
Dad

For my Mum and Dad,
the best parents anyone
could wish for.

Written for George and Henry.

This is their story. A way to
understand them more,
to remember the little things,
and to keep them close
for all the years ahead.

EDITION 1

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1946–56

Banbury in the late nineteen forties was a place still shaking the dust of the war from its streets. Terraced houses lined the roads, their windows patched, their bricks darkened by soot and worry. Children played in the alleys with scuffed footballs while ration books still lay open on kitchen tables. The Elms maternity hospital sat quiet among the narrow lanes, a place where new beginnings arrived in an England that was tired but hopeful.

My dad, Philip George Christopher Day, came into the world on 24 October 1946 at The Elms Hospital in Banbury, a small market town still catching its breath after the war. Streets were ordinary and tired. People queued for food, patched things up, and quietly carried on.

He did not arrive gently. He arrived in a fight.

He was the first of twin boys, Philip and Michael. For a brief moment, he was simply a new baby in a cold, bright ward. Then pneumonia took hold. His breathing turned shallow. His tiny chest struggled.

A priest was called to read last rites.

That one detail has the weight of a whole life inside it. A little boy so ill that grown adults, who had already lived through bombings and loss, believed they might lose him too. His mum, Maria Rhoda, and his dad, Michael Joseph, stood there in that strange space between hope and goodbye, praying that this small, helpless child would hold on.

He did.

Once he was strong enough to go home, he was brought back to a house that was simple, crowded, and full of movement. His older sister Margaret, born in 1944, was already there, a small girl who would one day cross the ocean to America. Later, another younger brother, Kevin, would join the family. Four children in a modest council house. Tight corners. Shared space. Plenty of noise.

They lived in The Fairway, on an estate that looked much like so many others across Britain at the time. A three bedroom council semi, coal fires downstairs, cold rooms upstairs, and frost that formed inside the windows in winter. Warmth came from people and fires, not from thermostats.

His mum, Rhoda, worked hard. She stitched underwear at Spencers during the day and worked in the chip shop next door in the evenings. His dad, Joe, worked shifts as a packer at Alcan, the aluminium factory. They were Catholic and went to church every Sunday.
Dad went sometimes too.

Life was not fancy, but it was solid. There was always food of some kind on the table, even if it was simple meat and vegetables. There were rules. There was structure. His dad could be strict. His mum was softer, more relaxed. Looking back, he says his relationship with his mum was easier than with his dad, and that Joe could lose his temper, but there was care underneath it all. Later, they would grow closer, especially through football.

The house had more than one front to it. On one side, the chip shop. On the other side, the neighbour, Pete Jarvis, who had a flat above with a television. In those days, TV still felt magical. Dad remembers going upstairs to watch it, a rare treat. He remembers playing Subbuteo there, which they called "fick football," and table tennis. Simple games, simple joy.

Outside, the world was wide open.

There were hardly any cars on the street, only a few families had them, so the road belonged to the children. Football in the street was not an organised activity. It was just life. You stepped out your front door and there would be a ball somewhere, a few mates, and an argument about who was in goal. Shirts as posts, grazed knees, and "play on" as the final ruling for almost everything.

Beyond the houses lay fields and patches of woodland. He and his friends would head there often, walking miles without thinking about it.
They played in the woods, made up games, and pushed their luck with the

gamekeeper who chased them out more than once. Getting chased was part of the fun.

Inside his room there was not much. A bed, a few clothes, comics, and whatever small treasures he had managed to collect. It was not a space filled with things. It was a place to sleep, get dressed, and leave from. He spent most of his time outdoors. The best thing about his room was that it was his. The worst thing was the cold in winter when the ice crept across the inside of the window and your breath showed in the air.

They never went on holiday. Not once.

There are no childhood stories of caravan parks in Wales for him, no seaside trips that happened every year. While mum was camping in Devon and learning to surf, my dad's world stayed closer to home. His adventures happened in Banbury's streets, fields, and football grounds. He does not talk about this with bitterness. He says it as a fact. His fun came from other places.

There were pets, of course. Two budgies, Bobby and Georgie. Bobby once flew into the open fire. Joe grabbed him out quickly. He survived, but his wings were badly burned, and he could not fly properly afterwards. He scuttled around on the floor instead. One day Margaret accidentally stepped on him. It is the kind of darkly comic, sad story that only families tell.

On a nearby street, another budgie called Nicky would sit on a windowsill. The owners warned Dad that one day Nicky would fly off. Eventually he did. That tiny moment stuck somewhere in his memory. Birds, it seems, found it hard to stay put.

A typical day when he was little was simple and free. His mum would be home in the day, then go to the chip shop in the evening. His dad worked shifts at the factory. The children would be out, in the street or the fields,

riding bikes, kicking a ball, running across open ground. There was not the same sense of class competition he sees now. Doors were open. Neighbours talked. Everyone knew everyone on the street.

He describes it as "a simple life." Not easy in every way, but straightforward.

His favourite toy was his Subbuteo set and, more importantly, a real football. His favourite memories are of playing with mates. The best days were ones where nothing special was planned. Just time. Time to be outside. Time to run. Time to be a child without being watched every second.

He had a best friend, Charlie Bradley, who would later die young in a car crash at twenty seven. At this age, they were just boys running around, sharing jokes, sharing adventures, unaware of how fragile everything really is.

There was mischief, of course. He was not a quiet angel in the corner. He knocked on doors and ran away. He threw mud at windows. He caused minor trouble and got chased for it. Later, as a teenager, the mischief would evolve into bigger stories, but the spark started here.

When he got bored, he did what many boys of his generation did. He picked up a ball and went outside.

Looking back on his childhood, Dad says his best memory is simply "playing with mates." His worst is that he cannot really remember any big bad moments. For him, that in itself is a sign of how fortunate he was. He had a roof, food, friends, and freedom. His parents taught him to work hard and do his best. Those were the values he carried forward without anyone ever sitting him down for a formal lecture.

He wanted to be a professional footballer when he grew up. Of course he did. Football had already anchored itself to his heart. It had given him belonging, joy, and a way to feel confident. Even at this age, you can see the shape of his future self beginning to appear. The man who will work hard, tell stories, find humour in almost anything, and always feel most himself near a pitch.

By ten, he had already survived a near fatal illness, grown up in a house warmed by coal and effort, learned the rules of friendship on pavements and in woods, and discovered that football could turn any rough patch of ground into something close to magic.

Life Lesson
From my dad's first decade, I have learned that you can come from very little and still build a rich inner life. A council house, frost on the windows, no holidays, and second hand toys are not barriers to happiness. They can be the backdrop to resilience, loyalty, and a quiet strength that does not brag. Surviving something as serious as pneumonia as a newborn did not make him fragile. It made him hard to break.

