

Memories of a Friend

Introduction

At 9am on the 4th of August 2006 my mother rang me on my mobile at work: '*its Dick he's away*' I said '*what do you mean he's away, where has he gone?*' Then the terrible truth began to dawn.

How do you cope with the sudden death of a friend who you have known for 55 years – how can you cope as a much loved wife, mother or child? Life remains as always totally unpredictable.

Richard Long, known to most as Dick – an appropriate name for such a huge personality – passed away very suddenly on the 3rd August 2006. He was found unconscious in bed that afternoon by his 17-year-old son, who called an ambulance which arrived within a few minutes. At the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary a CAT scan of his head showed a very large inoperable frontal lobe (brain) tumour. He passed away at 10.30pm the same evening in the presence of four of his five children, while his wife was desperately driving back by taxi from visiting her mother in Cornwall. He had seen his GP only three days before complaining of headaches but no other symptoms. He was probably not a man who would have coped easily with an untreatable condition with such a poor prognosis. So falling asleep in his own bed with no prior knowledge of his terrible pathology was for him a 'good' way to go.

I am writing this in an operating theatre just minutes after witnessing the birth of a little boy called Jack (I am the anaesthetist) – new life is always an amazing experience – as death occurs all over the world from many causes like armed conflicts, accidents, famine or disease, babies are also being born – life must go on, we must go on – we his family and friends, who in our own special and very individual way, loved this man – we must all keep going and strive to make an impact and a difference in this world of increasing devastation and need. Our son, husband, father or friend Dick would not want anything less.

Cars

We first met in 1951 as 'terrible' three-year-olds and no doubt combined together to be more than double trouble for Jean and Lilian our respective mothers. My earliest recollection, aged about five, was when we decided to wash Aunt Lilian's brand new week-old cream coloured Rover with smart red leather upholstery. This of course, was intended to be our good deed for the day – unfortunately we were using a hose and had failed to notice that all the windows were open! The mums only came to investigate when the electrics shorted and the horn starting sounding continuously. They apparently then drove the vehicle ten miles to the nearest garage to find a mechanic to stop the noise.

Dick developed an on-going love of cars especially if they were fast: the mini Cooper S with twin 1½ SU carburettors which he raced round the Ingliston track, the Lotus Elan he built himself from a kit, the jag he drove away in at the start of his first honeymoon (I was in fact his best man twice, he was only mine once) and the first Audi Quattro in Scotland. This latter vehicle once refused to start in a parking area beside the river Spey – an increasingly frustrated AA man was observed hitting various parts of the engine with a hammer in total exasperation! The red hot Volvo sports saloon, a BMW M3 or two, various Land Rovers, an Argocat full of red deer carcasses and quad bikes round the garden at his home Dunesk. One also remembers with amusement two stories I'm sure he would rather forget: his Land Rover stuck in the sand at Broughty Ferry beach with the tide coming in and then the episode with his Range Rover during a pheasant shoot becoming immobilised by a pile of rotting carrots after he had just announced that it could go anywhere. A tractor plus tow rope was required on both occasions.

Fishing

Aged about nine we took up fishing in his large family goldfish pond using sophisticated equipment consisting of sticks, bread and bent pins – I remember sore bottoms were a consequence of our success! Dick has in his lifetime caught more salmon per hour than anyone else I know. After 15 minutes fishing on Tulchan A, a well known beat on the River Spey, he caught his one and only salmon. Resting on his laurels of four fish per hour he has never fished for salmon again although he enjoyed joining the fishing group on many occasions for the gin and tonic at lunchtime, playing backgammon for high stakes and driving golf balls across the river. On one famous (or infamous?) occasion he floated down the river in a rowing boat completely out of control at about midnight through the best seatrout stretch (the Dhu pool) where the anglers were attempting to disturb the water as little as possible in pursuit of such an elusive quarry. He was not alone in the boat as the solitude was broken by uncontrolled giggles, some of which were possibly female? The boat was found the next morning beached some distance downstream much to the ghillie's annoyance. Our Dick turned up towards lunchtime not only muttering about the difficulty of rowing upstream but also that he had just eaten the best fried eggs he had ever tasted!

Shooting

Next it was guns, firstly BSA 177 air rifles with which we avidly stalked the 'spuggie' (sparrow) population in 'fruitful lane' just up the road from Tignduin, his parents home in Monifieth. Most of the time the sparrows proved to be an elusive quarry. Then we moved on to 0.22 rifles and shooting hares. One day just below the family cottage at Peathaugh in Glen Isla we spied a hare in the middle of a 400 yard wide field. Dick suggested that I should go round the other side so we could attack it from opposite directions. The situation became somewhat disconcerting when we both heard bullets passing overhead – the hare of course was completely unperturbed and ignored us!

