

Dad was born on 20 October 1938 at home in School Road in Crookes. Four years later, my Auntie Pam was born, my dad's younger sister and fourteen years after dad his brother, my Uncle Stuart was born.

Dad was a challenging child, quite mischievous really. Something he maintained throughout his whole life, right to the very end as I'm sure many of you have had first-hand experience. This often resulted in a good hiding from his mum, Grandma Gray, who at 4ft 11 and 7 stone, was a formidable woman!

One of dad's favourite tricks when he was a young lad with his mates was to visit Sheffield's Western Park museum where they would make sure they got the attention of the guard. This then became a game – as my dad and his mates knew the guard would follow them wherever they went. They would go as fast as they could up and down stairs, in every room, then to walk as slowly as they could up and down stairs and in each of the rooms again see how annoyed the guard could get. I think it probably worked!

Other things dad often did included breaking people's windows with his football or his cricket ball. This usually ended up with dad knocking on their door, asking for his ball back, to which the question would often come "Where is it?" "In your front room mister, my dad will be round later to repair your window!", which usually resulted in another hiding from his mum and his dad having to get his work bag out.

Dad was also a member of the Boys Brigade. He was the Sheffield Bugle champion during his time in the brigade, receiving a letter of congratulations from his tutor, the bugler who had sounded the end of the Great War on the western front. I have that letter and am very proud of it.

He was also a good boxer as a boy. One story mum told us was when he was doing boxing in physical education in school – the teacher who was very unpopular with all the boys invited dad to try and hit him saying “go on Gray try and hit me”. Not realising dad was a left-hander the teacher ducked, and dad duly obliged catching him with a great left-hook, knocking him straight off his feet. This made dad the class hero for a while.

Dad left school at the age of 15. He did various jobs including working in the steel works. He also worked in Cockayne’s department store and Stewart & Stewart department store in Sheffield.

In October 1957, dad got his call up to national service. After having a discussion with his dad who strongly advised him to do anything other than join the Coldstream Guards, dad went to the recruitment office and signed up to the Coldstream guards! Despite his mischievous nature this was not him rebelling, this was as a result of the recruiting officer advising him they were the best route into the police, which had been dad’s burning ambition since the age of four.

During his time in the Coldstream Guards, he became the batman to the Commanding Officer. As part of that role when the Commanding Officer entertained Field Marshall Montgomery, dad served his food. Apparently at the end of the meal, Monty gave dad a 10 shilling tip and said “that’s as good a service as I’ve ever had!”

Dad left the Guards in October 1959 and immediately joined the police. Two weeks after starting his police training at Harrogate, dad was home for the weekend when he met my mum, Kathleen at the Cutler’s Hall during a dance. This was the result of a half a crown bet with his mate that he could get a date

“with that blonde over there!” After dancing with her, they arranged to have a date the following week and dad was to meet her off the bus. When after four minutes, dad hadn’t arrived, mum decided to go to the dance with her friends instead. Sometime later in the night, mum’s friend said to her “there’s somebody over there that wants to talk to you”. Dad was abject in his apology, claiming he’d only just got home from police training in Harrogate 10 minutes before they were due to meet. This was, of course, a lie which was confirmed by dad’s mum a few weeks later when mum went for tea. Grandma told mum he’d been home all afternoon and had been chatting with his dad. I think the line was something like “come on Michael, you’ll be late for that girl” to which he replied “it will be alright”. After being together for 55 years, I suppose he was right.

After completing his training in Harrogate, dad started the adventure he called the police and his first role was as a beat bobby at Hammerton Road in Hillsborough. Five years after later he went to Attercliffe and this is where the fun began. Dad’s mischief and wicked sense of humour was never far from the surface. For example, on finding a tandem with his mate when on night shift doing the beat, they needed to return the tandem to the police station as lost property. Despite being 5ft 11, dad didn’t have a very big head – he had quite a small helmet size. His colleague, however, was the opposite, a giant of a man who had a very large head. In order to get the tandem back to the station, they decided the best way was to ride. But, thought this would be much more fun if they swapped helmets! Whilst riding down Attercliffe common, with dad sat at the back in a helmet covering his eyes and his mate riding on the front wearing dad’s helmet perched on the top of his head, they almost caused a road traffic accident as a lorry driver who drove past nearly crashed as he saw Laurel and Hardy on their tandem!

