

## Pandemic

My father, Raymond Clubley, died in May 1970. He is my biggest hero and I have thought about him on every day from that day to this. The first few weeks and months after his death were full of sadness, grief and loss but gradually thoughts began to contain smiles. My dad was a lovely man; he filled my childhood with guidance, instruction and his own special brand of homespun philosophy. Above all he was principled; there were certain things one simply did not do, no matter what – as well as things one should always do. This led to a rigidity which made life difficult at times. Nevertheless I had freedom to roam and play and learn from mistakes without excessive discipline. He lived in a more principled time anyway I believe; we seem to excuse almost anything today as people seek to have it all and do anything they wish. There's a happy medium to be struck somewhere between the two positions I think.

When something puts me in mind of him today the smiles are often about an un-yielding moral stance or other; maybe a clever bit of new technology he has just discovered or a funny story from his own childhood. I think I am a diluted version of him. I'm still the person he taught me to be but have lapsed along the way from some of the highest standards – some out of weakness, no doubt, and some after reasoned argument that they were a bit too high. I hope he would still be proud of me but there would be some gentle rebukes at all the falls from grace.

Of course, as children, we believe our parents to be infallible, it's only as adults ourselves we realise they didn't know everything and didn't always behave as they should. I'm happy to report I never found any serious flaws or weaknesses in my dad, maybe because they didn't exist or because I simply never discovered them. I once confessed to my mother something I had done which I should not. 'You're not half sharp,' he said, 'if I had confessed all my sins to your grandmother at your age I should not have lived to be telling you this now.' I found no serious character defects but there were a few errors of fact. Dad once dictated an answer to some chemistry homework I was struggling with. When the work came back from the teacher the mark awarded was 1/10. The trouble had been he sounded so confident I just wrote what he said. If I did ever catch him breaking the rules he would say 'You don't know the half of what I've done.' When my own daughter caught me speeding to catch a ferry

and said 'I've never seen you drive so fast.' 'I've done a lot you don't know about.' I replied. She laughed and fell to pondering what they might be. I hope my dad would be proud of me as I certainly am of him. I hope my daughter, Catherine, is as proud of me as I am of her.

My dad was a great believer and advocate in behaving in a dignified way. Whenever death or disaster occurred it was important to 'not make a fuss'; to carry on with what needed to be done and sort things out quietly. Disagreements were never aired in public; people never criticised out loud, except within his most inner circle. People were trusted, honoured and respected, even when they perhaps fell short of deserving it. Difficulties were born with stoicism and acceptance.

At the start of 2020 I knew the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death would arrive on May 30<sup>th</sup>. I wanted to do something to honour his memory but didn't know what. I knew he would appreciate being remembered but that was already a given. I suppose when we commemorate the dead we are doing it for ourselves and others still living as much as for the departed. I wanted to honour him for *me*, so that *I* would know it had been done. He wouldn't have wanted any fuss. He would not have enjoyed any grand, public gesture. To be remembered with affection would be enough for him, but I needed something a bit more for myself, something I could look back on and say: yes, that's what I did.

On 16<sup>th</sup> March 2020 my wife, Bev, and I were on the ferry from Stromness, in Orkney, to Scrabster, travelling south for a family party to celebrate her 60<sup>th</sup> birthday, when Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, came on the TV in the boat's lounge. "You must stay at home," he said, "everything must now close because of the coronavirus pandemic." (covid had not been thought of as a name at that point). We drove off the ferry in Scrabster, round the carpark and straight back onto the return sailing to Stromness.

I don't know when the thought occurred to me but I turned, as I often do for guidance, to what my father would have said and done. The answer is never long in coming. That may be because I get it out of my own head, of course, I don't actually have to debate it with him first as I once did. There may have been quite a bit of slippage over 50 years. My memory of his advice and principles may not be quite accurate anymore – perhaps I make them up to suit myself. In any event I resolved that I would honour my dad by facing whatever the pandemic had to throw at us with as much calmness, patience

and resolution as I could muster. I would follow the rules without too much complaining; give the benefit of the doubt to those trying to lead us through it; volunteer to help in the community in whatever way I could and keep my spirits up, and those of people around me as much as possible.

Whisper it but we may have got through the worst – at least if it's not the beginning of the end we should be able to claim the end of the beginning. This is not because I was calm, patient, determined, well behaved, forgiving and caring – but because we all were. I hope those who went before, and those who are still to hear about it will be (mostly) proud of us.