

Dad – Victor Miller z'l 20/9/35 – 2/4/20



In the right-hand corner of our garden stands a huge oak tree. It stands tall and proud and right now it's beginning to bud. There are signs of life emerging. Spring has arrived and particularly right now when we are living during this lockdown, there is time to stop and take notice of its beauty and listen to the bird song.

But this beauty hides another reality, the reality of unimaginable loss that is happening to thousands of families in this country and hundreds of thousands across the world. And this unimaginable has happened to us. We have lost our Oak tree... Dad ... the man who has stood by our sides throughout our lives and this loss is excruciating.

This wasn't his time. He has been ripped away from Laura and me and our families, he has been stolen from Valerie who has given him such richness and happiness over the last few years and we and his family and friends are reeling from it. His plan (and I quote) was to be shot by someone's irate husband when he was 98.

How is it possible that Dad who has always stood tall and proud could be so cruelly taken away from us and how is it possible that such a well-loved man had to die alone, cared for by strangers rather than by those who love him the most. It's not that we aren't grateful for the care he received. We know it was amazing. But it wasn't the ending that he would have wanted, and it wasn't the ending we wanted for him.

We know that this tragedy is not ours alone. It is going to be a common story during this corona season, but we are not willing to let him become just another statistic, so we want to say something about him.

Victor Miller was a son, brother, uncle, husband, dad, father-in-law, papa, lover, friend, doctor, student, philanthropist and all-round mensch. He appreciated all things aesthetic.

He was innovative, generous and creative. Often quiet, sometimes difficult, inscrutable and private, we had been worried that when we lost mum, he would become hermit like and close up. In fact, the opposite was true. He went out into the world and despite missing mum terribly, he lived and found love – real love again.

Dad often said that he had been really lucky in love and we think he really was... he had three meaningful relationships and the one he established with Valerie a few years ago brought a new zest for life to dad. And we loved Valerie too (and will continue to). In fact, at one point, I found myself saying to dad that if he messed up the relationship, we would drop him and keep Valerie.

Laura will have her own stories of dad but this is my take on him...

Things didn't always come easy for dad. Born in 1935, he told us that much of his early education took place in air-raid shelters and he was written off academically. It was only after having to redo his A'levels and managing to go to Glasgow University to read medicine that things fell into place for him and he began to flourish, and he had an illustrious career as a consultant paediatrician specialising in gastroenterology.

He was an expert in chron's disease, and he created (as far as we know) the first ever breast milk bank. It lived in our freezer until dad could take it into hospital for the babies under his care. This meant that we had lots of lovely but rather exhausted young women delivering bottles and bags of white stuff to our house on a regular basis and visiting the freezer for a meal became interesting.

He knew all about being a late starter and so when my headmistress wrote to my parents to say that I wasn't bright enough to get into the senior school, dad went to meet and

challenge her and say that perhaps I too was a late starter. That was the thing about dad. He always believed in us and always had our backs.

When we were little there was an American series that we must have watched as a family called "The Amazing Cosmic Awareness of Duffy Moon." I didn't actually remember the title of it until I googled it just now but the phrase "You can do it Duffy Moon" and the technique of puffing your cheeks out as you say it was something that dad encouraged us to deploy and his belief in us was phenomenal. He told us that his dad had told him that he could do anything that he turned his mind to, and he believed in that for us too.

Of course, there were things that we couldn't do and he couldn't do;

A lover of music, he found reading music difficult and though he learnt both the bassoon and piano, his practice times often seemed like a 9-round boxing match – Piano vs Dad where the piano definitely came off worst.

Dad and I had an on-going debate about whether he taught me how to jump into a swimming pool in Dubrovnik. I was pushed. He managed to electrocute himself cutting the hedge at our house in Manchester and only survived because he was thrown off the ladder which resulted in him shattering his shoulder. I had to ban him from hanging wall paper and any other decorating when I was doing exams because his tension trying to line up the pattern was far worse than any anxiety I felt about the exams and he was definitely not a natural driving instructor as the bumper of my mum's Volvo attested from our 2nd driving lesson.

However, these are stories of dad being just that... dad... he was there and engaged. He was a family man. And for him family and friends came first as did his patients and colleagues at work.

When I decided to apply for the NHS graduate management training scheme, I was asked why I wanted the job. I told them that I wanted to be able to say no to people like dad... he was a hard man to say no to.

He was committed, single minded and had tonnes of integrity. Once he made a decision to do something, he stood by that decision and he had unwavering energy for anything and anyone who was important to him. One of the things I've learnt about dad recently is how beguiling he was... his gp receptionist told me that she loved dad and I think dad was really great at mobilising that reaction in people.

The period when mum became ill and dad became her carer was terrible for both of them. It was not the retirement either of them had wanted or envisaged but dad continued to do his best to look after mum as she deteriorated and ensure that they maintained a quality of life as a loving couple by going to concerts, theatres, shul, seeing friends and having holidays. The loss of mum was a terrible blow for all of us, but Dad missed his soul mate profoundly. However, he didn't retreat.

He grabbed the opportunities and that allowed both Laura and I to have some really extraordinary moments with Dad. Moments that we will cherish.

He opened up and became more forthcoming.

I had plans for us and wanted more moments with Dad. I will miss so much about dad but what I'm missing right now is the opportunity to give him a kiss and a big hug and tell him how much he means to me and how much I love him.