

# *Eulogy for Robert Mott*

Every time I look at this I think, "Ooh I must talk about..." I wanted to add bikes, kites and Christmases, but to do so would make this never-ending, so please take them as read.

How do you begin to describe your dad? I thought he was brilliant, but don't all kids adore their parents? Instead let me tell you about the things I will remember him for.

Dad (and Mum) brought Ros and me up believing anything was achievable if you wanted to. It wasn't until I was fairly down the road of university that I was to understand that there were people in this world who thought girls couldn't or shouldn't do science.

He was always pottering, always playing with things. His garage was a thing of envy, and had everything you needed. Everyone we've talked to since his death has said, 'but he was always up a ladder'. I remember having to convince my physics teacher that he'd not help me cheat, when he talked about the hot air balloon he'd lashed together in garage with bin bags and heat guns. Independent of him, our physics group did have close-run thing nearly setting fire to Stratton Farm with a homemade sky lantern but that's a story for another day.

He loved his Morris, his manly keep fit, (and of course securing a good harvest) and was pleased to take me out and let me try and play along on the fiddle with Letchworth. I remember him telling me of a dance they'd invented in Hammersmith called the Hammersmith flyover where they all end up standing on one leg, in majestic representation of the architecture and of course Stanley, Dad's dad, had been a gymnast in his youth too.

We are discovering Dad's life is in the marginalia. Going through his effects we've discovered he's written his life story; the joys and the niggles. His youthful to go off and explore the world, coming home to help Alice (his mum, my namesake) along with his brothers Clive and Gordon, with the shop and the house. Listening to exotic radio stations from places beyond the Iron Curtain.

The dicing with apparent serious injury on a near frequent basis during his time at Glaxo making sheep vaccine. Getting into japes with his colleagues, hiding cars or brewing illicit coffee under the nose of the supervisor. Thankfully he left when he discovered he got more money as a booking office clerk. And started working for British Rail.

Dad always had these exotic things from trips aboard, he'd been to South America selling BritRail passes at a time long before this seemed achievable to gap year students and he even came into school to talk about it. Mum would wince at the timing as Dad went off on an overseas trip and we'd immediately help out by getting mumps or measles. Dad bought us back knick-knacks, including the recorder which started off Ros's excellent musical devotion. Erroneously given to me at first. Ros, I think, has forgiven 5-year old me for scribbling on her flamenco poster indignantly. It has only recently occurred to me that I wasn't the criminal mastermind I thought I was.

Childhood holidays would be in Austria, at the Hotel Esterhammer in the Tirol, where we'd enjoy excellent food, and Dad would again make Ros and I wince when he'd get up and join in with the *Schuhplattler* dancing, and to onlookers' amazement, be good at it. We'd go over by train, a journey that would take over 36 hours, and would involve negotiating French cobbles with family luggage in tow, transferring between Gare du Nord and Gare de l'Est, and customs checks at two in the morning at Basel station. Mollified with a giant bratwurst in a bun, of a size we'd never dreamed of.

We are in no doubt that he loved everybody and he never shied from sharing praise. He was very proud of Mum's talent with all things artistic – decorating, furniture, upholstery. He would happily trust in her care any jobs that needed her skills. They made a great team and the house always looked different every time you visited. They even redecorated a bedroom during lockdown, and practically refurbished and repainted the shed too.

He recognised that Rozie was doing a job she really loved, and I suspect secretly jealous that she got to study in Venice as part of her degree (as were we all). He was really pleased I work with the railway, and would lap-up *The Rail Engineer* magazines and then passed them on to others.

Dad was always the man in the tie. Nattily dressed, much to the disbelief of non-Motts he even wore an old suit for the DIY, something which never occurred to me as unusual. When Dave and I got married he gave me a set of drain rods (a second set to go with the set he gave me when I left home). He also gave me a rather elderly Good Housekeeping home maintenance book. Dad had annotated the text where it didn't meet his standards.

Ros, and her husband to be, Nick received the benefit of Dad's building skills too when they moved to Leamington, buying a house together as a *doer-upper*. Poking through the hatch under the stairs, Dad discovered that there was more *doing* than expected. The floorboards downstairs were all balanced on brickwork with mortar that was crumbling, literally, to dust. So, in tweed jacket and bobble hat, and for a fee of teas and dinners, he spent over 100 days that autumn under the floor, working his way round, repointing everything while the youngsters did their day jobs and worked on the *doing-upping* above ground.

He loved taking his granddaughters Jessica and Eleanor off on day trips, on the train of course. Cathedrals, museums and market towns, off they'd go. They became dangerously accustomed to the perks of first-class travel gained in accompanying a British Rail retiree. Jess in particular always regrets that she doesn't get free orange juice and pastries when Ros and Nick take them out by train. They would often spend a week visiting in the summer, and he would delight in jaunts to the seaside, filling them with fish and chips and dunking them in the sea. Unfortunately, he sometimes had a blind spot when it came to knowing exactly where on the seaside they had got to, but you know every cloud has a silver lining, and Eleanor now has a very good relationship with the Broadstairs Lifeguards.

I owe him my curiosity, my delight in knowing how things work and extracting jape from them. He taught me how to blow fiery methane bubbles one afternoon in the garden with a blow torch, and to mind the washing. I'll always be reminded of him in November as it seemed he'd deliberately get the dangerous Chinese fireworks we'd have been warned about on *Newsround* that afternoon, for having too much gunpowder in.

Dad was a model of kindness, he taught us that we should advocate for those who need a voice. To help people that are stuck. At a birthday lunch one year, he nipped to the car and got some spanners to fix the radiator whilst in-between courses at the Stratton House Hotel. He and Mum always saw that hungry people should be fed; that it nurtured the spirit. Something they continued to do during lockdown, preparing lunches for the neighbours, and that Mum has been doing since.

He and Mum supported the youth theatre Dave and I do in our spare time. Graciously they helped us with music lessons and competitions where Ros and I would sing or play recorder or violin. He instilled in me a love of clever lyrics, and introduced me to Tom Lehrer. And he stopped me from cutting out the cardboard medals in the Sgt Pepper album that he had. He even took on teaching me to drive, after uni, so that I'd be able to be independent.

Mum and Dad found that during lockdown, whilst inconvenient, they still loved and cherished each other. They enjoyed their time in each other's company and next year was to be their 50th wedding anniversary, which Mum had already started picking out dresses for.

Run Out for 78. Though he didn't look it. Not a bad innings.

Dad, it was a privilege, and I know if St. Peter is having a problem with the pearly gates not hanging quite right, he'd be more than happy to get his spanner set out and see if he can help.

Angela Adams, November 2020