

## **KEN – 1932-2010**

We all know Ken. Rude, loud, inconsiderate, self-centred, whingeing, annoying, stubborn and manipulative. He was all these things in abundance. And when it came to holding a grudge... Wow! - many of us have been at the sharp end of his publicly declared vendettas against the person who forgot his Christmas card or birthday! 19<sup>th</sup> May – it's etched on our collective memory.

So - Now that we've got that out of the way ...

He could also be caring, kind, obsessively polite, considerate, very generous, funny, incredibly hard working, dedicated, persistent. 100% honest. He couldn't lie to save his life. He was very gentle with children. He was totally trustworthy.

It seems that when God was dishing out personality traits, he gave Ken double portions of everything. That might also explain his huge appetite!

First - a brief sketch of his life of 78 years.

Ken Stickley was born in 1932 – in number one Block Green Faringdon – opposite the Fire Station – as the youngest of three children. Ken had an older brother Richard who was killed in France in 1944 – and an older sister Dorothy who also died when Ken was still young. Richard had a son – John – born after his death – in 1945. John is Ken's nephew and closest living relative – and lives in Stanford in the Vale.

Ken's father who worked at Baker's the Builders in Lechlade Rd - also died when Ken was young. His mother, Violet Emily, remarried another Faringdonian – Bill O'Connell – and became Violet Emily O'Connell. Ken kept his original surname of Stickley.

The story goes that Ken was hit by a lorry when he was 12 – and this explained his condition. But according to John's mum (Ken's sister-in-law) it wasn't that simple. Maybe Ken was already a bit different before the accident.

Anyway. Those were the days of institutions, and Ken was away from home – institutionalised - for most of his teenage years right up to his late twenties.

When he came home to Faringdon at the age of 29, his father who was an electrician at Shrivenham Military College, found him a job with the Civil Service – and Ken was then a loyal and faithful Civil Servant for the next 36 years – right up to when he retired at the age of 65.

There's another story relating to Shrivenham that most of us have heard various versions of. Apparently, when he was about sixty, Ken was made redundant from the college; he then continued to turn up to work because he didn't know any better; and after a few months of this they gave in and put him back on the payroll! It's a great story - but it never happened. Ken was never made redundant from the College. There WAS confusion at one point when facilities and services were privatised and taken out of the Civil Service and moved over to a private contractor. It's quite likely that Ken's

forms took time to be filled in and processed – and his salary was probably delayed for a couple of months.

But what definitely IS true: Ken was an incredibly diligent and hard worker. Ken's boss - Terry Mattingly of Lansdown Rd – who is here at the service – remembers that when there was a high ranking visitor then it was Ken and his wheelbarrow that were given the task of clearing, sweeping & cleaning all the route! On one occasion, after work, he had to dig over the vegetable patch of a top brass officer. Unfortunately, he started off by digging up all the onions!

And what is also true: after 36 years working at the College, Ken was given the mother & father of all retirement send-offs. A big party down the Sergeant's Mess; a photo opportunity with a bevy of five star generals officially wishing him well; a ride on a tank around the Base; and a new TV and video machine as a retirement present.

Ken didn't want to retire. He just wanted to continue to turn up for work – and the College very kindly allowed him to come in on certain days – carefully rationed and slowly scaled back - so that he could ease gradually into his retirement.

But Ken was actually tougher than anyone gave him credit for. By the time he retired in 1997, he had already been living independently - largely looking after himself – for five years. His mother Violet and his step-father Bill had moved to the bungalow in Marlborough Gardens many years before. Bill died first; and his mother died in 1992 after a brief spell in Witney Community Hospital. She was then 93 years old.

We now jump forward ten years – to 2007 and Ken's 75<sup>th</sup> birthday party in the Baptist Church. And what a party it was! He had the magician Peter Wentworth as one of the entertainers, and his all-time favourite band the Wantage Silver Band turned up to play for him. Ken – as we know – loved being the centre of attention – and absolutely loved his 75<sup>th</sup> birthday party. And - I'm sure - being the centre of attention today also meets with his approval!

His 75<sup>th</sup> Party was just three and a half years ago. Unfortunately, recurring hernia problems forced medical intervention and after brief spells in Ferendune, Swindon & Oxford, Ken then spent the last three years of his life at Brooklands Nursing Home in Banbury – where he was well cared for. They've been a difficult three years – and John – Ken's nephew - has asked me to again express how grateful he is and how grateful we all are to the staff at Brooklands for all that they have done for Ken. They couldn't have done more, or been more helpful or caring.

