

10 February 2011

TRIBUTE TO BRIAN

I would like to **welcome** you as **Brian** would have wished "Good afternoon, how very NICE of you to be here".

When Brian asked if I would speak at his service he told me some of the things he would like me to say including a 'potted history'. He said not too long and don't make it boring. He gave strict instructions don't mumble, speak clearly and stand close enough to the microphone. I have my orders. I must do my best.

Brian was born in Fyfield near Abingdon. With his ever present sense of humour he recently described his birthplace as a one-up one-down cottage with a bucket and chuck-it loo at the bottom of a very long garden.

With the arrival of myself and sister Christine the family outgrew the little cottage, and in 1947 moved to a bigger house in Littleworth, which much to Brian's great relief, had the luxury of a flush toilet.

Brian started school in Fyfield, completed his junior years at Littleworth then moved to the senior school in Faringdon.

During those formative years he developed an interest in and love of all things mechanical, clockwork and motorised. His interest was encouraged and nurtured by his father Ned. Anything with nuts, bolts, cogs, wheels or springs was taken apart on the kitchen table and meticulously put back together. Usually with some success. Always at his father's side he learned first hand about what goes on under the bonnet of a car. He fell in love with the internal combustion engine.

On leaving school Brian, affectionately known as Budgie, joined Eagle Motors, Faringdon as an apprentice motor mechanic. In 1960, at the age of 21, after five years hard work, study and tuition he qualified. He became a highly respected and valued member of staff, popular with work colleagues and customers alike.

In 1960 the Ministry of Transport introduced vehicle testing. With his qualifications safely under his belt Brian conducted his first MOT inspection.

He remained with Eagle Motors until it ceased trading in 1971, then with a friend set up a vehicle repair business in Park Road, Faringdon. To Brian the garage was more than a place of work. It was his baby, his pleasure and his passion.

He soon became sole proprietor trading as Brian Burgess Garage. He laughingly described himself as 'BRIAN BURGESS AUTOMOBILE ENGINEER TO THE GENTRY AND OTHERS'.

Most of us came in the 'others' category but we all received the same warm, smiling welcome and benefited from his expertise.

One of his work colleagues told me, when Brian looked at an engine he saw it as living and breathing. By listening to it he instantly knew what was wrong and what needed doing. There was never the need to read a manual. His knowledge was instinctive. He was doing what he was born to do.

His customers were unfailingly loyal, some having been with him since his Eagle Motors days. They brought not only **their own** vehicles to Brian but also those of their children, and in some cases their grandchildren.

Having a vehicle repaired by Brian was not solely a business transaction. One customer, representative of many, told me whenever she collected her car she allowed an extra 20 minutes to enjoy Brian's stories, humour and laughter.

She said he brightened the dullest of days.

He worked and smiled his way through nearly 40 years at the garage.

He considered retirement but his daily involvement with cars, attachment to a business he had built from scratch and the close bond and great affection he felt for his work colleagues pushed those thoughts to the back of his mind until 2005 when ownership of the garage passed to M N V Services.

Still not ready to hang up his spanners Brian worked part time in an advisory and consultancy capacity. He continued taking responsibility for MOT inspections.

Brian had an ambition. He wanted to achieve 50 years as an MOT examiner. He fulfilled his ambition last year. More than that he was one of the oldest and longest serving examiners in the country, a record of which he was justly proud.

Brian never did retire.

Almost every day throughout his illness, with his trademark smile and optimism, he said "I'm hoping to go to work tomorrow". Sadly that was not to be.

This brief outline of Brian's early years and work-life does nothing to reflect his out-going, sociable character, larger than life personality, happiness, sense of humour and booming voice that was never raised in anger.

In his leisure time Brian had great pleasure and satisfaction restoring his classic cars.

Once in pristine condition he enjoyed the excitement of taking them to driver club meetings and rallies where he mingled with like-minded people and talk revolved around such things as gaskets, pistons and oil pressure.

