

George Ferard

22nd August 1932 – 15th March 2009

Funeral Tribute by Dominic Ferard

I'd like to start with a party – a party that my father threw in 2005 for his car when it passed 250,000 miles. My father was fully aware of the comedy of his attachment to his white BMW 7 series, which had grown old with him, and the event was held with tongue firmly in cheek, the car having a star turn, literally, on the lawn, to the amusement and perhaps bemusement of the guests. A little later it succumbed to the wear and tear of those accumulated miles, and it remained irreparable and immobile in the garage at Lawnswood, his home, until it was scrapped only a couple of months ago.

But I am getting ahead of myself. My father's early history seems very much of its time and place: a child of the Raj, he attended Winchester and, before going up to Oxford, was commissioned as a 2nd Lt in the Royal Artillery and served in Malaya in 1951-52 during the insurgency. So far, so conventional. He was proud of his personal and family history, and quite prepared to show off about it, but, as Barbara would say, they broke the mould when they made my father.

His dynamism and enthusiasm made an instant impression on all who met him, he naturally dominated conversation and it was a joy to be in his life-giving presence. He was a born competitor, a natural entrepreneur, a risk-taker and leader. He could be tactless and insensitive, and even breathtakingly rude, but he meant no offence, he held no grudges and had no side, as long of course as he could win the argument. The three of us as children grew up with ferocious debating around the dinner table, and he gave no quarter.

Getting my father to change his mind was therefore difficult. A frontal assault was invariably rebuffed. After Rupert and I joined the business we would from time to time come forward with a suggestion that ran counter to his thinking, and this would be dismissed out of hand. But some time later my father would propose something remarkably similar. He would not admit to changing his mind and might even claim no recollection of our original idea.

The expert at this type of negotiation with my father was of course my mother. They met in London in 1956 and married in 1961. My father was lucky to get her – early in the relationship he was abroad and writing to her and to another girlfriend, but managed to get letters and envelopes confused. My mother and father were polar opposites, his ying to her yang. Where he was argumentative, she was gentle, where he was determined, she was cautious, where he didn't give a fig for appearances, she liked things to be just so. But together they made a joyous loving couple and tried their utmost to give the three of us a caring and stable start in life. We were able to take so much for granted that is denied to others.

A part, albeit not the major part, of this was financial security. As we all know, my father did think that money was important. He was not actually interested in spending it (as those who sampled his bargain Morrisons wine may recall) or for that matter in accumulating it; but it was a part of the game, and a measure of success.

For the first stage in his working life he was a salaried employee, ending up at ICI, and was promoted to a position in the north-east, to which he and my mother moved when I was a toddler. However my father was totally unsuited to working in a large organisation with its complex internal politics – I am sure some people must have seen him as a pushy know-it-all. He probably was. So maybe it was inevitable that at some point he would seize an opportunity to do something different. In the event, it was property that caught his eye in 1972 and so he began

'Stockton Flats'. This provided at last the outlet for his natural entrepreneurial flair.

He took risks – carefully calculated and researched, but big risks nevertheless, selling family heirlooms for vital cash and borrowing at rates of up 40%. But he was also hands-on. He would paint rooms, buy furniture and move it around in his Transit van, and lay carpets. He would vet tenants, take rent, go to the bank and even (after teaching himself double-entry book-keeping) prepare the accounts. He had no primer, no property-investor TV tip show, and no friends or contacts already in the business. He worked it all out as he went along, relishing the challenges and the sense of achievement that he got from overcoming them.

The risk-taking and the hard work paid off and business flourished, helped of course by the team that he built around him. Rupert and I joined in 1988 and so we were then business partners as well as sons, and he allowed us to develop under his wing. Given his commanding nature I think he must have bitten his tongue more often than we realised!

Then in 1997 my mother died quite suddenly and for my father it was as if he had lost a half of himself, and from this point he was 'walking wounded'. With the great support of friends he pulled himself together and threw himself back into social life and into work. Less than a year later he was told he had terminal cancer, but believing he had only a short time left he decided to carry on with life as normal, and until much later told only his family.

Outwardly he appeared to be his old ebullient self. He remained a generous and enthusiastic host and took huge pleasure in the company of family and friends. He played golf and bridge (and it says something for the strength of the friendships that my father was happy to play both games when he wasn't always, or even very often, the winner!) He loved

his grandchildren unconditionally and took great pride in their growth and in their achievements, and in his inimitable style would show off about them as shamelessly as ever. He built new property portfolios at work, and even undertook a campaign single-handed against the introduction of Housing Allowances, winning several changes to the legislation. But under that bravado there was a deep sadness and a burning sense of loss. Quite large parts of Lawnswood were off limits because of their memories; he would sleep in the spare room and entertain and relax in the conservatory which had been finished after my mother's death.

I and the family will always look up to him and revere his memory, for the love he showed us, for his generosity, for the sheer force of his personality and his drive, for having the courage to take risks, to continually push himself forward, for his determination to live up to the standard he set himself, and for his bravery during his long terrible illness.

I've already mentioned the white BMW 7 series, a car with which my father may have humorously identified himself, helped of course by its registration A1 GCF. So I'd like to end on a lighter note with a verse letter written by the car in 2003 to Father Christmas. I think we can assume that my father helped it with the drafting:

Dear Santa

I fear my master's failing ways

Will terminate my glory days

Maybe he'll last another year?

Then what of me? Pray shed a tear!

Like an old pet, they'll put me down

Then flog my organs round the town

Why am I stuck with this old crock?

Why can't he just rewind his clock?

After a re-spray he could be

Quite young again

LIKE ME! LIKE ME!

Yours hopefully

A1 GCF

... And now master, like motor, has been moved on. Thank you.