For George and Henry
When you imagine Grandad as a boy, do not picture him in an armchair with a racing form. Picture him in scuffed shoes on a Banbury street, hair blown about, cheeks red from the cold, a ball at his feet and his best mate beside him.

No screens. No fancy trainers. No big trips. Just friends, fresh air, and the freedom to play until someone's mum called them in for tea.

That is where your Grandad began. In an ordinary house on an ordinary street, turning very ordinary days into something he still smiles about now.

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1956-66

By the mid nineteen fifties, Banbury had softened around the edges. Factories hummed again. Streets felt friendlier. Cars were still rare enough for football to pause only when someone shouted, "Motor coming." Kids filled the pavements, comics tucked under their arms, Tiger and Lion swapped between friends. On Saturdays, crowds walked to see Banbury Spencer play, boots clattering on pavements, the smell of cigarette smoke drifting into the cold air...

As a teenager, Dad describes himself as "a mix." A bit rebellious. Possibly a bit naughty. Not a disaster. Not a saint. Somewhere right in the middle. Exactly where most honest teenagers actually live.

School, he says, was "ok." He quite enjoyed it. Not in the glossy prospectus way, but in the real way. He had lots of friends. He got on with people. The lessons were a backdrop to the real education on the playground and the pitch.

He was clever, in his own quiet way. "Quite academic," he says. He liked maths. Numbers made sense. They obeyed rules. He liked history, stories of the past, people, decisions, battles, mistakes. He liked PE, obviously. Anything that got him running, kicking, moving. Science did not appeal so much. Beakers and formulae were less interesting than football and the lives of kings.

One detail he still mentions with a sort of amused annoyance is the time he had to do folk dancing instead of football. Imagine that. A boy wired for competition and grass, suddenly asked to skip around with handkerchiefs and set patterns. "It did not go down well," he says. You can still hear the echo of teenage outrage.

If you asked his classmates back then how they would remember him, he thinks they would say he was friendly and sociable. He liked being around people. He liked talking, joking, finding the funny angle. That has not changed.

His favourite teacher was Mr McCarthy. A general teacher and a sports man. Easy to get on with, genuinely interested in football. That was enough. For a boy like Dad, if you respected the game, you were halfway to being respected as a person. There is something lovely about that. A language made of passes and goals.

His teenage passion was simple, and he never pretends otherwise. Football. Properly, wholeheartedly, obsessively. It was more than something to watch. It was what his days turned around. Matches, kickabouts, talking about the latest scores. If you pressed him hard enough then, and maybe even now, he would say that being a professional footballer would have been the dream.

It is no surprise that his first dream for me was exactly that. Not because he wanted to live through me, but because football represented something pure and joyful from his own youth. A life paid for by something that did not feel like work.

Teenagers make mistakes and so did he. One of the things he cringes at now is the memory of rolling home drunk. At the time, it was part of the culture. Part of growing up. Part of being seen as one of the lads. Now, with distance and a heart attack behind him, he looks at that differently. He can see the seeds of later habits in those early nights.

If he could go back and speak to his eighteen year old self, he knows exactly what he would say. "Save for your future." It is almost comically simple advice. No grand speech. No philosophical phrase. Just a very practical instruction from a man who has lived enough life to know that money in the bank and a bit of security make a big difference.

There were people who influenced him. One friend in particular, Foxy, offered a line that stuck. "Be careful, watch your back." It sounds small, but it says a lot. You do not say that to someone who is naturally cold or guarded. You say it to someone open, maybe a bit too trusting, moving through pubs and workplaces where not everyone has your best interests at heart.

It taught him that kindness and awareness need to travel together. That you can enjoy people but still keep an eye on who is in your corner and who is not.

If you ask him when he was happiest, he usually jumps forward to later. To his marriage. To when me and Rob were born. But he carries a real fondness for those teenage days too. The freedom. The football. The feeling that the whole world was out there and he was only just stepping into it.

Life Lesson
From my dad's teenage years, I learned that you do not have to fit neatly into a category. You can be clever and still do stupid things. You can be friendly and still a bit rebellious. You can love something as simple as football and still be a deep thinker inside your own head. Being a mix is not a flaw. It is human.

For George and Henry
When you imagine Grandad at your age, picture him in old style boots on a muddy pitch, or leaning against a bike with his mates, laughing. Not the man who now worries about your seatbelts and your packed lunches. A boy not very different from you. Playing in the garden, hating folk dancing, and starting to build the stubborn, funny, sharp person you know now.

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1966-76

The nineteen sixties and seventies rolled in with music, colour, and a sense of widening horizons. Banbury was changing. More cars on the roads. More work in the factories. More pubs filled with men finishing long shifts. Dad spent these years in overalls and boots, grafting on building sites, painting houses, and learning the feel of real labour in his hands. Britain was modernising but still recognisable. The radio played Elvis and news from distant places. Motorways stretched further every year.

Dad's twenties were not the spotless, curated decade you sometimes see in films. They were full of work, sweat, long days, banter, mistakes, laughter, and the sense of clambering into adulthood without a handbook.

His first paying job had come early with Stones, a cabinet making place. He started off "in the stalls," doing basic tasks that still needed doing. It was not glamorous, but it was real work. He learned what nine hours on your feet feels like. He learned the sound of a clock that does not care how tired you are.

At sixteen he was on building sites as a labourer. Humping things from one place to another. Heavy loads. Dust in the throat. Weather on your face whether you liked it or not. That sort of work teaches you about effort very quickly. Nobody can pretend for long on a site.

At seventeen he was painting. Different brushes, same logic. You do the job, you do it properly, you move on. Then at twenty one he shifted into automotive products, making up clutches for cars. Again, nothing glamorous. No big titles. No glossy offices. But every job like that gave him another layer of resilience.

He did not hang around looking for the perfect role. He took what was available, and he grafted.

Then, at twenty three, came Johnsons. The job that would quietly define the backbone of his working life.

He went "on the road," as he calls it. That phrase sounds romantic in a way, but the reality is early starts, long drives, careful loading and unloading, endless miles of A–roads and motorways, cups of tea at service stations, banter in yards, and that strange mix of loneliness and camaraderie that only lorry drivers really understand.

He loved it.

He liked seeing different places. He liked the freedom of the cab. He liked the spectrum of people he met. He liked coming home with stories that nobody else had lived. He built friendships along the way. The sort of friendships that come from shared shifts, shared complaints, shared jokes about bosses and traffic and weather.

He calls it "a fun life experience," which is such a simple phrase for something that filled three decades of his life. He saw Britain changing through that windscreen. New roads built. Old buildings knocked down. Cities growing. Services changing. He knows the country in a way paper maps never capture.