In December 1967 near my parents' estate a few miles south of Forfar we were arrested by a local policeman. My father had complained some days previously about possible poaching of his pheasants. That evening around dusk, Dick had shot what we assumed was a pigeon sitting in a tree. This turned out to be a pheasant which luckily for us ran away. A few minutes later I was manoeuvring our vehicle on the verge of a public road to facilitate Dick's aim from the window at a hare in a nearby stubble field, when a policeman appeared who was not very impressed with what we were doing. He asked to see the rifle and then proceeded to pull the trigger – the gun fired. Luckily it was pointing in the air! We then had to follow him to Forfar police station where it transpired that the obligatory firearm certificates were in our fathers' names and legally speaking we each needed our own certificate to be in possession of a rifle. The police contacted our fathers who were then presented with a dilemma: did they agree they had illegally lent us their weapons or say that we had stolen them? Luckily for us, in spite of the fact that an enforced 'rest' inside might be a possibility for two very hard working businessmen they chose the former. The case was subsequently dropped as, technically, all of the falfete Dshosep5.1(w a0ge h.)6Off.1(T-24. in spi0.1(T(.).60.1(0.1(14.9(ifle)

black *Vaurnet* ski suit (which I still use today) Dick was gob smacked as he was not an impulse buyer and would carefully research the pros and cons of any significant purchase before making his choice.

Dick I believe was a very successful businessman but I really knew nothing about this aspect of his life – there are many others who can tell you much more. He certainly seemed to manage his assets well enough to lead the life style to which he became accustomed. For a number of years trips to London always meant staying at the 'pub in the Strand' aka '*The Savoy Hotel*.' He knew most of the staff by name including the waiter whose expertise at carving the smoked salmon was legendary, he even gave Dick a video of a demonstration of his skills.

Occasionally though one used to find a tough business attitude taken into more social occasions. He could give restaurant staff a very hard time if he felt they were not up to the high standard that he always expected. I once rented him our villa in Vale do Lobo for what I thought was an extremely reasonable contribution to running costs – his comment was '*I just want to stay there for a week not buy the bloody place!*'



He had excellent artistic tastes particularly in early Scottish paintings and antiques, an ability no doubt inherited from both his parents. He was involved in many charitable ventures particularly as a trustee of the *TA Long fund*. He used to sponsor me generously for running events like the London Marathon and also he, myself and my mother have paid for the education of Ruth Esther a young girl who lives in Abidjan in the Ivory Coast for the past

fifteen years. She had a cleft lip repaired on the Mercy Ship *Anastasis* in December 1991 then survived heart surgery in 1993 in a local African hospital.

Dick enjoyed a wide range of other sporting activities including skiing (very accomplished but I think even he would admit not in the same league as his wife Heather) and paragliding. He was for many years secretary of the British Hang Gliding and Paragliding Association – I used to have a Beneficial bank credit card with a picture of the man himself suspended from his paraglider. Once he nearly came to grief when a new model he was testing stalled over the French coast but luckily not only did he plunge into the sea but he was wearing a suit of the latest *Kevlar* protective body armour.



Camping in the Lake District



Dancing at my daughter's 21st



An intimate meal in Saas Fee

The stories about this amazing man, both anecdotal and true are legion – one cannot replace one's oldest friend, one mourns the loss of shared memories of many past adventures. There are many stories which by their very nature must remain untold. But I will remember my dear friend, I will remember, I will never forget.

Epilogue

The day before the 'Glorious Twelfth' in 2006 we buried this remarkable man on the moor at Peathaugh in a site he and his wife Heather had already selected four years before. As the family drove up the glen in a convoy behind the Land Rover carrying his coffin on its last journey, the sun shone, the wind blew gently and there were sounds of wildlife all around: pheasants, geese and even a solitary grouse welcoming him back home.

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The service was taken by the Rev. Tony from Northampton, an old friend of the family whom Dick had only recently told – ‘*when I go I want you to bury me.*’ The mourning family gathered on the hillside round a pre-cut hole in the ground with the coffin balanced above on two wooden planks. After beautiful readings by two of his five children, Elizabeth and Philip, a brief sermon and prayers, six male relatives took hold of the ropes and lowered him gently on his last journey. All present then symbolically tossed some earth on top of him.

We all walked, overcome with the sadness of the occasion, slowly back down the slope to the barn beside the cottage where there was a fantastic buffet prepared by friends – he would have approved. Glasses of wine were lifted in celebration of a life which had been terminated so prematurely. There were no speeches, just everyone talking about their personal memories of him. We looked at a collection of past photos some taken over 50 years ago. Most were beautifully displayed in an album done by his daughter Jenny to illustrate different times of his life .

The end of the day for me came when we all released red and white helium filled balloons over the very field below the cottage where Dick and I had come within inches of accidentally shooting each other over 40 years before. The balloons all rose high up into the afternoon sky, jostling with the thermals as if rushing to join a phantom paraglider way down the glen. That is all except one white one which moved (was it of its own volition?) about six feet above the ground up the hillside towards where he lay.

May God bless you my friend – rest in peace.

