

# A EULOGY TO TOM WITCHELL

OCTOBER 1934 – MARCH 2019



## TOM WITCHELL 1934 – 2019

*This Eulogy was written by his Son Giles and read by him at Tom's funeral:-*

*I think it's fair to say that Tom would find the next few minutes fairly strange, not that he has any chance to stop me but he has always struck me to be other person centred, willing others to succeed while he stood out of the limelight. I hope the next few minutes will demonstrate that his life was such a blessing for other people.*

*Memories shared over the last few days from others had a central theme: kindness and good nature:*

*"Tom will always be remembered as a kind and gentle man."*

*"Tom was a delightful person who was so kind"*

*"He really was the most gentle, kind and honourable man, a rare breed in today's times."*

*"Tom was the soul of patience."*

*"He was always gracious and warm."*

*On 14 October 1934, Tom was born in Warmley which was at the time a little village between Bristol and Bath. Not many years later during the war he had started sailing and was weekly visiting Bristol harbour throughout the holidays. We worked out that this would have been when he was about 7 or 8 and he would be sailing by himself, around the time of the battle of Britain! What could go wrong?*

*After School at Clifton College and a five year building apprenticeship he worked towards the MIPM: Membership of the Institute of Personnel Management (in other words HR). During the course there was a conference which was held in the Assembly rooms in Edinburgh in 1961. As he entered the library for a coffee break he exclaimed in a very Tom way: "Oh, what a beautiful library", to which my mother concurred. I admire him for his bravery in that chat up line which I am sure is underused these days.*

*After two years of seeing each other it was decided that the pairing was inappropriate and they were forbidden to see each other for seven years, only trading Christmas cards to stay in touch. At Christmas in 1970, my mother received from Tom a card that mentioned that Sidney Witchell, his cousin had died and that he was about to travel back to Sevenoaks which he had moved to in 1963 to bury his father.*

*This almost broke my mother's heart and within 1 year the two of them were married on 3 July 1971.*

*During this time Tom was working for the Ministry of Defence. Due to his obedience to the official secrets act, almost no one knew what he did, certainly not my mother, brother or myself. Let's just say that his innocent predisposition and humble character was an excellent cover for his likely job description of secret agent. Or so we would joke. From what I can remember I was only allowed into the ministry once and I spent my*

*time crawling through filing cabinets in an attempt to reach the truth, which I failed miserably at, as my father closed all the draws as quickly as I opened them.*

*At the same time my father's love for sailing continued. He had joined Chipstead sailing club in 1963 and has been a member ever since. Over 55 years of sailing there as well as on the Bristol Chanel, Norfolk Broads where we had many happy family holidays, Sandbanks, Sheppy, Cornwall, various lochs of Scotland and Eastbourne where you can see my father sail on the back of the order of service in 1966 during his exile years from my mother. For such a humble character he had a fairly ruthless streak when on water. I seem to remember he capsized my mother after which she swore never to get into a sailing boat again with him and he scared me witless when I crewed for him in his graduate when I was very small, sailing so close to the wind that the boat was practically on its side.*

*Out of the sailing boat, Tom's concern and care for people was remarkable. He was completely loyal to my mother and doing his absolute best for her. He would support her attending most (if not all) of my mother's concerts, I think he became a bit of a mascot. And we recently remembered that if ever my mother was even 15 minutes late returning from a rehearsal, my father would be there, torch in hand, on the road, looking out for her. Although conservative with his emotions I know he always, always wanted the best for both myself and Jonathan. Sacrificially giving so much for our education from prep school all the way up to past university, he just wanted the best for us.*

*As he grew older, and with the arrival of grandchildren, Grandpa Tom was just as kind hearted to them as he was to his own children, even when they were off the scale of energetic and excited. Josie is only 7 months old and Tom, even though his health was deteriorating was always keen to see her, spend time, and play with her. True, it would knock him for six and he would spend the rest of the day sleeping, but he had a deep affection for all three children, even when he had little energy himself.*

*Through this time his prayer book became increasingly visible, and ever since last summer he knew that his health was not what it should have been. Even in difficult times I have never known my father to complain. I have never heard him shout (except in a boat), and certainly not in anger. In fact, during my whole life I believe my father to be the most level headed person I have ever met, putting the needs of others before himself. Even in his last few weeks in hospital, the last thing he wanted to do was inconvenience anyone. Like the rest of his character, my father had a quiet but sure faith in Jesus Christ. It wasn't a shouty faith, but his understanding of the gospel ran deep and was taught to him at a young age. It was a faith that was clearly active as he served others.*

*A day like today, we can think about death, and it can sting. All of us here are affected by it, and it can feel like an unhealed wound, where the pain continues to throb, refusing to ever go away. And yet, the faith that Tom had was in a person who broke through death, and rose on the other side of it. And so death does not, nor should not hold power over us. As the Apostle Paul said: Where Oh death is your victory? Where oh death is your sting? But thanks be to God, he gives us the Victory through the Lord Jesus Christ. Tom has tasted death but has broken through the other side to be with his heavenly father, where there is no more death, mourning, crying or pain. So let us give thanks to my wonderful father knowing he is safe and well, and our loving heavenly father who has given us a great victory in Christ.*

**Our grateful thanks to Giles for allowing us to publish this moving tribute to his Dad.**