

I've come here today to talk about my father, Ron Ainsworth.

Sadly, we've known this day was coming for a long time, and over the past weeks and months it's given me great comfort to collect my knowledge and memories of my father for this moment, so I can talk about what he's meant to myself, my brother and sisters, to all his friends, and to his wife, my mother, who he loved so very, very much.

Several years ago he stood here himself and spoke at the funeral of his great friend, Hamid Lesan, who my brother spoke of, and who many of you here know, and miss, as we still miss him, my family and I.

And when I told my dad that I wanted to speak today, he said "Put me next to Hamid."

And that is what we will do, in an hour's time - lay him down next to his friend.

I hope I can speak as well as he did that day about what he has meant to me, and to all of us who are here today.

People will say we're here because my dad lost his battle with motor neurone disease, but in my mind, he didn't. It killed him, sure enough, but he won.

He dealt with his condition with extraordinary calm, with little complaint, and with unflinching good humour. If anything, as everything else got worse, his sense of humour improved, and just a few weeks before he died, he was still able to make me laugh.

When the nurse asked him what he wanted to drink recently, long after he'd lost the ability to eat and could barely speak, he mouthed the words "Pint of bitter".

And he was still able to enjoy a good quality of life right up to his last few weeks.

He still read eagerly, listened to music, and enjoyed the company of his family and friends.

He remained interested in history and politics and economics until very shortly before his death. He hung on partly, I think, because he wanted to see the Greek exit from the Euro, to prove to me he was right about the single currency.

And his strength allowed him to support those around him as they supported him - particularly my mother, who showed an unflinching devotion to him and care for his needs.

And now, fittingly, he will be laid to rest here, mingled with the soil of Sheering, his home for almost half his life.

In the 32 years he lived here my father became a part of this village, and given so much time to the things that make it tick - chair of the parish council, treasurer of the village hall committee, editor of the Sheering News. And a tree warden, although I'm not sure what that involved.

My dad enjoyed making sure Sheering ran smoothly. It suited his personality: he was meticulously well-organised and he wanted to get things absolutely right.

Up until just a few weeks ago, he was still thinking hard about the future of the village car park. Just a note to the village hall committee, by the way: he thinks you should leave it to the parish council.

Elsewhere, too, he gave of himself selflessly and conscientiously.

He didn't always come across as the most patient man, my dad - certainly not to his kids, anyway - but as a CAB advisor, he spent countless hours using his exhaustive knowledge of the correct rules and procedures to help and protect some people who had lost their housing benefit or got into a dispute with the gas man. I think he helped a lot of people. And again, he derived a quiet satisfaction for getting things done right.

But there was a lot more to my dad than that. Another thing I admired immensely about him was his certainty about life, an enviable ability to be sure what he wanted and enjoy what he had.

I think he spent all the years up to his 55th birthday building a world that was secure for himself and his wife and children, and then, as soon as he had his pension sorted out, he took early retirement, and settled down to enjoy life.

At that point he relaxed a lot more. He became more jolly. He put his feet up and began in his own way, to enjoy life.

Around that time, he decided to get a law degree on the OU - not because he needed to, but because he had a quick and methodical mind and he needed to keep it active. He clearly liked it, because he kept acquiring degrees after that. I think he ended up with six. When he died the full list of letters after his name read ACIS, AIB, ATII, BA, BA, BA, BSC, BSC, LLB - not bad for a lad who left education the first time round with nothing but two GCEs - not even a swimming certificate.

And when the last of the kids left home, he bought another sports car, a Mazda MX5, which he drove very sensibly to the CAB and back.

So for the last 15 years my dad would volunteer and acquire degrees, and my mum would garden and tutor kids, and they were content together. Every so often, they would venture away on what my dad called an "eating and drinking" holiday, but Sheering always called them home.

"I could go on holiday every day if I wanted to," my dad said to me once. "But I can't get your mother out of the garden."

However my enduring memory of my father in retirement - and I'm sure this will be true for many other people too - is coming through the door and discovering him at the kitchen

table with my mother, both heads bent industriously over the Times crossword. Sometimes it was just the two of them. Sometimes - if it was getting a bit late in the day - there was a pile of dictionaries and electronic aids to help. I don't think it defeated them more than a handful of times in 15 years.

