

JAKE FRANCIS-JONES - EULOGY

Typically, Dad left instructions, a list of numbers to call, people to inform and actions to be taken. One of those was to ask the monastery if we could celebrate his life at St Benedict's, the parish church in this village. To our delight and sincere gratitude, The Prior and The Community suggested that the Abbey might be a more appropriate place, for which we are immensely grateful.

Disobeying Dad, even now, is a courageous move but in this instance, I hope, forgivable as this unexpected up-grade would have pleased him enormously. Thank you Fr Prior and The Community for allowing us, his family and close friends, to remember him in the place that he loved so much. Thank you also to Fr James for presiding over the Mass, to the choir for their angelic singing, the sacristans and to you all, friends and family, for joining us today.

Ronald, Carew, Jake, Dad, Babu Francis-Jones. Names that bracketed, as they so often do, the chapters in which one might have met Dad !

Ronald, was born in 1937 in Pretoria, South Africa from where he would, as he described, spend the next few years living out of the back of a 4-tonne truck following his father's Battalion, the Northern Rhodesian Regiment. Stories were regaled over the years, usually when somebody mentioned a name between South Africa and Somaliland, which prompted Dad to recall an encounter or

adventure at that location. Only one or two photographs remain with us of this incredible, boy's own, time and so the tales were important. The one picture that particularly remains with me, is of Dad looking very young, yet very smart, in a safari jacket and shorts. Aged 5, this was his uniform and as the Commanding Officer's son, he in turn was the Company Commander of the children's Company, who were expected to parade with the Battalion in the morning whilst his father marched on to inspect the troops, complete with a Cheetah at his father's side !

Whilst there were many incredible stories, there was also intense hardship as Dad and Bronwen's mother, Muz, struggled, like so many, to keep things together as the husbands went off to War in the Far East. As a tight knit unit the 3 faced much adversity but moved forward, bound by a very strong and unique bond. One that grew stronger over the years particularly with his young sister, whom he adored.

For Dad, new adventures lay ahead and Ronald, known as Carew by his mother, was sent to Pembroke House, a wonderful prep school in Gigil, Kenya. Few memories were forthcoming from this period but I suspect he had enormous fun. Not long before he moved on, Dad's father died and the 3 were really alone. His mother decided that Carew would be educated in England and he was admitted into St Mary's School, Nairobi, for a year principally he suggested 'to

receive his first Holy Communion and Confirmation' in preparation for his next school.

His epoch at Downside was about to start ! Shipped to Somerset where flipflops were not in fashion, the Kenya, rather relaxed attire, was swapped for starched collars and a world that couldn't have been farther apart. Although Dad missed Kenya, his mother and sister, he had to persevere and throw himself in to the school. Academics was a topic that he never really mentioned, sports again a limited conversation but escapades with members of the Drones Club, some of whom might well be here today, were embellished and became better as the years passed. The Drones Club was, I think, an unofficial archaeological club for a select few. Members dug graves at the Plague Church, a mile from here to gain an income, to be spent over meetings in the nearby pubs. Life in Stratton-on-the-Fosse suited Dad and it became home. With Kenya being too far for him to return to, except in the Summer holidays, term time was important as he would spend his Christmas and Easter holidays, in digs, in Torquay by himself. Friendships made here would last forever.

It was during this time, on one of the CCF trips, that the nickname Jake was bestowed upon him and this became Dad's long-term identity.

After Downside, a brief spell back in Nairobi where he prepared to join the Royal Navy. He returned to the UK to complete his 2 years as a cadet and then as a

midshipman at Britannia Royal Naval College, Dartmouth. A new set of tales and profound friendships began here too with many of his closest friends including Tony Lambourne, with whom he will now be reunited. 'Happy Days' as Dad would tell us, spent with a term that he would never forget. And so started his long career in the Royal Navy when travel, in those early days, dominated his life. Goodness knows how he managed to meet Mum whilst he was serving in Cape Town and Diana was in Nairobi – a moment's chance brought them together and a year later they were married and Diana started **her** career with the Royal Navy.

Singapore beckoned next and Jake was to become Dad to one person – I was born and a few years later Max was born when we returned to the UK. Like many Naval families we moved around following the leader, settling eventually and for many wonderful years in Durley, Hampshire – lovely to see many of those families here today.

As the years passed, we went through a fleet of interesting cars from the 'Biscuit Tin', the model and make of which I have no idea but it really did look like a biscuit tin on wheels to the 'Clockwork Orange', the VW camper – Dad's pride and joy. We became enthusiastic campers which included a trip to Carew, the village in Wales, where we camped in a random field, hounded by the inevitable

Welsh drizzle. Even here Dad managed to find a family link between us and the farmer – the networking was beginning !

The annual highlight, with this vehicle, was Prize Day at Moor Park where families would park alongside us, under the oak tree and the most magnificent picnics would appear. He loved such gatherings, exploring and we as a family clocked up many joyful miles.

Dad's life in the Royal Navy moved from establishment to establishment some of which we joined in with and others not so much. Including HMS Centaur, Ajax and Hermes; names that you will recognise bestowed upon his working Labradors over the years.