So – that's the brief sketch of Ken's life. Now a bit of anecdotal filling in.

Ken was probably the most ecumenical church-goer ever! It suited him well that Church services didn't overlap so that he could catch at least two services every Sunday morning. And by alternating, he could then cover three communities

every fortnight. But what about the fourth community then? Ah yes! since he'd usually fallen out with one of the four communities, it all worked out rather well! God works in mysterious ways... In the Catholic Church we did need to keep a watchful eye on the pile of newsletters, because Ken made it his mission to take them away to distribute to other Churches! On a number of occasions we had to confiscate them from him – but he didn't mind at all!

And what about his impressive appetite? You soon learnt that even though he was always fastidiously polite, if offered he would never refuse another piece of cake until it was all gone! "D'you want another piece of cake Ken?" There was only one answer. "Yes please, Thank you very much" – and then he would focus on eating until it was finished. He was always a very appreciative guest – and did like most foods. We had him over for Sunday lunch one time – and it was roast chicken. "Is there anything you don't like Ken?" "Roast chicken!". Problem. Think quickly. "D'you like pork Ken?" "Oh yes – I like pork". So - he got the white skinless chicken meat chopped into pork-like chunks and he loved it!

He also loved his letters and his postcards and his Christmas cards – both sending and receiving. HIS Christmas card would often be the first to arrive. He would come round with his remarkably compact little address book – so that you could find the right name & address and then take down his dictation. On one occasion: "Who's the next letter for Ken?" Answer – with a completely straight face: "The next one's for you!" At which point you would find yourself writing to yourself to thank yourself for the birthday shirt. I used to travel a lot around Europe in the 80s – and IF Ken knew I was going somewhere then of course he expected a post card . I set myself a little challenge. How FEW characters were needed for Ken's address – that the postcard would still arrive safely? And I found that I could send Ken a postcard from anywhere in Europe using just eight characters. KEN , SN7, UK

You can't even send the queen a postcard using so few characters! SN7 meant that the postcard would safely arrive at the Faringdon sorting office, and of course KEN was then more than enough for the sorting office staff to know exactly who it was meant for. There could be no other. 167 Marlborough Gardens. One of a kind. Speaking of the Queen – Ken used to write to her regularly – and received responses on no less than three separate occasions from her lady in waiting; in 2000, 2002, and 2007 . And in his files you'll also find responses and signed photographs of - amongst others - Paul O'Grady, Tony Blair and even the Pope! In Faringdon, there's no doubt that if you had a photo of Ken standing next to the Pope, then people would be more likely to say "Who's that bloke standing next to Ken?" than the other way round!

His persistence was also endearing, and worthy of respect! The best raffle ticket seller ever. If he fancied a visit to Blenheim Palace, then he knew exactly what he was doing when he would wistfully repeat "I've never been to Blenheim

Palace – I'd like to go to Blenheim Palace". And it often paid off! In the Charity shop & at jumble sales he could also be playfully manipulative in getting value for money – even though he then had to trust the volunteer to do the counting out of the coins! And then he would give away the spoils of his bargaining as presents. Generosity was his middle name. Embarrassingly, every week he would insist on giving our youngest son Barnaby a pound. No reason. Just the simple words "Here you are Barnaby" . And at the monthly fair-trade stall at the Catholic Church, he would often empty out his pockets – "What can I get for that Tuart?"

Pantomimes, Fetes, jumble sales.... Ken could be relied on to support them all – and also voice his opinion on whether they were any good! Speaking of voice – Ken had a remarkably good singing voice – and a good memory for well-known hymns, especially the chorus.

Ken also had a wonderful self-deprecating sense of humour. He knew when he was being teased – and loved it. "You Teading me again Tuart!" he would say – with big smiles all round.

Ken kept himself busy in retirement just as much as when he was fully employed at Shrivenham – whether it was tramping the streets delivering leaflets, washing cars, or gardening. Give him a broom or a wheelbarrow and he was in his element. Dominic remembers Ken sweeping out his garage regularly - and of course it was always spotless. Ken - the consummate professional.

Ken was a character of Faringdon alright. But he was also THE character of Faringdon. Meaning that he helped to DEFINE the character of Faringdon – and there's no doubt that Faringdon's character as a caring community benefited and was improved because of him.

There's many aspects of Ken's life we haven't touched on. For example, the Cromwell Centre and the 14-Club – to name but a few. But whoever you ask – the response is the same. Ken WAS larger than life – a big man with a big heart.

Ken - we will always remember you with immense warmth and affection – and be the better for your memories.

*Sjoerd*  
20<sup>th</sup> October 2010