came around. I am sure the two of them are together now. And, as a sign of how much he loved his own dogs, my sister tells the funny story of when she and Philip first moved in together and had wanted to take her dog, Henry, to live with them. Unfortunately, this proved impossible as dad had become so attached to Henry in the years he lived with us at home that something of a Kramer vs Kramer situation developed and Natalie and Philip had to leave Henry with mum and dad. Some weeks later, Philip rang my father rather formally asking if he could come and see him. When Philip arrived and dad heard Philip ask only for my sister's hand in marriage, dad was so relieved, as he'd feared Philip was coming over to ask for the dog back, that he quickly shook Philip's hand warmly and waved Natalie very happily into the deal.

From that marriage came two wonderful grandsons. If dad, the mad football fan, had been slightly disappointed to get two non-football-playing daughters as children, his prayers were answered in those two Next Gen boys. As the photos in the musical tribute at the Crematorium will show, they heard and answered his clarion call to support his beloved game and his beloved club, Leicester City. Through years when the ball was half as big as them and then through GCSEs and university degrees, his questionable influence saw them travel to virtually every match home and away. Glory in the 2015-16 season was an incredible experience for all people from Leicester and led the trio onto bigger adventures across Europe. They went to Seville, Porto, Lille, Madrid, which, Natalie, I would say sound pretty glamorous. They certainly weren't on offer to you and me in the 70s and 80s or we might have reconsidered the values of supporting the Foxes. Back in England over these happy years, the trio also went to all places many of us might see as godforsaken but, in the eyes of the Lord, and in football, nowhere is godforsaken. Because in every match, every ball, every minute, every point matters. And George and Edward have become the same football mad fans that my father was, laughing at his favourite goading chants to the opposition, following his routines, making friends at

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the ground. It is hard to say goodbye to him now but he is with you in every match and every victory from here. In fact, he wouldn't want anyone here to be sad today or in tears. That behaviour is only permissible if Leicester lose!

In truth, he was quite unbelievable in terms of temperament and did meet those two imposters, Triumph and Disaster, just the same. Through good times and bad, he kept his cool, his nerve and his positive outlook. By 80, you think you know your own father but this unwanted cancer diagnosis still had the ability to reveal a further dimension of him to me and all of us: his awe-inspiring bravery. The courage and good-humour he showed in the face certain death will stay with me, with all of us, forever. He never once felt sorry for himself, or was bitter, or lashed out, or said, why me? He received that terrible news without flinching and he took every day as it came; every day he was up, shaved and dressed to the day he died. His only concern was for mum and how we would all cope. He put his affairs in order and handed over a simple file with every detail in it to make things easy for us now. He smiled every time we came in a room and he forced the energy somehow from such an energy-stricken body to come to the door to wave us off when we left. He had such dignity and such courage. And, if he spoke about his plight at all, he simply had the grace to say that, in a world where some people die young and unjust wars rage, he had been very lucky to have 80 years and a family who loved him, and he had no complaints. He was quite a man.

In closing, I will say how many friends he had across his life and you are here in affecting number today: his schoolfriends Martin, Ian, Roger, Dave and Tony; his football friends from so many eras including the madcap Valentine's Vandals and the recent five-a-side Goals teams; his and our dear friends and colleagues from OKAY and from our customers and partners who've made the trip today, including his accountant, Chris, and even Phillippa our lawyer. Who says lawyers don't have a heart; his longstanding group of friends in Oadby: the Marlows, the Braints, the Grahams, the Hancocks, the Mobsbys, the Browns, the Wolfes, the the there are too many to mention but they were all much loved; his neighbours Suresh and Suchandra, Zainab and Naeem, Bettina, Rosemary, Rebecca, Masie – he took the time to get to know them all and they lined the streets for him just now as we pulled away to leave his home for the last time; his very dear friends Jane and Vic with whom my parents went on many happy holidays; and Vic again with Bob and John who met dad regularly at Boboli's for lunch even deep into his cancer fight. Vic's friendship shown in driving over in his lovely Aston Martin to pick my dad up in style and take him when his strength was fading touched dad and all of us very deeply. Mum's many friends who have made the effort to be here, plus my own and Natalie's. The Douceys who have come from Sussex today for a man they knew and loved from shared holidays long ago on that magical island of Anglesey. To my darling Julia who cared for him so lovingly over all his time of illness, Philip, Danielle, Emily, Philip and his dear friend Helen coming from Munich especially. His sister, Frances, and his cousin Rachel. And, finally, his cousin Joan, who is of similar years and yet made the long round trip all the way from Stockton-on-Tees recently just to see him again when he was so very ill; it touched his heart and all of ours. Thank you. The list is long and is longer than I can stand here for without the food and drink break I referenced earlier. To those I have mentioned and those I have not, I thank you very sincerely for attending. Something about my father was worth us all coming today. To my amazing family in Germany who gave us such a warm welcome when he chose to visit them for his final quick holiday after that terrible diagnosis, I thank you sincerely for the happiness you gave him. They, like his lovely cousins Janet and Barbara, can't be here today but are marking this service in their own personal way. They, you, all made his life so happy and I thank you for that. He was a kind man who wore a gentle smile wherever he went and he had time for everyone. He was intelligent, hardworking, funny and friendly and, as was written in each card we have received, he was a gentleman. He was a loving husband, father, grandfather, father-in-law, family man, friend, colleague and boss. He was someone very special, and my family and I, and the caterpillars of Holland, will love him forever.

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