On another occasion dad was doing a beat on a miserable night. He decided to have a rest, so tried a few car doors until he found one open, where he climbed into the back seat for five minutes. You can imagine the horror of the poor steelworker who got into his car at 5.00am in the dark and started to drive, only to be tapped on the shoulder by a police officer asking him if he'd mind letting him out. I think the poor chap nearly had a heart attack.

In 1969, he joined the CID as a plain clothes police officer where he found his real vocation in life. Dad loved this role and excelled in many ways, never again returning to uniform. He then joined No 3, Regional Crime Squad in 1976 for his 2 year attachment. Dad did so well in the Regional Crime Squad, he was kept on until 1980, 4 years later, working on many serious cases including key investigations such as the Yorkshire Ripper case. His last role in the police was a store detective until 1982 up until he retired.

Dad was a bloody good copper. At the time he left in 1982, he'd been awarded 13 commendations from the Chief Constable. This in itself is an incredible achievement and I believe was the highest number of commendations in the whole force at the time of his retirement. Of these commendations, the two he was most proud of were when he saved people's lives. He was quite rightly exceptionally proud of these and this makes my chest burst with pride whenever I think about it.

After retiring from the police dad did a number of jobs, mainly in sales. For the last 8 years before retiring he was the general manager for N&A windows, a job he thoroughly enjoyed. Although I believe after removing all the dead wood from the sales department the managing directors used to joke with each other not to go into the office in case Michael sacked them!

Dad married mum, Kathleen, on 21 October 1961. My eldest brother Andrew was born in 1963. Richard was born in 1965, closely followed by me and finally my sister Joanna in 1972. Thank goodness they had a girl when they did as they were determined to keep going until they got one.

Dad was exceptionally proud of his family – every single one of them. He was also the most generous man I have ever met and would quite gladly give us everything he had.

We didn't have a lot of money when we were growing up on a police wage, so holidays involved going to Bridlington and then evolved to camping holidays. Dad took on the role as chef when camping, and armed with the family's pressure cooker, would cook up an amazing meal every day as long as it was all in stew!

The only thing that dad wasn't always generous with was food when he was hungry. I recall a time when we were on holiday in Bridlington and as a treat, we went to the chip shop where we had chips and whatever we wanted as long as it was a sausage! Richard wasn't awfully fond of sausages so after a while, he offered it to mum. Before mum could even answer, dad had reached across three of us, grabbed the sausage and had eaten it!

Last year, on the WI trip to Bridlington, mum and dad sat on that same wall eating chips and laughing about the sausage incident.

Despite being extremely proud of his career as a police officer, dad was more proud of the whole of his family, especially his wife, his children, his son and daughter in laws, his grandchildren and great grandchildren, more proud than anything else he had achieved in his life.

In later life, dad was an active member of the church here at St Saviours, where he was a church warden and also a dab hand at ringing the church bell along with his wicked sense of humour keeping the vicar and many of the congregation on their toes.

My dad was brave and he was strong. He fought his illness in such an inspirational way. He was generous and would give you anything. He was loving and kind. He was funny and charming. He was my hero. He was Andrew's hero, Richard's hero, and Joanna's hero, and what a hero to have.

I asked my mum last night how she would like to remember dad. This is a really difficult question to answer, after 53 years of marriage and 55 years of being together. She said Dad made her laugh, like nobody else could make her laugh, from the day she met him until the day he died he could always make her laugh. Even when she wanted to kill him and in the middle of an argument, he still had the ability to completely disarm her by saying something funny.

Mum said dad made her laugh like no one else, which quite frankly came as a real surprise to me because I thought I was the funniest person in the family.

God bless you dad!!

Jon Gray