

My Dad, Ron Ainsworth, was one of the best men I ever met.

He grew up in Southport, where he met three men who were to be some of his closest friends throughout his life - Roger, Eric and Geoff - who are here today. He lived with his sister Doreen and his parents, and he enjoyed himself hiking and cycling all over the countryside.

It's safe to say, I think, that dad didn't take to school, school didn't really take to him either, and he left aged 16 with only 2 O levels. He decided to look for jobs, and he wrote to Martin's Bank, informing them he was coming in for an interview. Despite his presumption, or maybe because of it he got the job.

Two years later, it became part of Barclays Bank, and that was where he remained for 40 years. He rose over that time from making tea to Assistant Company Secretary, which I understand is very important but I have no idea what it is. Whenever we asked Dad about it, he would always say that he didn't know either.

In his early 30s he met mum, when they were both studying at the Open University. He thought she was a bit of alright, and wanted to impress her. So as with everything else in his life he planned out carefully what needed to be done. At the time he had a rather nice sports car, a Triumph Spitfire. So after work he took the train for an hour from London to his home in Chingford, so he could pick up the car and drive an hour back into London to the University. He did this every week until one day the opportunity came to casually offer her a drive home after class. It must have worked because 9 months later they were married and they were together for 40 years since. At the wedding dad wore a rather natty plum-coloured suit, which might be the last daring piece of clothing he ever wore. Eventually they got their degrees, and mum featured in the local paper. Her picture ran underneath the headline "Hubby was a bonus".

Soon he had to give up that Spitfire and buy a more practical car because they started producing children pretty rapidly, and ended up with the four of us. He was happy with us, I think, but he always missed that Spitfire.

## Family

He loved his family.

In his typical practical manner, he left various instructions for what to do after he was gone. He left some about the funeral. Two jolly hymns, he said, and any eulogy to be given by my children.

From as far back as I can remember he wanted to make sure we were all provided for, that we got a good education and were always able to look after ourselves. He valued stability very highly. I suspect that's a result of growing up after the 2<sup>nd</sup> world war, with rationing and the times as they were. As far as he was concerned we should be able to do anything we wanted in life, as long as that was to be an accountant or a lawyer. He didn't mind which. I don't think he ever understood why none of us followed this incredibly sensible and very obvious advice.

He loved mum more than anything else. Don't think my grandma Robin really understood Dad, they were very, very different people. She loved drama in her life, and he abhorred it. But as far as she was concerned he was alright, because he was clearly besotted with mum.

## Plain speaking

He didn't mince his words. About 6 months ago we had someone at the house to give a quote for installing a through floor lift for the wheelchair. Dad asked how difficult it would be to get rid of the lift again when it wasn't needed any more. Rod was unsure what to make of this, and asked – “do you mean if you move out”. Dad said “No – I mean when I'm dead.” Poor Rod, he didn't know quite what to do with himself.

He remained extremely fit up to his 70th birthday. When asked what his secret was, he always replied with the same rule: Everything in moderation and no sticky toffee pudding. People react very strongly to this rule. They feel cheated by it. Despite being allowed any other food in the world they cry out “What! No sticky toffee pudding!” It's all things that are bad Dad would explain – it's sticky, it's toffee and it's pudding. Dad told me this rule with such conviction that I've always stuck to it. After all, I assumed it this was wisdom that had been passed down through the Ainsworth family from generation to generation. So I've never eaten sticky toffee pudding. Then about three years ago, I found out it was something he'd invented, and that before that he'd eaten some sticky toffee pudding himself. I was devastated.

## Emotions

He never liked to discuss emotions. He couldn't see why on earth you would discuss what was going on in your head with someone else.

I was talking with Matt and Bobby the other night, and they said one time they were visiting and he told them that Rachel was coming home. You could see he was proud and happy - his whole face lit up. "That'll be nice" Matt said. "Mmph" was his only reply.

When we were younger he often lost his temper, but never for more than an hour. Even if he realised he was wrong (which he only admitted to 23 times in his life – mum kept a list), then he'd never say so – he'd just start a conversation again a little while later.

Started thinking a couple of months ago – you see in movies, and read in books. Wish I'd said such and such a thing to my dad before he died. Well – I think we were alright me and Dad. There were a couple of things that I thought about telling him. Like that he was a good Dad, and that I loved him. But he was already in enough pain because of MND, it didn't seem fair to put him through any more. I think he knew we were ok.

He wanted to tell the carers – Jamie and Anne – that he thought they were fantastic. Which they were! But that was a bit much to do, so he got mum to tell them for him.

## MND

When someone dies suddenly it's like a punch straight between the eyes. For us, MND was more like being pinned down, sat on and gradually crushed with large rocks.

But Dad gave us a Master class in how to die. I rarely heard him complain, despite the fact that by the end he could only shake his head, and move one hand a little. It wasn't until the last couple of weeks that he said to mum "I'm fed up."

He was so selfless, all the way to the end. He'd be sat there, with the ventilator on, struggling to breathe. He'd shake his head to get mum's attention. She'd go over, take off the ventilator, and lean in close so that she could hear him whisper . . . "Tell the parish council that they shouldn't hand the car park to the village hall committee."

Stuart's going to say some thank yous later, but I want to give my personal thanks to the carers – especially Jamie and Anne, the district nurses and to everyone in Sheering who's helped out – particularly Anne, Lyn and Lynda who have done more favours than you should be allowed to ask, and never seemed to feel that they'd done enough. I also want to say publicly how proud I am of mum. She worked herself to the bone trying to keep him as comfortable as possible. You did a good job mum.

## Missing him

Dad was a good man, an honourable man. He's quite a role model to live up to.

I'm going to miss him.

I'm going to miss our very short phone conversations. "I'll go get your mother."

I'm going to miss him leaving meals while everyone else was still talking.

I'm going to miss our incredibly firm handshakes, which Rachel informed me contained all of his love

I'm going to miss how much he cared, and how he always did what he thought was right. However hard it was, or whatever the hell anybody else thought.

One of his other instructions for after he was gone was to bury him next to Hamid. And we are doing. And if there is a heaven, then right now there are 2 very special men debating crossword clues up there.