Those years also held the same drinking culture that had started in his teens. Nights out after work. Pubs where everybody knew each other. Rounds bought and received. It felt normal. Expected even. Nobody talked about hearts or lungs or long term costs. They talked about the day, the match, the boss, the joke someone had cracked.

There is a version of himself he looks back on in this decade with real fondness. If you ask him what age he would return to if he could, he says twenty eight. He jokes that it was a good age. "Not too old for the younger girls, not too young for the older girls." The line makes me laugh every time because it is so perfectly him. Half serious, half playing to the crowd.

He says the sixties and seventies were the best. No phones. People had to make their own fun. You knocked on doors, you went to the pub, you went for walks, you played football. You were present because there was no alternative.

Underneath the jokes and the nostalgia, there is something else. A sense that he was still unanchored. Working hard, yes. Living life, yes. But not yet rooted in the way he would be later. Those jobs and those nights out

were laying the foundations for the man he would become without him even realising it.

He had not yet walked into the George VI pub in Lichfield on that specific night, the night where staying in turned to going out and "Julia appeared." He was on the road towards it. He just did not know that the biggest turning point of his life was waiting at a public house bar in Lichfield.

Life Lesson
From my dad's twenties, I learned that work does not need to be glamorous to be meaningful. There is dignity in showing up in overalls, in boots, in a cab. There is real value in graft that nobody sees from the outside. A life can be built out of unremarkable job titles and still be remarkable in what it supports.

For George and Henry
Your grandad did not drift lazily into adulthood. He laboured on sites. He painted walls. He packed clutches. He drove long distances. He made friends in cold yards. He built himself with each shift. That is why, today, he looks at your games and ambitions and says, "Work hard, but enjoy it too."

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1976-86

Late seventies Lichfield had a gentler pace. Pubs like the George VI were full of clinking glasses, cigarette haze, and the warm rumble of conversation. Three channel television glowed in living rooms. People knew their neighbours. Nights out were simple. Things happened through coincidence rather than planning. It was in this world, on an ordinary evening that could have been forgotten by anyone else, that Dad saw Mum walk into the pub.

Some life changes arrive with fanfare. Others slip in quietly, disguised as ordinary evenings. For Dad, one of the most important nights of his life began in the George VI pub in Lichfield. He had planned to stay in that night. It was his last evening working in the area, and he felt tired, ready to sink into the sofa. But someone persuaded him to go out. One more shift. One more drink. One last goodbye before moving to the next job.

He agreed, almost absentmindedly. A simple "alright."
And that small decision changed everything.

Mum went out that same night too, although for completely different reasons. She had been stood up. Dressed up, ready to go, full of expectation, only for the plan to collapse at the last moment. Karen was already out, and Mum, fed up of sitting at home in disappointment, decided to join her. A quick call from the pub phone persuaded her.
And so she went.

Two lives heading in different directions ended up in the exact same place at the exact same time. People talk about fate and timing as if they are grand concepts, but sometimes they are just two tired people making last minute decisions.

Dad describes it simply. "Julia appeared."

But you can hear more in his voice when he says it. A softness.
Recognition. He noticed her the moment she stepped in. He liked her immediately. Not in a dramatic, cinematic way, but in a real way.
A warm pull. A sense of ease.

He still jokes that his first thought was, "She would do me." It is the sort of line that tells you everything about him. Teasing on the surface, but hiding a deeper truth. She was lovely. He hoped she felt the same.

They talked that night. Not about anything profound, just the normal meandering subjects of two strangers who feel unexpectedly comfortable. They laughed. They teased. They slipped naturally into the rhythm of two people who might as well have known each other for years. Something clicked before either of them had time to register it.

They began seeing each other properly after that. Nothing dramatic. Just dates that suited who they were. Walks. Pub conversations. Simple meals. The kind of time spent together that layers, slowly and quietly, into something sturdy and real. They were a good balance. His rough charm and humour. Her steadiness and warmth. Her eye for the details he often missed. His ability to make her laugh in ways that surprised her.

Dad was still working hard then. On the road for Johnsons, travelling across the country, living in and out of cabs, depots, and small towns. But he came home differently now. There was a reason to hurry back. A reason to tell stories. A reason to smile when he walked through the door.

Their wedding reflected who they were. A proper Lichfield celebration, grounded and familiar. St Chad's Church for the ceremony. Photographs in the grounds of Stowe House. A reception at St Chad's Hall filled with friends and family. No showiness. No fuss. Just two people who meant it. They stayed at the Angel Croft Hotel that night before heading to Cornwall the next morning.

Dad had told his mates firmly not to decorate the car. So naturally they decorated it twice as much. Ribbons. Boots. The full spectacle. He rolled his eyes, but even now, when he tells the story, there is a smile tucked in the corner. He enjoyed the attention more than he would admit.

Cornwall was peaceful. Beaches. Waves. Fish and chips. Windy lanes. A honeymoon as simple as it was perfect. They had no script for what came next. They were just two people walking side by side into the unknown.

Back home, the rhythm of their shared life took shape. Mum built the warmth of the house. Dad kept the work going. A team from the start.

And then they decided to begin a family.

When Mum told Dad she was pregnant, he was genuinely happy. No hesitation. No fear. Just quiet joy. I arrived in 1985. Dad still remembers every small detail of that day. My long fingers. My long eyelashes. My slightly long head. He jokes about it with that gentle teasing that runs through all his stories, but you can hear the pride underneath.

There is a moment every new father has, although many never speak about it. The moment he realises this tiny child will stay with him forever. That day was Dad's moment. It stayed folded inside him for decades.

Years later, holding George at two in the morning, exhausted beside me, he said the line that explains the whole arc of fatherhood.

"You never stop worrying. I worry about you now just as much as when your dad was that size."

A lifetime of love summarised in one sentence.

Life Lesson
From my dad's thirties, I learned that the biggest changes often arrive quietly. A pub you almost do not go to. A conversation you nearly skip. A person you were not expecting. A baby that rewrites your priorities without asking for permission. Life does not always shout when it turns a corner.

For George and Henry
Your grandad was once a young man who walked into a pub hoping someone smiled back. He was once a new father who held a baby and felt the world tilt. Every joke he tells, every story he shares, every moment of care comes from these beginnings.

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1986–1996

By the mid eighties, Britain had shifted again. Motorways spread across the country like new veins. Retail parks grew on the edges of towns. The hum of industry was changing shape. Lichfield remained steady, but homes buzzed with new things. Atari consoles, VHS tapes, football on television every weekend. Cars filled driveways where only bikes had stood before. Dad spent these years on the road, moving goods from depot to depot, living the life of a working man in a country racing forward.

