

EULOGY

for Michael Gadd

delivered at his funeral service at St. Nicholas' Church, Loxley,
12 noon, 7th June 2007

I wasn't going to do this. Somebody else would do it. But then I realised that it would then be no tribute to my father and the example he set: he did things.

So having decided to make this tribute to him, I then couldn't think where to start. So many memories. It was something my son George's school headmaster said that crystallised what I should do: "very often the words that are spoken at funerals capture much that has been *unknown* or *uncelebrated* in the life passing".

Michael was a gentle man, whose quietness left much unknown and uncelebrated.

He was born, a 10lb bouncing baby, in Bristol on 26th October 1940. Bristol had already been suffering 4 months of night-time bombing raids by the Luftwaffe, and within another month much of the old city had been destroyed. Michael and his brother, Chris, were evacuated with their mother first to mid-Wales, and then to Clevedon. It was here that Michael formed his first lasting memories, of time spent

on the beach, and the arrival of his sister, Jill. *They* all moved back to Bristol in 1943, but it wasn't until 1946 that Michael's father re-entered the family's life following his military service.

And it was in Bristol that the scientific experiments began, often in secret places (under the bed), and often involving matches. Setting light to the bed went undetected, but burning the neighbours' clothes line with a home-made firework was rather more conspicuous and led to consequences.

This passion for experimentation and invention is clearly genetic. A few months ago, George and I were helping Michael with some electrical project in the garage, when he recalled a similar situation some 57 years earlier when, the same age as George is now, he watched as his father and grandfather performed what could have been a lethal operation on the mains electricity supply.

He also recalled an all too familiar-sounding occasion when, in the interest of science and the pursuit of knowledge, he took apart the watch he had been given for Christmas, and then couldn't work out where all the bits belonged. But his father sat with him and quietly explained the function of all the parts, and coaxed it back to life. I saw this quiet, practical patience re-enacted by Michael many times

throughout my own childhood, and more recently with his grandchildren.

Michael's childhood was also full of music. His father was an accomplished amateur violinist, who with his friends would gather in the evenings and play chamber music while Michael listened as he lay upstairs in bed.

Christmas mornings were heralded not by an angel, but by Michael's father sitting up in bed playing carols on his violin, before the children opened the presents which Chris and Michael had already previewed in the bottom of their parents' wardrobe. This exacting approach to gift research meant that George was able to say last week that Grandpa always knew what presents to buy him.

Michael did very well at school, his place at Cotham Grammar School being rewarded with a bike which, by his own calculation, he went on to ride over 20,000 miles. At school, he began to learn the violin himself, and before long he was leading the second violins in the Combined Bristol Secondary Schools Orchestra.

In 1958, Michael won one of only 1,000 State Scholarships for university entrance, and was subsequently offered a place to read Physics at Queen's College, Cambridge. However, money was tight at

home, so rather than spend more time at school to get the necessary Latin O-level, Michael opted to leave and start work. There can be no doubt that he could have mastered Latin: he was recently studying Anglo-Saxon, and using this to reinterpret the early history of this Church and the village of Loxley.

Michael took up a place at Manchester University, where he was proud to have studied under some of the pioneers of computer technology.

His first job on leaving University was with Racal Electronics in Bracknell, where Trixie and I were born. A couple of years later, we moved to Coventry, where we were joined by Robin and Nick. Michael was now working at Courtaulds, where his various inventions included machinery for drawing and twisting the company's man-made yarns. He still found time to pursue his love of music – my early memories of Saturday mornings are of Michael tinkering with a soldering iron to the accompaniment of Radio 3 or of recordings of chamber music. Having retired from performance his practical efforts were focussed on developing high quality electronic equipment for audio reproduction – some of which he later used when Trixie's school produced an LP and he gave his services as recording engineer.

Much of our family life during this period revolved around Coventry Cathedral, where I and my brothers were choristers, encouraged by our father who did much for the choir through his involvement with the parents' association. Largely through his encouragement, we eventually had two pianos, a violin, a viola, a trombone and a French horn at home, thankfully not all played at once, though we did see off three sets of neighbours. He was proud of our musical achievements, in that non-verbal way that those of you who know us Gadds would recognise, and was proud too that his grandchildren are continuing the tradition of music-making.

Since his days in Manchester, Michael had kept abreast of developments in computing, and I remember the pride with which I was able to tell my friends at school that I had been into my dad's work and played noughts and crosses on a computer as big as a minibus. In the late 1970s, alongside his continuing work at Courtaulds, Michael set up one of the UK's first Apple computer dealerships, working at home often late into the night, and still accompanied by Radio 3. He left Courtaulds to take up a post with a company who were developing the world's first hand-held computers, before moving on to freelance consultancy.

After several years' membership of the Coventry Junior Chamber, an organisation which promotes links between local businessmen and develops their business skills, he became its President in 1981. It was through the Junior Chamber that he met Wendy, who was its Secretary that year. They married in 1983, and together developed a great love of travel. Wendy retired in 1995 so that Michael could give up daily commuting to his work in Northampton and take up a computing job in Miami, where they spent three very happy years. It is a measure of his great expertise that he was able to get the necessary permits to work in the USA.

A highlight of Michael and Wendy's exotic travel itinerary was his 50th birthday in New Zealand during a round-the-world trip, which was accomplished in rather more comfort and considerably less time than Trixie's round-the-world Global Challenge boat race some years later. He plotted the race progress almost by the hour, and it offered an excuse to revisit New Zealand with Wendy to meet Trixie at her half-way point. He was ecstatic when, at Portsmouth in July 2005, he saw Trixie's crew win the race.

In 1991, with a view to their eventual retirement, Michael and Wendy bought a cottage in south-west France which they developed

into a very special home where some of us were privileged to spend happy holiday times either alone or with our attentive and welcoming hosts.

When Michael retired in 1999, there was no way he would find himself at a loose end. He was suddenly able to turn his mind back to things which had interested him earlier in his life. As a boy, I remember perching tentatively on joists in darkness in our loft while Michael worked magic with his photographic enlarger and strange-smelling chemicals. His more recent photography was of course digital, and more akin to computing than chemistry. While in America, he bought a rather fine telescope, and so could see for the first time some of the amazing celestial things that he had described to me as a child.

The other interest of his that I remember from childhood, and which eventually occupied much of his time, is history, and family history in particular. I recall him regaling us with strange tales of Jamaica and lost fortunes, glass eyes, and dentures. His enquiring mind and rigorous forensic approach to research have debunked some of these stories and replaced them with some even more interesting tales.

Michael applied the same approach to his study of the history of Loxley, this village which he and Wendy made their home in 1999. They quickly became active in the community, and made many friends here through their involvement with activities such as the Strawberry Fayre. Michael was secretary of the Loxley Parish Plan group, and ultimately wrote the plan which was adopted by the district council earlier this year. He researched and constructed the Loxley Village website, and recently encouraged Wendy to become the Parish Clerk.

Michael's handling of his 14-month illness was typical of him. He bore it if not cheerfully then with absolute bravery, optimism, and uncomplaining stoicism, deeply inquisitive about the illness itself and its treatment, eager to understand the scientific processes, performing self-diagnoses and suggesting innovative ways to combat each successive challenge. Sadly, even this was ultimately not enough.

I've been referring to my father as Michael, though he was better known to us variously as Mike, Mick, Dad, G-Pa, and Grandpa. But he was to all of us invariably the same gentle, kind, helpful, practical, pragmatic, sympathetic, understanding, knowledgeable, interested, interesting, hospitable, generous man. That's why I'll miss my Daddy.

Stephen Gadd