



Celebrating the Life of

Lester Bradley Simms
'Les'

9th December 1924 – 14th February 2017

Parndon Wood Crematorium
Thursday, 2nd March 2017 at 4.45 p.m.

Conducted by
Steve Stacey - Civil Celebrant

Steve Stacey

CIVIL FUNERAL CELEBRANT

www.funeralcelebrancy.com

T: 01438 362061 M: 07775 645735

E: steve@funeralcelebrancy.com

10 CHELLS LANE | STEVENAGE | HERTS | SG27AA

Script copies:

Additional printed & bound copies available

PDF version FOC please e-mail

Celebrating the Life of

Les

Entrance Music

Puccini: O Soave Fanciulla (La Boheme) –
Pavarotti & Mirella Freni - The Berlin Philharmonic

Welcome & Introduction

Welcome here today as we meet to celebrate Lester's life, to pay our respects to him and of course to comfort and support each other in our loss.

We meet to share our memories of him, our stories about him, our love for him and to share our grief at losing him.

Les was one of life's real characters. He was a colourful individual – of course, he loved the colour orange.

He was a gentleman in every sense of the word. He was a private man who kept his emotions to himself.

He was charismatic, he'd talk to anyone – he treated everyone the same, they were always equals.

Perhaps he treated women differently – he did like the women. His family sees a poignant reminder of that on the date that he died – it was Valentine's Day!

He had a great sense of humour and could be the life and soul of the party. He was great at cracking jokes – they were usually very near the knuckle!

Wherever he was and wherever he went, he would be the 'clown in the round'.

There was an element of Peter Pan about him. He always looked much younger than he was. He was always very young at heart and definitely believed that he would never die!

He wouldn't get a travel pass because it meant admitting his age. He never shared his age willingly, in fact, he absolutely hated people knowing his age. He didn't even tell Holly's mum until a few days before they were married!

He could be stubborn at times – in his eyes, there were two ways of doing things – his way or the wrong way. He was someone who was always encouraging people to better themselves. He'd tell them how to do it ... and of course, expected them to do it his way.

He was a proud and independent man – he never wanted to be a burden. He was a fighter to the very end of his life – he was determined to go out kicking and fighting!

Les was proud of his family. They are his greatest achievement.

Our hearts go out to his children. Cheryl, Judy, Chris and Holly have lost the cornerstone of their family. His grandchildren, Aaron, Gary and Brad have lost a remarkable grandad. Barnaby, his great grandson, will grow up hearing wonderful stories about him.

His family are the legacy that he leaves behind, a living and growing memorial to him. He will always be a part of them in everything they do in life.

Andrea and Rachel have lost an important person in their lives.

Each one of you has lost a special part of your own life too.

There is never a good time to die or a good way to die. We want the people that we love to be with us always, happy and healthy.

His passing is a reminder that like all living things, we're only here for a moment. That moment is never long enough for those who love us.

Our service for Les has been created by his family so that we can celebrate his life and everything that he leaves behind, rather than simply focus on our loss.

I hope that as we go through the service, you feel that it reflects, respects and honours the Les that you knew and loved.

Tributes

Les got on with everyone, whatever their age. His 11 year old neighbour treated him as a grandad. Elspeth has written a poem to share today.

“On rainy days when the sky grows dark
You light up my life where the world is apart.
We will miss you forever, but you won't be gone
because deep in my heart you are still going strong”

Holly has chosen some words that are a reminder that we never lose the ones we love.

“Pooh Bear... What if someday there came a tomorrow when we were apart?” asked Christopher Robin

“As long as we're apart together we shall certainly be fine.” said Pooh

“Yes, yes of course. But if we weren't together. If I were... somewhere else?” replied Christopher

“Oh, but you really couldn’t be, because I would be quite lost without you. Who would I call on those days when I’m just not strong enough? Or brave enough? And, who would I ask for advice when I didn’t know which way to turn?” asked Pooh.

