

# JOHN PARSONS RIP

## Eulogy given by sons Michael and Nick Parsons

Dad said he wanted this to be as happy an occasion as possible and told us not to be sad. I was never very good at doing what I was told but we'll try!

Our Dad was hard to miss. He was a big bloke with a big presence. He could be kind, understanding, sensitive, easily hurt, and 'jolly' bad-tempered and exasperating when it suited him, but above all I think he wanted to be straightforward, fair and plain-speaking.

To my discredit I did not listen closely enough to Dad when, several times, and up till recently, he quoted a saying of which he was fond. However it was along the lines of:

"When I die, say: 'He was a good man'. If you must, say: 'He was an awkward --- , but please..... Don't say: 'He meant well'."

But when it comes to it, he really did mean well.

He *meant* to provide for his wife and family. His family was very important to him, perhaps because his father's family went through some pretty rough times. And he never really got over the loss of his elder brother who was shot down on a bombing raid during the war.

He *meant* to look after Mum in her older years until he simply could do no more. And he did. He said it was "APOTS", "all part of the service" and that that was "what he had signed up for". There was very much a sense of duty and loving care, and he wanted to do it as much as possible on his own. But he was also extremely grateful to all the people who over the years have done so much to help: and so are we. We can't name them all, there are so many. Many are here today. So please accept our heartfelt thanks for everything you have done and will I'm sure continue to do to help Mum.

... and when he could do no more, through pain and weakness, yes, he was desperately frustrated to be ill and side-lined, but during the last four weeks of his life he was bombarded with visitors and flooded with good wishes.

When he was a boy he spent a lot of time at the Abbey in Farnborough, amongst other things helping the monks on the farm. He said recently that he wondered whether he could still harness a draught horse: we will never know. He enjoyed seeing the monks at Quarr and kept in close touch with some of them until they died. It was at the abbey that he acquired the habit of wearing a beret.

He spent a good part of his working life as a 'simple serpent', doing the mind-numbing, and physically exhausting, commute to and from London each day. When I was little I thought my parents were a bit old and boring. For Dad, I now realise, by the time he got to the weekend he was fit for very little. I don't envy that life.

However, I am sure that, when St Peter realises that Dad ran (or co-ran) the complaints department at DVLC Swansea in the very early days of public sector computerisation, he will recommend that no more penance is required!

When he could carve out 'leisure time' he spent a large amount of it, particularly during the 1960s and 1970s with the Christian Life Movement and the Christian Life Community, locally, nationally and internationally.

We weren't remotely jealous that we holidayed in Bognor while he went to conferences in Chantilly, Augsburg, Santo Domingo and Philadelphia!

He was particularly proud of how he was able to use some of these opportunities to get across a message which was very important for him, that Christianity meant working together to combat poverty etc.

Dad never had the opportunity of a university education, something I think he really regretted, but he had a fine mind, a powerful memory and a comprehensive command of the language and pulled himself up through the ranks of the civil service to end up, in about 1988, as Regional Controller for Housing for the Eastern Region of England. He also spent some time in Town and Country Planning, and was involved in formulating policies relating to Gypsy and travellers' sites, something of which he was very proud. He was proud not only because he could formulate policy but also because he was able to build up a relationship of trust with many of the Gypsies' and travellers' leaders. Above all he had a genuine sense of public service and civic responsibility.

He had a long history from an early age of volunteering to help those in need, but his work didn't leave him as much time and energy as he would have liked. He worked with a couple of close friends to build up a community around the new church of St Joseph in Basingstoke.

In retirement he was active in a number of voluntary roles. He worked with communitarians, meals on wheels and Church Choirs. He was always ready to help. His ardent enthusiasm for ecumenism saw him chairing Churches Together in Fleet, being a member of the Methodist Aurelia choir and chairing the Portsmouth Diocesan Commission for Christian Unity. (And probably a number of other things we never knew about!) We welcome his friends from other churches here today. The ecumenical dimension-or what someone apparently once called the unichemical dimension- was very important for him.

He also recorded news for the local talking newspapers service and was happy and proud to have been able to provide regular contributions to his 'Parsons' Pointers' column in the Portsmouth People magazine.

He was particularly pleased when he could make some unhappy children smile. And he often said that if there was one thing he would like to be remembered for it would be that he always went to the back of the church and made sure that everyone, even at the back—especially at the back—felt they were included, that they were part of a community. And that is why he has asked us to do today what he always did, which was to go round the church for the sign of peace and make sure he shook hands with everyone.

He very much enjoyed being with his grandchildren and great-grandchildren. They will remember a lot of things. They will remember him practising his singing. My son's first word was "hallenujah", probably because of the singing practice in the car! They will remember the chocolate cakes he loved baking for them and "that was very tasty, Grandpa" became something of a family byword.

He loved the choir, both here and in earlier parishes. I remember him conducting the choir in St Joseph's Basingstoke where the choir was upstairs, with a low wall separating the choir from the church below. Dad usually put the music on the wall as he conducted. His conducting was always enthusiastic and very ample, so one day the inevitable happened and 60 or 70 sheets of music paper, hymn books and so on went flying down on to the unsuspecting congregation. He was always keen on bringing the music to everyone in the church! He went to singing lessons every week and loved singing in the choir here and we would like to thank his singing teacher and the choir and the organist for everything they have done and are still doing today.

Many of you who have known the family a long time will have noted Dad's method of summoning his offspring, grand-offspring or even great-grand-offspring – "Michael, Judy, Nicholas – Here a minute!" That 'minute', particularly in Dad's computer room, might take an hour, but, hey...

So, on a global and celestial scale, Dad was only 'here a minute' – but we are glad he was!