

## SPEECH FOR DAD'S 90<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY- APRIL 13<sup>TH</sup> 2015

We might measure a life by the richness of an individual's experience and its impact on others. And, Dad, by any measure, your life has been rich in experience and impact.

Across nine decades of big social change, you've set forth on many adventures on your 10-speed, your Ariel 350, in your Cortinas, and of course on Shank's Pony – and engaged in countless absorbing episodes. It's a life that's been played out on the private stages of 63 Madeley and 349 Priory Road, and on public stages such as Erdington Rugby Club, Garretts Green Technical College, and Shirley Guitar Club.

Amongst all these settings, perhaps the most defining is the garden shed at 349, your 'man cave' – a true projection of your self-described identity as a 'jack of all trades', an artisan engine room where you've cut, crafted, turned, carved, and moulded a host of useful and unique creations.

Of all your many watercolours and oil paintings, my favourite is the one of a workshop – colourful, spacious and busy...and, I think, maybe your Dream Den. Curiously, it's your only interior landscape.

If we ask what comes with your version of the Green Genes, art, music and stage performance are definitely part of the heritage package – endeavours that you always encouraged us in from an early age, and which you've remained dedicated to, to a very late age.

Throughout, you've been a tireless advocate for learning and self-improvement; a prime example of this from younger years is your reading us the entire library of Ladybird tales from English history. Your respect for Shakespeare at Stratford was a constant – and I believe your two favourite lines were "her skin like monumental alabaster" and "neither a lender nor borrower be" – this latter capturing a characteristic cautious grounded sensible approach applied not only to money but throughout your general life outlook.

You were the first person to make an entry in the autograph book I got for Christmas 1967, and above your signature was the line “Never trouble trouble till trouble troubles you, or you will double trouble and trouble others too”. It highlights the honesty of your commitment to people and living. With you – what you see is what you get. You’ve never harboured pretensions or delusions; and, whilst there was a passing admiration for the skill of what you called ‘kidology’, you’ve never had time for the high-noters, power-brokers or self-seekers.

As a family man, a teacher, and a friend, your influence on others seems to have been extensive. We’ve watched your composure, your fairness and kindness, your willingness to help others – and we’ve learned how to improve ourselves.

Above all, it’s probably your relish and readiness for life that’s been so infectious. You’re a doer, and one thing you still love doing is singing and making music. 65 years on from the trad jazz banjo cameo with The Original Levee Ramblers, you’re still strumming and serenading.

One song stands out for me beyond all others. 20 years ago you handed me a cassette tape collection of songs you’d recorded. With a typical dry nod to mortality, you’d named your album ‘About me when I’m gone’. And in amongst a string of sincere and strong deliveries was the old 60s folk classic ‘Streets of London’. It tore me up at the time: your rendition of those lyrics (“Let me take you by the hand and lead you through the streets of London, I’ll show you something to make you change your mind”) seemed to sum up your empathy and compassion for fellow humans as we deal with the difficulty, the pain and the joy. You knew what it was like to walk in all of those shoes.

We don’t get to choose what is – we do get to choose what we do about it. We are the sum of our choices, and it’s clear, Dad, that to have got to where you are and to be who you are today, you’ve made a lot of good choices,

Congratulations on making this landmark. May there be as many more to come as you choose.