Christopher sighed. “Oh pooh. If ever there’s a tomorrow where we’re not together, there’s something you must remember. You’re braver than you believe, and stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think. But the most important thing is... Even if we’re apart, I will always be with you. I will always be with you.”

Les moved many times in his life. He was a proud resident of Cutlers Green, Thaxted and in those years in the village, he finally found somewhere to call “home”. Our hymn this afternoon held a special meaning to him. It was written in his beloved Thaxted.

His family call the song simply, Thaxted.

Hymn: I Vow To Thee, My Country

I vow to thee, my country, all earthly things above,
Entire and whole and perfect, the service of my love:
The love that asks no questions, the love that stands the test,
That lays upon the altar the dearest and the best;
The love that never falters, the love that pays the price,
The love that makes undaunted the final sacrifice.

And there’s another country, I’ve heard of long ago,
Most dear to them that love her, most great to them that know;
We may not count her armies, we may not see her King;
Her fortress is a faithful heart, her pride is suffering;
And soul by soul and silently her shining bounds increase,
And her ways are ways of gentleness and all her paths are peace.

Lester's Story

Lester Bradley, Les, was born on the 9th December 1924 in Barons Court, Kensington to Mary and Royston Simms. His father was an Army Officer. He was joined by his brother Eric in 1930.

He had a difficult and unsettled childhood and the family moved often during those early years. This had a lasting effect on him and throughout his life, he never liked to leave his house for long periods.

His Aunt Stella and Uncle Ernest took the boys under their wing. They made sure that Lester had proper schooling and provided him with some years of education at Haileybury, Hertfordshire from 1938 to 1940.

By then, his father was running a garage and Lester followed in his footsteps. His father was something of a wheeler dealer and Lester took after him in that way too.

In 1944, Lester enlisted in the RAF and to share some of his life from those days, I am pleased that his good friend, George Welton is here today.

A Tribute to Lester

My name is John Welton. I was made an Honorary Life Member of the 106 Squadron Association by Lester and fellow veterans a few years ago. It is a great honour for me to speak on behalf of the Squadron in tribute to Lester.

Lester was very passionate about the Association, its history and surviving veterans.

When our previous Chairman Derek Thomas died suddenly about 5 years ago, Lester stepped up to the plate. The reunions and Association may have ceased without Lester's enthusiasm and dedication.

He would often ring veterans as far afield as Scotland and Canada, who were too frail to attend our reunions. Lester contacted veterans and me on Xmas Day.

Lester had happy and sad times in the RAF.

Lester lost two of his best pals during these times, which I know affected him greatly.

Lester started training at RAF Metherringham in 1944 as a trainee pilot.

In Lester's own words...

“The few months I spent at 106 Squadron have kept strange and deep feelings of affection inside me – partly because of what I saw and experiences I had there.

Rear Gunner Vic Bowley and I became very good friends. We met in the Royal Oak pub in Martin and spent too many evenings together there. I can remember the old pine furniture and the beer coming in from another room in jugs and the skittles!

We also were befriended by the Land Army Girls at their hostel nearby. They cooked us some super meals.

Even after I was posted away, Vic and I corresponded until he was lost flying Lancaster ZNO over Stuttgart on August 28th. The only 106 aircraft of 18 that set off from Metheringham that night. I was at senior flying training school in Bulawayo, Rhodesia when I heard the bad news. Sadly, I had just received a letter from him. “

Sadly, Lester lost another of his best pals during training whilst in Rhodesia, when a wing fell off during takeoff. Lester had just completed a solo flight in the same aircraft!

Lester says “ I often wondered many times how good I would have been in action, yet strangely, I feel that my memories and closeness to 106 Squadron would have really helped to see me through. “

After the war, Lester embarked on a Bomb Disposal career and his speed of foot as an ex-rugby wing three quarter, allowed him to finish his RAF years unscathed, when he heard the delayed action fuse ignite on a large un-exploded item that he was dealing with alone at the time!!

