

Tribute

I feel very privileged and honoured to be asked by Rolands family to say a few words about a man I came to regard as a good friend. Not that I feel unique in that respect. Roland had a lot of friends and was admired and respected by many in the town and beyond. I do hope that I can do justice to a perfect gentleman. He always had time to spare for those who needed his counsel. A man whose attention to detail, whether in business or in his personal life was exemplary. A man who was....well he was just a great person to share time with.

I have known Roland for many years, mainly through his connection with Rotary. Rotary is a charitable organisation and he was always first in line to support any project we were embarking on whether that was giving of this time or with a donation. Each week we meet for a meal and fellowship and it was always a joy to be on his table. He inevitably regaled us with some tale or other and was never slow to share a joke at his own expense.

Several Rotarians have reminded me of one recent evening when Roland was in great form sending us all away with a smile on our faces and memories of that trademark chuckle he had. He loved to get involved with our games stall at St. Annes Carnival and in fact designed and made a lot of the games we use. Our Christmas food appeal was another project he threw himself into wholeheartedly. Organising recipients beforehand, setting up the wooden booths – made by his own fair hand incidentally – that we use to sort the food and generally making sure that everything ran smoothly. He liked to be a backroom boy and didn't often deliver food parcels. However, on one occasion we were short of a delivery boy for a parcel or two. Imagine the scene. We deliver on a Monday and as usual, Roland had already dressed in his Funeral directors suit and waistcoat, immaculate as usual with not a hair out of place. Thus sartorially attired, he knocked on the door of an unsuspecting lady who, in his words blanched to a perfect shade of grey when she opened the door and saw him on her doorstep. Once he explained the reason for his visit, she was mightily relieved and had he not looked the epitome of funeral professionalism would have given him a huge hug and planted a kiss on his cheek I'm sure.

I also got to know him in a technological context as he decided late in life to get himself a computer. Now Rolands hands were designed for cabinet building which he carried out with his usual attention to detail. They were not designed to caress the unforgiving keys on a PC keyboard. Consequently I was always at his house sorting out a problem or three. 'I don't know what's happened, Tony.' He would exclaim 'but it is nothing I have done.' It invariably was. However, I didn't mind as it was always a delight to visit his home. I loved going there. We would always have a coffee together and sit and chat either in the house or his beautifully tended garden under his flagpole. He had flags for every occasion that he would raise on the appropriate day.

Visiting him at his office was always another pleasure. Although very serious, considerate and professional when dealing with his business, a trip to the old Lifeboat house was another great way to spend a little time. Listening to him telling a tale or two and enjoying his warm and friendly attitude to life. On seeing him filling in forms by hand, again I immaculately and carefully, I asked why he didn't computerize and save himself a lot of time. He wasn't keen but I built him a prototype and after that he wouldn't be without it and expanded its use to suit the needs of the business. He was happy and I was happy as it meant more trips to bask in the warm and friendly atmosphere of his office. I also persuaded him to invest in an iPod and he got a lot of pleasure transferring his huge

CD collection, marvelling at how much such a small gadget could hold. There was always music playing when you visited his home. He was a great lover of big bands, James Last in particular.

Often a party of us would go to a Rotary function, or out for a meal or the theatre and Roland loved to join us. We usually made our own way but Roland decided it was time to get rid of his ageing Volvo and buy a people carrier. He was like a young boy with his new toy and whenever the opportunity arose would offer to transport 6 or 7 of us. I remember the first time he rolled up to our door taking great pride in showing us his new acquisition. It had buttons for everything, even automatic passenger doors. Although Roland embraced technology, it took him a little while to master it. Consequently we had trouble moving seats to get into the rear of his machine and he had trouble finding the right switch to close the doors. I think he demonstrated the function of every button on the dashboard before we were ready to depart. On top of that we travelled all the way to Blackpool with an unnerving beep ringing in our ears. By our next outing Roland had mastered the machine and proudly demonstrated before we set off.

From time to time I edit our Rotary club newsletter and Roland often supplied me with copy. He sent in his holiday photos and a comprehensive write up on the country he had visited. I smiled a one line in an account of his visit to Alaska. There in the middle of a comprehensive study of the country its history and politics were the words 'I must admit I enjoyed the home made cider and cookies. It was all good fun' Roland enjoyed life and enjoyed being with. Another article he sent me was about his National Service or as he put it "The time when the government give you your marching orders". In the article he says he joined on 1st March 1958, the day that Lytham Park Crematorium opened. He also said that his boss at the time, Jim Porter "tried hard to get me from going in altogether" He also says "it was an experience that I shall never forget, and one that, did me the power of good in many ways, it taught me the meaning of standing up for one's self; it taught me about my fellow man and most of all about taking orders and the meaning of survival. There was no running home to mother." He also says "I asked to go in the RAMC, the Royal Army Medical Corp (nick name rob my comrades) which he thought was a little unfair. It was during this time that he married Ivonne and in the article he speaks very fondly of her and quotes a time when he had to inspect their own married quarters in his role as Guard Commander. With his commanding officer he had to don white gloves and inspect every nook and cranny, including the tops of doors and picture frames, for any speck of dust while the sergeant made notes on his clipboard. He felt that a house proud Ivonne, who witnessed the inspection, never got over it or forgave him. I'm sure she did.

Roland took great pride in his family. He was devoted to Dawn and idolised his two granddaughters Olivia and Eleanor and I don't think there was a time in his company when you were not mentioned in some context. He always shared with me your successes and the things you had all done together. He spoke kindly of you too Edward. He thought you were a great son in law.

So Roland was highly delighted when he changed the name of the business to Roland L Whitehead and Daughter and Dawn joined the family firm. I know that he would be thrilled that it will be "business as usual" at the Old Lifeboat Station and can be confident that you and Eddie will carry on the work that he dedicated himself to in the same professional and caring way that he applied to everything he did.

Roland, we will miss so much about you. You will be missed by our family and everyone who knew you. Attendance here demonstrates the warmth and affection that everyone feels towards you.

God Bless and Rest in Peace.