Brian avidly followed Formula 1 motor racing. When he was younger he attended many Grand Prix meetings. In recent years he preferred to avoid the traffic queues by watching on TV from the comfort of his armchair.

Brian and Betty were well travelled both in this country and abroad. No matter how many beautiful countries and places he visited Brian had no wish to live anywhere except here in Faringdon. He took pride in the knowledge five generations of his family have lived and worked in or near the town. He liked having roots. It was important to him to see and keep in touch with old friends as well as his family.

Brian had an innate love of music. Not only did he HEAR music he FELT it, and was often moved to tears, especially by opera. He chose the hymns we will sing and the two songs we will listen to during this service.

He was an avid reader with a wide taste in literature including the classics, Dickens being one of his favourites. Brian also enjoyed reading biographies, not surprising considering his interest in other people and their lives.

He was more than a 'people person'. Brian **enjoyed** people. He had an amazing capacity to communicate with and put a smile on the face of everyone he met. Family member, friend, work colleague, casual acquaintance or complete stranger, he shared his enthusiasm for life with us all. Everyone felt better for having spent time in his company.

On many occasions his outgoing personality and smiling face served him well. For example, on returning from a holiday or weekend away with Betty he often expressed disappointment that their room was the size of a broom cupboard with a panoramic view of the dustbins.

He found a solution to the problem. When booking into an hotel he would smile and politely say to the receptionist "Hello my dear, may we have the worst room in the hotel please? It's the one we **usually** get so we won't be disappointed".

His relaxed manner and winning smile meant, as if by magic, room numbers were juggled. Broom cupboards and views of dustbins became a thing of the past.

Another example. A journalist friend wrote "I remember Brian's friendly face enabling him to accompany me to functions as my newspaper photographer although he had no camera. I remember him talking our way into the Pits at Silverstone although we had no passes".

I would like to read you some **more** of the **many** tributes we have received -

A truly great character who made a lot of lives better just by being.

A classic car enthusiast and owner he was himself a classic.

Budgie was unique.

When walking into a room Brian had the ability to instantly change the atmosphere. Just by being present he made an average evening a special occasion.

A great guy. One of Faringdon's legends.

A man among men. Brian was truly a 'one-off'. He cannot and will not be replaced.

Betty asked me to say she has received over 200 cards and letters. Heartfelt thanks.

Brian met Betty on a blind date. In true Mills and Boone style it was love at first sight for them both. They became a double act that lasted 48 years.

After their marriage they lived for a short while with Betty's parents who took Brian into their home and into their hearts. Betty's brother and sister, Pat and Anne, loved Brian dearly, they welcomed him into their families and made him one of their own.

When their daughter Shelly arrived Brian and Betty's family was complete.

They lived in Longcot for a few years before moving to their bungalow in Faringdon which remains the family home.

Brian's dream was to win the lottery and buy a BIG house. I have to tell you no mansion or castle could have held more love than that shared by Brian, Betty and Shelly in the bungalow.

Brian, Christine and myself grew up from being childhood playmates to adult friends. Brian's love and friendship extended to include our husbands and our families.

I would like to read this tribute to Brian, written by Christine on behalf of both of us.

Christine's words -

"We have always looked up to, respected, admired and loved our big brother Brian. He leaves a huge gap in our lives never to be replaced.

We will **always** remember the happy times we spent together, holidays, car rallies, family celebrations, the list is endless.

Brian loved all his girls, Eileen and I were privileged to be two of them.

He affectionately called both of us 'Kid Sister'.

Someone so special will never be forgotten, he leaves us with treasured memories".

Brian's legacy is the happiness he brought to so many people.

He **told** me how I should end this tribute. I will now read Brian's **actual** words -

"Thankyou to each and every one of you for being here today.

I'm not ready to leave all you lovely people, but sadly it's time to say goodbye".