Lester left the RAF in 1949.

We had some lovely times with Lester at our 106 reunions and we will miss his wicked sense of humour!

We at 106 Squadron, together with the Friends of Metheringham Airfield, will never forget our dear friend Lester and in his honour we will always fly the flag for 106 Squadron.

When he returned to Civvy Street, he went on to working in the fruit market in Covent Garden before being a driver for Coca Cola.

He then began selling car parts on the road becoming the sole UK distributor of NGK spark plugs where he worked closely with the Formula 1 team, Lotus during their glory years, developing relationships with many motorsport legends including Gunnar Nilsson, Ronnie Peterson and Mario Andretti.

He built a successful business and was proud to have driven the first Toyota Corolla saloon off the boat into England.

When his time with NGK was over, Lester turned a hobby into his business, opening an art gallery in Newport, Essex – Gallery Appenzell. His passion for art and antiques turned into a job and he enjoyed buying and selling a variety of pieces.

As if Lester's life was not exciting enough, along the way he had four children – Cheryl, Judy, Chris and Holly. He also had 3 grandsons – Gary, Bradley and Arron and he recently became a great-grandfather to Barnaby.

He enjoyed his sport. He was always a keen Tottenham supporter. He liked golf, snooker, tennis, cricket and darts. He was very competitive at whatever he tried.

He loved the outdoors. He enjoyed the sun and nature generally. A favourite retreat was his holiday cottage at Nether Phawhope in the beautiful Ettrick Valley.

Perhaps it was unsurprising that he liked cottage style living. His homes were full of character and he surrounded himself with things that he collected.

His golf was a passion. He enjoyed playing in Mallorca with the Mallorca 12.

The Mallorca 12 were a group of 12 lads who would go there every year for twenty years. It was a standing joke that Les would sleep on the balcony after the other guys moved his bed there.

He played every Wednesday in the UK too. He was a member of Bishops Stortford Golf Club for more than 50 years and had the nickname Simmo there.

He enjoyed trips abroad. He loved exploring places that were generally off the beaten track. They would be small, quaint villages, full of character where he could bond with the locals, enjoy local food and taste the local alcoholic drinks!

He loved a village in Switzerland called Appenzell – Andrea came from there and Chris lived there for 13 years.

Chris remembers that his dad loved the long drive from the UK through France to Switzerland. They would stop at canals on the way and have a picnic of baguettes with cheese, olives and tomatoes. Les would have his glass of wine and Chris would make do with an Orangina!

He finally retired about 25 years ago. He lived at the Old Cottage in Thaxted for about 20 years. It was a very special place to him. It was paradise for him and a museum for all of his treasures. One special treasure was his teddy, Bonzo – that lived in his bedroom – he had another in his car!

He loved things that were old and had character. He never got to grips with modern technology though, despite his family trying to help him. Strange when, according to Les, he was good at everything!

One thing that he was good at was wheeler dealing. At the Golf Club he was notorious for always looking to do a deal on on the food and drink.

His son, Chris runs his own company specialising in selling adult toys. Some of the toys can be quite outrageous and Les didn't come over as appreciative of what Chris was doing. However, Chris had built up a huge stock of samples that were opened but never handled and kept them at the Old Cottage.

Les asked his son what he was going to do with them. When the answer was that nothing could be done and that they would be dumped, Les changed his view of them.

He did no more than load them in his car and drive off to a local market in Bishops Stortford and sold the lot from the back of his vehicle in 2 hours.

He loved his cottage style garden and watching the many varieties of birds that shared it with him. His pond, with its Koi Carp was a very special feature.

He liked dogs, but only if they belonged to someone else. He liked parrots too. He had one called Mickey, who hated men – he gave Harvey, his second parrot to Judy.

Perhaps one secret of his longevity and youthful looks was the fact that he was a strict pescatarian. He loved his own his own creations of food and fresh fish. He was very creative and loved spicy food.