If the previous decade was about meeting Mum and building the foundations of a family, this decade was about living inside it. Dad was in his forties, and the house was full of the sounds of early childhood. I was a toddler. Rob arrived in 1987. The years that followed were loud, fast, tiring, funny, and scattered with moments that still glow bright in memory.

Dad was learning how to be a father at the same time as he was working some of the hardest years of his life. Johnsons still defined his days. Long drives before dawn. Deliveries across the country. Motors rumbling beneath him. Weather changing through the windscreen. A world made of roundabouts, junction numbers, and service stations.

But when he came home, everything shifted. Instead of depots and loading bays, there were nappies, bottles, bedtime stories, and little shoes lined up by the door. He remembers me as a cute, happy child who was also shy and cautious. He laughs and says he sees some of that in George now. The same look of standing back and watching before stepping in.

Rob was different from the start. Louder. Bolder. Busier. Dad tells the story of how Rob cried whenever he saw him in the early days. He laughs now, but you can hear the sting underneath. Imagine being trusted with heavy loads across long distances, yet completely disarmed by a baby who burst into tears every time you appeared. He still jokes that Henry gives him that same treatment.

Despite the exhaustion, Dad played with us. Not half-heartedly. He played properly. He invented "swings and pushes," throwing us up in the air, spinning us around the bedroom, turning the room into a blur of laughter and dizzy excitement. It was chaotic, physical, and full of joy. Mum would shout warnings from the doorway and he would just grin. He was careful, but he never let the fun slip.

He brought home small gifts from the road too. Little Loch Ness Monster toys. Cheap plastic treasures bought on fuel stops. I always waited for them. Sometimes the gift was a story instead. A strange delivery. A sharp corner. Something funny a mate had said. His stories made the world feel wide and Dad feel like an explorer returning from far-off places.

There were brighter memories too. The Atari. The stiff joystick clicking loudly. The glow of the game on the screen. Stealing the cherry off his Bakewell cake. Little habits that became anchor points in my childhood.

But there were difficult moments as well. He remembers the day a nurse took me through the theatre doors for an operation while I cried. He stood there unable to help, unable to follow. For a man who solves problems with his hands, that helplessness stayed with him a long time.

Money was tight some years too. Job changes. Shifts ending. New roles. For a man who grew up with scarcity, financial worry touched deep parts of him. He carried it quietly because that was what he had been taught to do. Provide first. Panic later.

During these years he was foreman for a while. He came home with stories that we still tell now. Rescuing a pig and taking it on the road with them. Convincing the new lad to ask the gaffer if he could borrow a hair dryer. That particular joke still makes him smirk as if he is watching it unfold again. Mischief was part of his working life.

There is another small memory that feels bigger than it looked at the time. I once crayoned all over the windows. Everywhere. A full display of toddler creativity. Dad was furious. Properly furious. I had turned the house into a gallery without permission. He tells the story now with pride. His son, the artist. At the time he probably did not imagine a creative future for me, but that moment became one of those childhood tales that lives in the family for decades.

Most days in this decade were not dramatic. They were built from ordinary routines. School runs to St Chads School. Bedtimes. Sunday visits. Shopping trips. Little arguments. Moments of pride. Moments of frustration. The rhythm of a young family finding its pace.

It was the decade that formed my idea of him. A father arriving home tired but ready to play. A man with strong opinions and a big heart. Someone who would work himself hard because he wanted his family to feel secure.

Life Lesson
From my dad's forties, I learned that parenthood is made from small acts that do not look important at the time. A game before bed. A toy from the road. A joke in a long week. A story told in the kitchen. Love often hides inside the everyday.

For George and Henry
Picture Grandad in these years. Dark hair. Quicker steps. Lorry keys in one pocket and tiny plastic toys in the other. A man who carried the weight of miles and still found the energy to lift two boys into the air. A man whose tiredness never cancelled his love.

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1996–2006

Nineties Britain was full of colour and noise. Britpop blared from radios. Football reinvented itself. High streets were busy, and technology crept slowly into daily life. Dad was in his fifties, working long shifts for Hazell and Jefferies, then Wincanton. Lichfield and the surrounding towns carried the same dependable rhythm they always had. Workplaces were harsher, expectations higher, but home life was warm and familiar.

By his fifties, Dad stood at a point in life where you can finally see both directions. Childhood far behind. Old age still on the horizon. The middle years. The reflective years. The years where work continued as it always had, and fatherhood shifted as children became teenagers with different needs and different questions.

Work had changed shape by then. After decades on the road with Johnsons, he moved to Hazell and Jefferies. New people. New routines. New frustrations. But the same underlying rhythm. Early mornings in cold yards. Heavy lifting. The long, steady hum of a working man's life. Later came Wincanton, contracts for Screwfix and Marks and Spencer, and more years of hard, physical labour. He stayed in that world until he was into his seventies, a fact he shrugs off in the way only a practical man does. No fuss. No speeches. Just turning up and doing what needed to be done.

During those years, he learned something important. He learned how to push back. After a lifetime of absorbing pressure, he finally found the confidence to say no. When managers pushed for more, he drew a line. Not rudely. Not dramatically. Just clearly. For a man raised in the old idea of never complaining and simply getting on with it, that shift meant more than he would ever admit aloud.

But even with all that resilience, he did not pretend his career had been perfect. When I asked him if he had regrets, he answered plainly.

"A lot," he said.

He wished he had studied more. Wished he had gone further in education. Wished he had found a job that paid better, stretched him more, kept him closer to home. He wished he had not spent so many nights away in lodgings. Wished he had been around for more bedtime stories, more school evenings, more of the everyday moments he now understands with a clearer heart.

And yet, in the same breath as those regrets, came something gentler. A quiet pride. A sense that even though life did not go the way he sometimes imagined, it still went somewhere meaningful. He held a steady job for decades. He supported his family. He stayed loyal to his marriage. He raised two sons who love him in ways he sometimes struggles to express. He became a grandad whose eyes light up at the sight of his grandsons.

There is a moment from this decade that I will never forget. One day he said that sometimes he would go to big houses or nice places through work, see expensive cars, and wonder if he should have done better. If he should have aimed higher. If he should have become something more impressive from the outside looking in.

But the truth, the simple truth, is that he was always perfect for me.

And that is its own form of wealth.

The wealth of being a brilliant dad.

Of showing up.
Of making us feel safe.
Of being proud of us, even when he was unsure how to be proud of himself.

That is success too. The kind that lasts longer than any car.

There were bright chapters in those years.

Florida. That huge, luminous family holiday. Flying across the Atlantic. Heat that wrapped around you like a blanket. Theme parks with neon

colours and voices louder than anything we had back home. For Dad, it was not the rollercoasters or the food or the attractions that made it unforgettable. It was all of us being together. A whole family, side by side, with no work shifts, no early mornings, no lodgings. Just time. Real time.