He was extremely quick when it came to solving clues, and often if you read one out to him he would get it immediately.

But woe betide you if you read it out in the wrong way.

My father insisted that you tell him first the number of letters in a clue, and then which ones you had already got.

His good friend Hamid would often go for a walk with my dad in the evening. Often on the train home he would have got part way through the Guardian crossword and turn to my dad to finish the rest. But he would never remember this structure.

One time when they went walking together, he turned to my dad and said something like:

"Pretty girl in crimson rose"

"How many letters?" my dad asked.

A little while later he turned to my dad again.

"Antelope in eastern China," he said.

"How many letters?" my dad cried.

A little while later Hamid turned to him again.

"Postman arrives with a big bag," he said.

*"How many letters?"* my dad shouted in unbearable frustration.

Hamid threw his hands in the air. "Lots and lots of letters!"

This, though, was just one of very, very many - interesting character traits - that made my dad a - unique - individual. When we've spoken together about him, our family, it's somehow his faults and peculiarities that we remember with most love.

For example, his skill with the tools of finance was only really matched by his lack of skill with actual tools. He never tried to fix anything, and he despaired of men who tried to explain to him what had gone wrong with the washing machine or the radiator.

I remember coming on him getting particularly exasperated on the phone one day. "Look," he was saying. "I only want to know two things from you: when will you fix it, and how much will it cost?"

Similarly, it always surprised me that he could remember verbatim the definition of a bill of exchange, or the words of the theft act 1978, but that he was unable to remember the name of the central character of a film ten minutes after it had started.

Often he would demand "Who's that? Who's that?"

"It's the hero, dad," we would say. "you just saw him."

"Well," he would say, "I don't know who he is."

And he was always quick-humoured, too - when my cousin Sara Creed married Perry Hope, for example, he wrote to them, congratulating them on a second marriage which was a triumph of Hope over experience.

"he just couldn't resist it," my mum said.

He could be genial and expansive, and was very good company at parties when he put his mind to it, but he often did not feel the need to do so. He was self-contained. Internally referenced. Happy in his own company.

There wasn't any side to my father. He was honest to a T. He never said anything he didn't think, and rarely refrained from saying what he did.

In his latter years he was, transparently, a very happy man. I felt - although we never talked of it - that here was a man who had set himself certain goals in life, and achieved them, and was now enjoying what he'd built.

His was a good life, and a life well-lived.

I've been really struck by how many lives he touched, and how many people have written to us to say how much he mattered to them. One of them said that he would have looked back on his life as a job well done. And I think that's right.

I don't know whether it was his goal to have lots of sons and daughters, but he certainly achieved it, and at times, particularly after a hard day at the office, I think he found it hard to come home to a house full of squabbling kids. But he went at it with the same conscientiousness he applied to everything else. He spent hours explaining English, maths and reasoning, mostly patiently, to all of us. He tipp-exed out all the commas and full stops in Peter and Jane books to help us learn how to punctuate, and he would ambush us with questions about the times tables. It took Rachel years to learn 7 x 8 in particular, but she proudly informed me this morning that it was 56.

As we grew older, he adopted a more laissez-faire school of parenting. I rang up one time from university and mentioned, apologetically, that I hadn't been in touch for a while.

"I don't need to talk to you," my dad said. "I just need to know you're alright. And that you don't need any money. Would you like to talk to your mother?"

On his 70th birthday, we all travelled down to Wales, he and my mum, us four kids and our then girlfriends, now our wives. We ate and drank and laughed, and I'm very glad that we had that one last weekend together as a family, untroubled in the sun.

Mostly, though, my dad was just solid. In my entire life, I have never once known him to be late to an appointment or forget an obligation. And he was wholly unwavering in his devotion to my mother, who he loved more than he could ever put into words.

He was a rock, in short, on which we could build our whole world, and it has seemed strange, now, to have that foundation transformed to shifting sands.

My dad was a great father and a good man, and I will miss him all the rest of my days.