Ships sailed and returned, usually in fairly quick time, but every now and again longer periods of time were necessary for Queen and Country. The one that I recall was with HMS Hermes marked by Dad's, infamous, rooky mistake. We would proudly announce that he was off on a 'World Cruise', well there were many islands and much entertaining to be done, so this description seemed to us, most apt. 'Operational Deployment' we were sternly instructed; which we understood sounded far more important and purposeful. 'Sleep in peace' he would remind us 'whilst your Navy keeps the sea lanes safe'. All was however shattered when on a miserable and bleak Winter's evening, we were home and Mum was manning the fort, the telephone call from Dad came through. All

seemed very normal until, much to my surprise, Mum slammed the 'phone down – most unlike her. Unknown, at the time to me, was Dad's parting words 'must go, the sand is burning my feet'. This faux pau took him some time to recover from !

Portsmouth and Whaley were next and somewhere along the path he endured a stint at Whitehall which he hated – London bureaucracy wasn't his style. It was whilst at Whaley that Dad's next passion began to emerge, shooting. Along with the island's establishment was an underutilised shooting instructor who suddenly became, to his delight, very busy. Saturday's in the season were now fully booked followed by a flurry of Summer charity clay pigeon shoots that he organised in order to raise money for the Royal Naval Benevolent Trust – Dad never looked back. He loved his shooting and will have been with some of you, always returning from a day out with yet another tale of 'you'll never believe how wonderful a retrieve...'

Retirement from his beloved Royal Navy, after 36 years, was closing in and we moved to their penultimate house, Woodlawn. Here, after retiring, he became the Regional Secretary of the Game Conservancy in Somerset which he enjoyed but this was never really a true passion. Enthusiasm was however rekindled as he focused his attention towards Dom Daniel's card index system and encyclopaedic memory of Old Gregorians. 'The greatest talking shop in the

Country’, regaled Dom Daniel, ‘nothing happens but we meet every now and again’. Suddenly a second career started to manifest. Within a brief period of time, the card index system had been claimed and digitised, emails were crafted and The Pusser was in full sail again.

Everything and everybody, Old Gregorian, was being organised – Jake was alight whilst Dom Daniel enjoyed his new sedate lifestyle – everybody was happy. But this wasn’t enough and Jake realised that not only could we celebrate the many successful OG’s but there were also a forgotten band of brothers who needed help. He responded by raising the idea of Bruised Reeds at a council meeting and was, unusually, flatly denied any support. Nevertheless, undeterred he crafted Bruised Reeds and set about just helping those in need. He didn’t need or want any praise but was encouraged as more volunteered to join him. With this also came the advent of the *Old Gregorian Magazine*, the profits from which would go towards a bursary for a student at the school. Having a father as the editor meant that ‘yes’, a photograph me in Singapore aged 2 in nappy order appeared in one of the editions – o joy !

During this second incarnation, Jake became Babu, grandfather in Swahili. Derived whilst Max and Nikki were living in Tanzania. Jake’s view of grand-daughters was, shall we say **old school**. As devoted and as generous as he was to them, shooting and driving land-rovers remained the preserve for the blessed

Humphrey – apparently nobody told Emily this and Camilla had bigger fish to fry anyway. Even worse, Max and Nikki's daughters are bound for St Mary's, Ascot ! But Dad always understood: everyone makes the occasional error of judgement.

Dad had many nuances. His beer that he lovingly made for years, always brewed on a Sunday for mum to bottle during the week; brunch at Jake's was a great Summer gathering that re-occurred for many years and most grim of all was the smoking in December and by goodness he would smoke a year's allocation in one month. So much so, that soon after Christmas he too would be willing the end of the month to come around as he started to recoil from the intensity of his fumes.

Dad was engaging, entertaining and a great host, gregarious in nature, never one to miss an opportunity to make fun out of something, but always without malice. He loved a bash and could never be accused of holding back on the wine ! It was not unusual for lunch parties to go on into the evening and dinner parties to the next day.

Dad was a wonderful father, useless at DIY and fixing cars, something he passed on to us, but always loving, understanding, reliable, supportive and charitable. In parenthood, as in many other areas of his life, his maxim was 'no problems, just solutions'.

He was a man of honour, and much to our frustration and later gratitude, he went to great lengths to make sure that we understood the difference between right and wrong; and to try to always be kind to others. Something that is evident in the letters received this week, revealing his kindness and support to many.

He was also ridiculously argumentative, never allowing authority to prevent him from making his point. It could be maddening and challenging, in equal measures, although after many years Mum might have other descriptions of it.

And so there we have Ronald, Carew, Jake, Dad, Babu Francis-Jones, encapsulated. A very brief summary of a man who filled his life from beginning to end, a synopsis that I hope does his journey justice, particularly recognising the love that he had for his family, friends and all things Downside. As one of the many OG's wrote to me this week 'a large light has gone out'. Hopefully though, this void will be filled with an abundance of happy memories. Mum feels that Dad should be awarded a long service and good conduct medal for 55.5 years of a solid, happy, marriage and for many of those years for looking after 8 wonderful Labradors; sometimes followed by the qualifier that she gets the halo.

Thank you Dad, we salute you.