He still talks about that trip with a smile. A highlight of those years.

His favourites reveal him in ways a biography never could.
Book. Papillon. A story of endurance and escape.
Film. Schindler's List. Heavy, honest, human.
Musician. Elvis. Of course.
Song. Are You Lonesome Tonight. A soft, reflective classic.
Animal. Horse, but only, as he likes to say, when they win.
Word. Win.

He calls himself the Nearly Man with a grin. But even in that joke there is a kind of poetry. He sees what he nearly did. But he also sees contentment. Fun. A life lived with effort and loyalty. The bookmakers were always his small slice of irrational happiness. Not about winning big. Just the ritual. The choosing. The possibility.

Yet woven through these years of routine and reflection was a sorrow that cut deep. His mum, Rhoda, passed away. Losing a parent at any age rearranges you inside. He does not speak about it dramatically, but you can feel the weight of it when he mentions her. She was a steady presence throughout his life. The woman who raised him. The woman who worked through the war. The woman who saw him become a man, a husband, a father. Her passing left a quiet grief that stayed with him. A grief that softened him a little. A grief that made him look at the generations below him and feel even more grateful for the time he had.

He also lost his brother Kevin around this era. The two events together, mother and brother, arriving close in time, left a mark that does not fade. These losses shaped how he viewed his own life. They gave him a sharper sense of time. A deeper appreciation for ordinary days. A new tenderness beneath the gruff humour.

Life Lesson
From my dad's fifties, I learned that life is rarely simple. It is a braid of success and regret, pride and wishing, contentment and longing. You can wish you had studied more and still feel proud of what you built. You can miss moments and still be a wonderful parent. You can look at your life and see the paths you almost took, yet still find peace in the one you lived.

Regret and gratitude can sit side by side.
That is not failure.
That is honesty.

For George and Henry
Your grandad might call himself the Nearly Man, but that is only humour. Look at what he actually did. He worked hard. He stayed loyal. He built a family. He raised your dad. He carried love quietly but constantly. He turned up even when he was tired. He cared. He worried. He tried.

And if a man does all that, he is not nearly anything.

He is more than enough.

60

2006-2016

The two thousands brought mobile phones in every pocket, satellite television in every home, and a sense that life was speeding up. For Dad, this decade slowed everything down. Losing his brother Kevin. Losing his mum, Rhoda. Surviving a heart attack that forced him to rethink everything. The world outside was fast and noisy, but inside his own story, time felt heavier. These were the years of hard truths, quiet bravery, and the beginning of gratitude becoming a daily practice.

Dad's sixties were shaped by two events that arrived close together and cracked open the quiet rhythm of his life. One was his own heart attack. The other was losing his brother Kevin. They happened around the same time, and it felt as if the ground shifted under his feet in two directions at once.

He does not talk about that period lightly. When he tells the story, there is a softness in his voice, something slowed, something thought through. These were the years that made him face himself in a way he never had before.

The heart attack came first. He was sixty eight. One moment he was living the same life he had lived for decades. The next, everything stopped. There is nothing abstract about a heart failing inside your own chest. It strips away pretence. It tells you, in the most direct way, that you are not made of steel. He went from a man who felt almost invincible to a man sitting in a hospital bed, staring at the ceiling, wondering how many years he might have left.

He had been smoking since he was young. He had been drinking for most of his adult life. He had eaten the sort of quick, fried, easy food that fills the days of men who work long hours, sleep odd shifts, and spend more time on the road than at the table. Suddenly all of that caught up with him.

The change he made afterwards was not small. He stopped smoking. Just stopped. After decades of cigarettes. That takes strength.
He stopped drinking. A whole part of his social identity fell away. That takes courage.
He changed the way he ate. No more greasy canteen food. No more easy habits. That takes discipline.

He knew he had to do it. And he did.

He regrets how long he waited. He regrets the stubbornness of his younger years. He says it plainly. "I should have listened more. I should have been more open minded." But regret is only half the story. The other half is choice. He chose not to continue down the same path. He chose to stay. He chose more time.

While he was still processing all of this, trying to settle into a new version of himself, life delivered another blow. His brother Kevin died. Sixty years old. Far too young. A sudden absence that hit the family hard. A reminder that tomorrow is not promised. A grief that sits quietly behind many of the things Dad says now.

To lose a sibling and then realise your own life is hanging in the balance is a kind of double impact that takes time to absorb. It made him look at everything differently. Work. Home. Health. Time. It made him grateful for the years he still had, and deeply aware of how many years he might easily have lost.

That same year, more changes hit. His mum, Rhoda, also passed away. It was a year that took more than it gave. A year that reshaped the family in ways none of them had prepared for. A year that sits quietly behind so many of the choices he later made.

And yet, through all that, he stayed himself. Still a bit argumentative. Still quick to get wound up. Still capable of laughing at himself minutes later. Still loyal. Still straightforward. Still with a streak of humour that never leaves him, even when the subject is serious. He even jokes that he wants "I told you I was ill" somewhere when his time comes. The humour softens the truth. The truth is that he knows how fragile life is now.

The older he gets, the more grateful he becomes. Grateful for Mum. Grateful for our family being healthy. Grateful for positive people around him. The things that matter most sit closest to the surface now. He has

thought carefully about how he wants to be remembered. His answer is simple.

"Being able to hold a steady relationship and look after my family."

That is his measure of a good life.

There are still small rituals that make him happy. Picking a horse at the bookies. Watching the race. Feeling that flicker of hope. Elvis on in the background. A quiet afternoon at home. These things matter more now than they ever did.

Loss changes you. Survival changes you. The two together shape a man in deep ways. Dad's sixties were the decade he woke up to himself. Not in a sentimental way, but in a clear, practical, honest way.

Life Lesson
From my dad's sixties, I learned that health is not a backdrop. It is the base of everything else. When it cracks, your priorities get redrawn overnight. I learned that stubbornness carries a cost. That listening is a form of wisdom. That grief and survival can arrive together and remake a life from the inside out.

You do not get to choose what shocks you into change. You only get to choose what you do next.

For George and Henry
When Grandad tells you to look after yourselves, he is not lecturing. He is remembering the moment he watched doctors save his life. He is remembering the brother he lost. He is remembering how close he came to not being here for you at all. The changes he made were not about discipline. They were about love. You are part of the reason he is still here.

70

2016-2026

Lichfield in the late twenty tens grew busier and brighter. Cafes filled with families, parks full of children, football on bigger televisions than anyone needed. Dad moved through this decade with a calmer step. Retirement, or something close to it. Slow mornings. Racing on the television. Walks to the shop. The humour still sharp. The love still steady. Grandchildren transforming him, one visit at a time.