He had an eclectic taste in music – he was a lover of opera and classical music, Spanish guitar music ND Michael Jackson. He did appreciate anything with a good tune – he had a set of bongos that he kept at home to play along to a song with a good rhythm. He didn't stop there – he played the spoons and washboard as well.

He was fascinated with books and films about World War 2. Anything about aviation, Bomber Command and Lancaster Bombers would get his attention. He enjoyed watching Sport, Art and Music shows beside and would always watch a good classic western.

He enjoyed the company of family and of friends and would host get-togethers at home.

After suffering from chest infections for many years, in 2016 Lester was told that he had Idiopathic Pulmonary Fibrosis. It was a difficult time for him and those closest to him as he became unable to do so many of the things that he loved.

Showing his true strength and character, he was determined to remain independent and he managed to remain in his beloved home until February 2nd 2017, when he was taken into Broomfield Hospital. He passed away peacefully in the early hours of February 14th and will be dearly missed by many.

I hope that you can take comfort in the fact that he had a good life and a life he enjoyed. He leaves behind that wonderful legacy of family, friends and some great memories.

I'd like you to think about the things that you've heard about him today. Think about your own memories and how good it was to have him as part of your life - those memories will be every bit as special and unique as he was. No two of you will have exactly the same memory either.

Remember the times that you spent with him, times that you had a laugh with him, things you did together, perhaps something that he taught you.

Les was someone who made people smile – Our next piece of music is a reminder, if one were needed, to keep smiling at his memory.

Music for Reflection
Smile – Michael Jackson

Quiet Reflection

We're going to spend a moment or two in silence. Try to think of a special memory. There are so many good things to recall. I hope that whatever you think of does make you smile as you remember.

If you have faith you could use the time to say your own private prayer for him.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses,

As we forgive those who trespass against us;

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory,

For ever and ever. Amen

The Committal

Sadly Les's journey with us here has now ended. He is free of all of the cares of the world, free of all of the troubles of the world. He is at total peace.

Lester...

To everything there is a season

A time to be born and a time to die.

We have remembered your life with love and thanks.

We are glad that we shared our lives with you.

We will cherish all of the good things that you brought into our lives.

We will remember your character and your personality,

Your love of fun and your company,

The wonderful things that you did with us

And the happy time that we spent together.

We commit the memory of you to our hearts and minds.

With love and tenderness, we leave you in peace.

Closing Words

Those we love don't go away,
They walk beside us every day,
Unseen, unheard, but always near,
Still loved, still missed and very dear.

Whatever your faith, it is in remembering that we live on in others.

We never lose the people we love. Be thankful that Les was and still is a part of your life. For his family, he will always be a part of them, always be with them.

Enjoy sharing your memories of him with each other.

After the service you are all invited to Bishops Stortford Golf Club.

When you get there enjoy reminiscing about Les. Enjoy laughing at stories about him. Remember that it was a favourite place to be for him and I'm sure that if he were with you, he would be laughing loudest and longest.

There's nothing wrong with that – he would have expected nothing less. Perhaps he'd appreciate these words being shared today.

Feel No Guilt In Laughter

Feel no guilt in laughter, I know how much you care.
Feel no sorrow in a smile that I am not here to share.
You cannot grieve forever; I would not want you to.
I'd hope that you could carry on the way you always do.
So, talk about the good times
and the way we showed we cared,
The days we spent together, all the happiness we shared.
Let memories surround you, a word someone may say
Will suddenly recapture a time, an hour, a day,
That brings me back as clearly as though I am still here,
And fills you with the feeling that I am always very near.
For if you keep those moments, we will never be apart
And I will live forever locked safely within your heart.

Les had his own way of saying goodbye. He might say “Adios” – there again, he might simply say... “sod off!”

He liked an audience – please – put your hands together for a great character... Lester.

Exit Music

A Day In The Life – The Beatles