In his seventies, Dad looks like an older man only if you do not know him. Sit with him for more than ten minutes and you will realise that most of the younger versions are still in there, crowding around his jokes and his arguments.

To you, George and Henry, he is just Grandad. The man in the familiar chair. The man with the racing on. The man who laughs when you do something daft and pretends to be cross when you climb on the furniture. The man who has a particular way of saying your names that nobody else does.

Inside that frame are decades of motion. A boy playing football in the street. A teenager rolling home drunk and laughing it off. A young man hauling bricks and painting walls. A twenty three year old climbing into a lorry cab for the first time. A thirty something in a pub seeing your nan walk in and knowing, somehow, that this is different.

There is the father who watched his son taken into an operating theatre and felt utterly useless. The man who cried quietly later and then pretended he had something in his eye. The husband who stood next to Mum when things were tight and scary and kept saying, "We will be alright," even when he was not sure yet.

There is the man who held you both, George and Henry, and felt the whole cycle start again. Worry. Pride. Hope. Love.

He still calls himself the Nearly Man. The one who nearly did this, nearly did that. The one who nearly went further in football, nearly chose a different career, nearly did more studying, nearly drank less. He sees all the forks in the road where a different version of him might have walked.

From where I am standing, and where you will stand one day, the story looks different.

He is the man who stayed.

He is the man who worked.

He is the man who kept showing up.

For Mum. For me. For Rob. For you.

He is the man who changed when he had to. Who stopped smoking after decades. Who cut out alcohol, even though it had been woven into his social life for longer than I have been alive.

He is the man who can admit regret without letting it crush him. Who can say, "I wish I had done things differently," and still mean it when he says, "I am proud of what we have."

He enjoys his retirement in his own particular way. The rhythm of sport on television. The rituals of picking horses. The familiar programmes. The jokes about modern life. The predictable grumbles about phones and how nobody talks properly anymore.

His advice to you is straightforward. When you get a bit older, let your kids have freedom. Do not hold them too tight. Let them find their own way, just as he wanted to do when he was your age. Save money. Listen more. Do not be as stubborn as he was.

He talks about wanting his legacy to be the fact he held a steady relationship and looked after his family. I think he underrates how rare and valuable that is. In a world full of leaving, he stayed. In a culture that often glorifies constant change, he made continuity into an achievement.

He jokes that it does not matter where his ashes go. Scattered in BetFred he says with a smile. A field. Wherever. It is not that he does not care about his own ending. It is that he cares more about the story before it.

Life Lesson

From my dad's seventies, I am learning that winning at life does not always look like it does in films. There are no big award speeches. No front covers. Sometimes winning is a house that still has both parents in it. Grown children who still visit. Grandchildren who climb on you and think you are brilliant. A partner who still laughs at your jokes.

Remember

For George and Henry, when you remember Grandad in the future, do not stop at the image of an older man in a chair. Remember the younger versions too. The boy with muddy knees. The dad at the side of a football pitch. The grandad letting you sit on his knee while he lets you search for Golems and Enderman on Minecraft.

80

2026+

These years, the soft ones, the gentle ones, belong to the people who love him. The house a little quieter. The routine a little slower. The stories told with more pauses, but never with less heart. A man sitting in his favourite chair, watching his grandsons grow taller, louder, funnier. A man who has lived every version of himself and found peace in the simplest things. Time will soften him, but it will not dim him.

As I make this book, Dad is eighty next year.

Grandchildren have already taken twenty or thirty years off him. You can see it the second you burst into the room. His back straightens. His eyes sharpen. For a minute he forgets how much everything aches.

He still groans when he stands up. He still mutters about his knees and his back. He still pretends not to hear questions he has no interest in answering. He will complain about his age often and dramatically. Then he will get down on the floor to play with you anyway.

I can picture Henry, still giving him the runaround. Handing him cars and dinosaurs. Telling him exactly what they are called. Exactly where they need to go. Exactly what sound they should make. Correcting him with the confidence only a young child has. Grandad, not like that. Like this. Dad will play dumb sometimes just to spark your laughter.

George might be sitting beside him, watching the racing or the football, asking real questions now. How does that work. Why did they do that. What is offside again. Grandad will explain it with the mixture of seriousness and humour he has always used, turning decades of sport into small lessons you will remember without realising it.

He will still tell stories. The same ones you have heard before and a few you have not. Tales from the road. From building sites. From the George VI. From matches long before I was born. Stories about mates with names like Foxy. Stories about times he won big at the bookies and times he lost in spectacular fashion. His memory for the details may soften one day. Names might blur. Dates might drift. But the heart of each story will stay strong. A man trying his best. A man who loved his mates, his wife, his sons, his grandsons. A man who laughed often, even when life gave him reasons not to.

His humour will be the last part of him to fade. It is stitched too deeply into who he is. Even if his memory thins and his body slows, he will still land the occasional perfect one liner. A sideways look. A muttered comment. A reply that makes the whole room laugh even as they tell him off for being cheeky.

He will care less about the small things each year. Mud on the carpet. Crumbs on the sofa. Toys hidden under chairs. None of that will matter. What will matter is that you are there. The sound of your voices. The feel of your hands in his. The simple joy of having you near.

Or as time goes on he will see you grow. He will watch you move from little children to bigger children to something closer to adults. He will measure the seasons by your laughter and the hum of your energy in the house. Every year you will look a little older and sound a little more confident, and every year you will pull him forward with you. He will smile at your jokes, listen to your stories, and take pride in the people you are becoming. Time will go on, but so will his love for you, steady as ever.

By his nineties, if he reaches them with the same brightness he has now, he will have watched you both grow from babies to children to almost teenagers. He will measure time in your heights, your shoe sizes, your new phrases, your changing jokes. He will remember when he could lift you easily and when he had to stop for his own safety. He will laugh about that. He will tell everyone he knows that you are growing too fast.

He will remain argumentative. Some parts of people do not change. You will still lose debates you should probably win because he refuses to concede the point. He will still tease Nan. He will still insist he is fine when he clearly is not. This is who he is. Stubborn and steady, serious and silly, soft in ways he has never been great at showing.

From that vantage point, looking back over eight decades, I think he will see his life more kindly than he does now. The Nearly Man title will soften. He will see that he did not nearly build a family. He did build one. He did not nearly stay. He stayed. He did not nearly change. He changed deeply when it mattered.

He will feel grateful for that heart attack at sixty eight, strange as that sounds. Grateful for the warning. Grateful for the extra years it pushed him into creating. Grateful for every Christmas, birthday, and ordinary Tuesday with you that came after. Wisdom often comes wrapped in fear. He has learned that first hand.

He will say these things in his own way. A little gruff. A little blunt. A little funny. Underneath, it is all love.

For George and Henry
When you think of Grandad in these later years, picture him in his usual chair. The racing on quietly in the background whilst he checks his betting slips. Henry climbing over him like a piece of playground equipment. George debating who would win out of a Golem or Wither. Grandad will be engaged, as he always is.

Time will age him, but you will keep him young.

And one day, when you are much older and the house is quiet,
~~you~~, we will understand how precious he really was.

In the years ahead, I know his greatest joy will continue to be you, George, and Henry.

Love her and cherish him, just as I do.

Q | A

PERSONAL FAVOURITES

Colour | *Red*
Song | *Are You Lonesome Tonight*
Film | *Goodfellas*
Meal | *Fish and chips or Steak*
Dessert | *Cheesecake*
Animal | *Horse (when they win!)*
Holiday | *Florida*
Instrument | *Drum*
Weather | *Warm*
Flower | *Daffodil or Cosmos*

FAMILY AND HOME

Childhood home | *Simple and happy*
Siblings | *Three*
Meal | *Meat and veg*
Tradition | *None*
Chores | *Running errands to the shop*
Parents | *Joe/angry | Rhoda/relaxed*
Grandparent | *None*
Play | *Football and table tennis*
Christmas | *Happy*

CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

Favourite toy | *Subbuteo(New Footy)*
Best friend | *Charlie Bradley*
Favourite subject | *History*
Least favourite subject | *Science*
Games at school | *Tig or Marbles*
Favourite holiday | *None*
Childhood pet | *Budgie*
Favourite TV show | *Lone Ranger*
Favourite treat | *Jelly and Ice Cream*
Favourite sport | *Football*

TEENAGE YEARS

First job | *Helping the milkman*
Favourite outfit | *Suit jacket and jeans*
Music as a teen | *Pop*
Concerts | *No, a few theatre shows**
Favourite clothes shop | *M and J*
Hairstyle | *Long*
First car | *Rust bucket Ford Anglia*
Sneaking out | *Not really*
First date | *No idea, never had dates*

**Winter Gardens dance hall. Saw the Rolling Stones before they were famous. A band member even commented on his hair. Also saw Rod Stewart.*

ADULT LIFE

First job | *Cabinet factory*

First home | *Wissage Court*

First holiday | *Pontins near Lowestoft*

Trouble at work | *Yes, being late*

Dream job | *Footballer*

Proudest moment | *First winner on the Grand National (joke). Having me and Rob*

Difficult thing | *Driving an articulated lorry*

Something he feared | *Never tried anything he was scared of*

MUM

How they met | *George V pub*

First date | *Drink at George VI*

Honeymoon | *Newquay**

Wedding | *St Chad's Church*

Romance | *Not romantic, flowers once in a while*

Favourite thing together | *Holidays*

Silly memory | *Pizza in Barcelona*

Surprise | Visited him after a varicose veins operation early in their relationship. She was only eighteen and travelled by train to see him.

HOBBIES AND FUN

Favourite hobby | *Horseracing*

Relaxing | *Picking out winners at the bookies!*

Sport to watch | *Football and Horses*

Board games | *Monopoly and Ludo*

Weekend activity | *The Bookies*

Hobby together | *Dancing*

Favourite TV series | *Only Fools and Horses*

Comedies or dramas | *Equal*

Cinema | *Not a big fan*

OPINIONS AND PREFERENCES

Morning or night | Bit of both

Tea or coffee | Tea

Sweet or savoury | Both

Countryside or city | Countryside

Dogs or cats | Dogs

Reader or watcher | Watcher

Beach or mountains | Both

Mood | Organised and relaxed

Weather preference | Warm

Dream car | Lamborghini

**Remembers watching the World Surfing Competition*

RANDOM AND SILLY

Broken bones | *Yes, ankle*

Can whistle | *Yes*

Impressions | *Albert Steptoe*

Won a competition | *Local dominos*

Weirdest food | *Snake (in a pub)*

Famous person | *Jeremey Beadle*

Live anywhere | *New Zealand or Canada*

Pulled a prank | *Lots, especially when I was on the road*

HOPES AND DREAMS

Childhood dream job | *Footballer*

Wanted to try | *Skiing*

Country she would visit | *Japan*

Future wish | *To be healthy for as long as possible*

Bucket list | *Nothing really*

Advice to younger self | *Save. Go on the Wild West trail*

Best thing getting older | *Not having to go to work*

Live in a time period | *Sixties*

Perfect day | *Picking winning horses!*

Important lesson | *Take opportunities when you can*

TOP 5

FILMS
Goodfellas
Straw Dogs
Jaws
Gladiator
The Green Mile

MUSICIANS
Elvis
Queen
The Rolling Stones
Billy Fury
Smokey Robinson

SONGS
Are You Lonesome*
Bohemian Rhapsody
We'll Meet Again
From a Jack to a King
Little Ole Wine Drinker Me

TV SHOWS
Only Fools
Porridge
Match of the Day
Horse racing
Rising Damp

ENGLAND
York
Bath
Whitby
North Wales**
Scotland***

ABROAD
Florida
Madeira
Rome
Paris
Florida

MEALS
Steak and chips
Beef Sunday dinner
Fish and chips
Chinese chicken curry
Sausage and mash

ACTORS
Clint Eastwood
Charles Bronson
Susan George
Ronnie Barker
John Malkovich

PETS
Georgie and Bobby the budgies
Goldie the goldfish

GAMES
Atari
Tutunhanum and River Raid

Amiga
Sensible World and Mean Machines
Sonic
Dominoes and Darts

DREAM TRIPS
Japan
Vietnam
Antarctica
Canada
South Africa

LIFE
Lived a happy and comfortable life

Thankful for how me and Rob turned out

**Are You Lonesome Tonight is nostalgic due to a Sea Cadets tragedy)*

*** Memories with mum*

**** Misty mornings in Glencoe*

STORIES

The Hairdryer Incident

When I worked away from home for about thirteen years doing road resurfacing, the company gave us big caravans to live in. Four men to a caravan, plus the foreman in his own little one. The foreman I was under could be miserable and short tempered, so you had to be careful not to upset him.

One night we had a young lad start with us. He was a bit naive, so we decided to wind him up. After work we all got washed and ready to go out. The lad was saying his hair was still wet, so we told him the foreman had a hairdryer. We said if he knocked on his caravan door and asked to borrow it, he would not mind.

Of course, what he did not know was that the foreman did not own a hairdryer, and once he had settled in his caravan he hated being disturbed unless it was important.

You can imagine the reaction when the lad knocked on the door and asked for the hairdryer. We thought it was hilarious. The foreman did not.

Passport to Wales

Working away with a gang of blokes meant constant banter and winding each other up. One day we were told we were being sent to Wales for a job, and one of the lads convinced a young bloke that he would need a passport. The poor lad believed him and started to panic about not having one.

He was genuinely worried until someone finally told him it was a joke. We all laughed. He did not.

The Sandwich Bet

Working with a mixed group of characters meant you got every type. Quiet ones, noisy ones, lazy ones, serious ones, and a few who were not the brightest.

One night I made sandwiches for the next day. At work I said to one particular lad, who was not very quick, "If you can tell me how many sandwiches are in my bag, you can have both of them." He looked proud of himself and said, "Ah, you have got three." I said, "Well done. How did you know that?" He replied, "I saw you make them last night and you only made three. You cannot fool me."

I said, "No, I cannot," and left it there. He was very pleased with himself.

The Christmas Tree Trick

One Christmas, the landlord of the local pub wanted a tree for the roof. Two of my mates said they could get him one for a fiver. He agreed, so they went to the woods, cut one down, and put it on the flat roof above the pub door. The landlord paid them and was grateful.

Two nights later they climbed onto the roof, took the tree down without the landlord seeing, and walked into the pub. The landlord was furious and said someone had stolen it. They told him they could get him another for the same price. He agreed again.

They went back to the woods, brought the same tree, and put it on the roof. The landlord paid them a second time and thanked them for their help.

He never realised he had paid twice for the exact same tree.

The Big Freeze Snowball

I remember the winter of 1962 to 63, known as the Big Freeze.

One of the coldest winters on record. Snow everywhere.

One night after a heavy snowfall, a mate and I started rolling a snowball down the hill where I lived. By the time we reached the bottom it was enormous. Instead of leaving it, we decided to push it right up against my next door neighbour's front door. Because of the freezing weather they could not get out through the front door for about a week. Luckily they had a back door.

At the time we thought it was hilarious. Looking back now, I realise it was not a very kind thing to do, but I was only fifteen or sixteen.

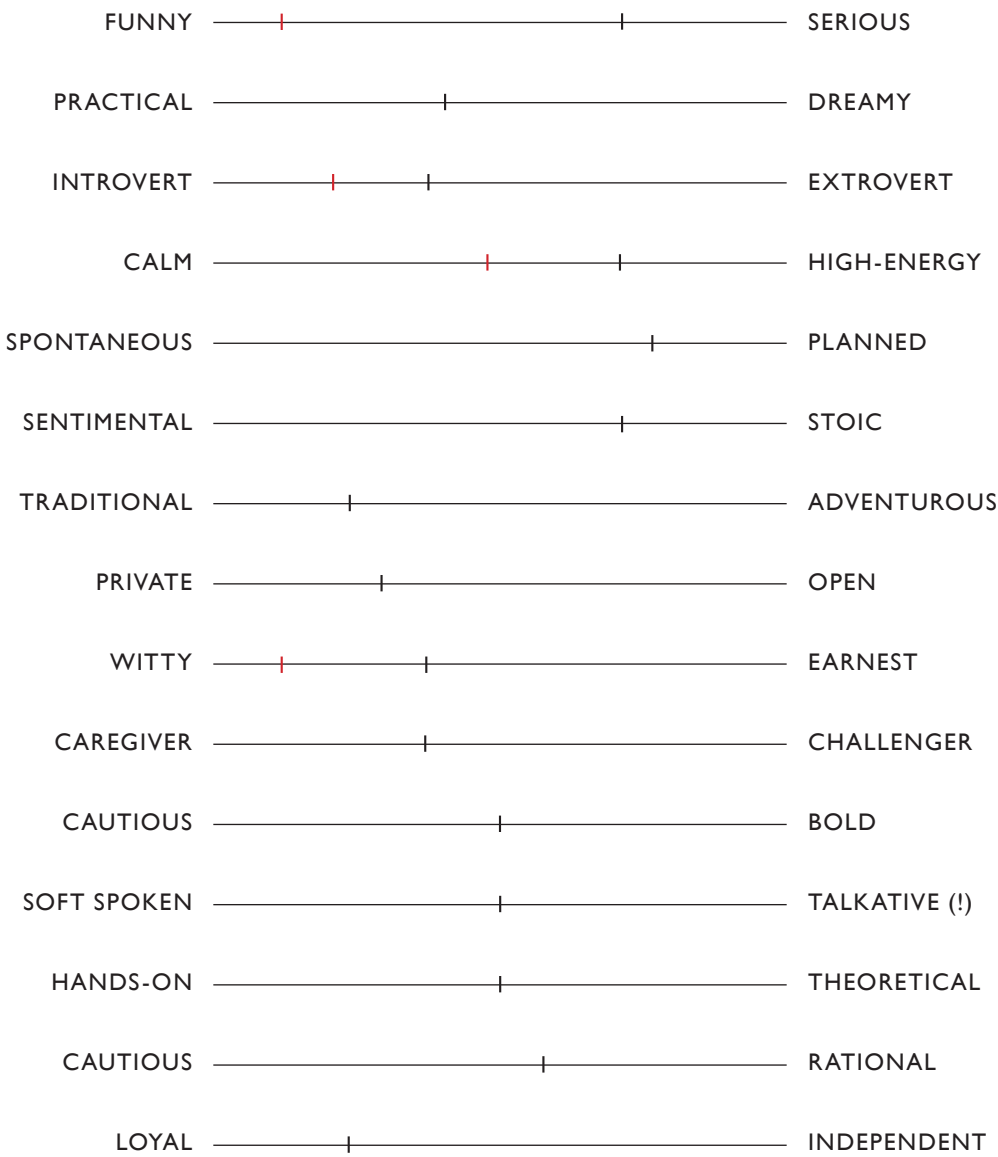
Sporting Moments

Sport has been a constant thread through my life, and when I think back on my favourite moments they come as one long sweep. I remember England winning the World Cup, watching it at home and then heading straight to the pub to celebrate. I remember Celtic lifting the European Cup in 1967, a real shock at the time and something that stuck with me.

I think about every Grand National I have ever watched, each one giving me that same little rush of hope. I even owned a greyhound once, and she won a couple of races, ran at Wembley a few times, and gave me something to cheer for in a different way. And then there were my own playing days with Wroxton FC, winning the league and the cup, boots covered in mud, the kind of success you feel properly because you earned it. These moments are still clear to me, not just because of the sport, but because of where I was and who I was when they happened.

PERSONALITY

RATED BY HIMSELF (I AGREE WITH MOST OF IT!)



28,899

Days on earth

THE WINNING HORSE

A life of quiet graft,
steady humour, and
love that always came home