

Patrick Byrne - Eulogy

Pat generally found funerals too mournful and preferred the Irish celebratory wake style. He would often try to lighten the mood by telling a few topical jokes about St Peter and the pearly gates, with mixed results. Over 10 years ago, after celebrating their Golden Anniversary with his beloved wife Jean, he commented that if he died the next day he would still have been lucky to have a happy, fulfilled life, and any extra time would be a bonus. He had that bonus, and although he was still looking forward to the future he died happy to be reunited with his beloved wife, and was prepared for death. Ever the optimist, he had £264 hidden in a spectacles case to cover his funeral expenses, and had recently changed the old pound coins for new ones.

Pat was born in Huddersfield in 1926 and his brother John was born 3 years later. Little is known of their elder sister Maureen, who left home after their parents disapproved of her wanting to go on stage.

The brothers had a difficult start. Their mum died young. They could later have moved to a pub when the landlady took a shine to their father, but he had made a promise at their mum's deathbed not to remarry. Their father often returned from his labouring with chemical burns and injuries from handling steel, and he thought they would have a better upbringing at the family farm in Ireland.

Pat was not always the best example to John, but taught him life skills, like how to avoid being arrested for vagrancy, how to see Flash Gordon for free at the cinema by creeping in through the fire escape, and how to skip school by pretending not to speak either English or Gaelic.

Pat did voluntary work at a fairground. It was voluntary as it was unpaid - the income came from short-changing drunks using sleight-of-hand when returning their change. He demonstrated the method to Shaun and his friends, who found that the same trick is used to this day.

As you would expect, music played a big part during their time on the Irish farm and the boys were expected to sing along. Unfortunately, the theme of most of the songs was how to drive the British out of Ireland. After Pat joined the British army during the war there was little contact with the Irish relatives, but decades later very warm relations were resumed with the next generation of the family. Pat had a

good memory - 70 years later when his grand-daughter Anna told him she was studying the Irish troubles at school he could still sing nationalist songs to her.

Pat spoke little about the war. He missed the D-Day landings due to his father's untimely death just as his unit was being mobilised to the coast. He was demobbed after the war and then decided to sign up to complete 25 years' service.

He enjoyed the peacekeeping duties in Austria and Germany, but his time in the Malayan Emergency was particularly difficult. It sometimes seemed that they were patrolling the leech-filled jungle to give the communist guerrilla snipers a moving target to practise on, and he lost several good friends.

It was while he was on peacekeeping duties in Beverley that he met the love of his life, Jean. Picture the scene: a handsome young soldier with his friends enjoying a pint outside a pub, surveying the street for insurgents or pretty girls. A girl walks by, provocatively swinging a cucumber, eyeing up the soldiers. He asked her out on a date .. and .. it didn't work out and she went back to her cucumber. However, the soldier and cucumber girl were with their friends Pat and Jean that day, who also dated and for them it worked out perfectly.

Pat and Jean calculated that on their income they could afford one child, and Shaun was very lucky to be that child. They were wonderful, loving parents and they were keen to ensure that Shaun got a full education, unlike themselves.

Pat spent some time in the Military Police at an army apprentices' college. Shaun remembers that whenever he told Pat that he had seen soldiers enjoying themselves, Pat would rush off to investigate in case he needed to put a stop to it.

Artillery and a tropical ear disease contracted in Malaya that persisted for 30 years wrecked Pat's hearing. He would never ask anyone to repeat a question, but would guess at "yes" or "no" based on his mood and whether he liked the questioner and their expression. He would forget that others generally had good hearing and that even as far away as 4 foot they could still hear what he was saying.

After the death of Jean's dad, they bought a house outside Scarborough so that Jean's mum would not be living on her own in an isolated hamlet in the forest.

Pat then started his second career as caretaker at East Ayton primary school. He took to this with relish and loved helping the children in the village.

Pat and Jean were a familiar sight cycling around the village. Pat also enjoyed motorcycling, occasionally giving in to pressure from Shaun to upgrade to a larger motorbike. Jean considered Pat's riding style too sedate, and found it more exciting riding pillion with Shaun or his friends. At least Pat could boast that he had never had an accident riding with Jean, unlike Shaun who had an accident on the same forest track where Jean's father almost died when his tractor and trailer jack-knifed decades earlier.

Pat was very generous to friends and family, but personally was frugal and hated waste. Before going to the opticians he would first check the spectacles available at British Rail lost property in case he could find a pair that was good enough. His collection of glasses is almost as varied as Elton John's. He also enjoyed picking up bargains at auctions and they all had one thing in common – they were completely free. Pat would turn up after the auction had finished and salvage unsold items from the skip outside the auctioneers. He would arrive home with items of furniture balanced across the back of his motorbike, and Shaun's career in electronics was helped by the constant supply of TVs and radios that he could experiment with.

Pat played dominoes for fun and competition at the Denison and the sports club with friends including Bill and Chris. Bill and Pat would meet most days to share jokes and put the world to rights, and also enjoyed weekly trips to Scarborough for a pub lunch.

Like other students, Shaun would bring laundry home to be cleaned. It got the extreme army treatment from Pat, pants and socks pristinely ironed, and he would set fire to boot polish on Shaun's shoes before polishing them to a mirror finish.

Pat and Jean enjoyed visits from family and friends, who were treated to home baking. Jean's sister Vera and Bernard were frequent visitors, who sometimes arrived with a minibus full of pensioners ready for a tea and cake break on their way to the seaside.

They also loved to see and hear news of other family: Vera's daughters Susan and Jackie; Clifford and Betty's daughter Sharon; and brother John and Mavis's daughters Lorraine, Jackie and Joanne.

After retiring as school caretaker, Pat and Jean progressed from the annual holiday in Blackpool to holidays in Spain and the Mediterranean with friends and family.

Their greatest joy in retirement was when Shaun and Helen married and they became proud grandparents of Thomas and Anna. They doted on their grandchildren and loved spending time with them. Pat was a keen gardener with several allotments in the village and Thomas and Anna would help harvest the vegetables.

They were fantastic babysitters and Pat's reading style for bedtime stories would send the children to sleep in record time. Thomas will be talking about their memories later.

Tragically, 10 years ago Pat's beloved Jean passed away. He was devastated but was as positive as possible about the future. He adjusted well to taking over her roles, such as baking, letter writing and the monthly spring-clean. He remained active and fiercely independent for many years, but increasingly needed support from family, good friends and neighbours, and ultimately professional carers. Ian and Pat helped each other out. Jeff would visit with treats like cream cakes. Tony and Linda gave practical help when he had problems. Robert and Jane watched over him and were literally life-savers on several occasions, like when he was stuck in his bath for a day before they rescued him, and another time when he slipped on ice late at night and was trapped with a broken arm.

A bonus of Pat's increasing number of medical appointments was that he had many opportunities to chat up nurses, after which he would give Shaun a knowing wink as if to say "that's how you do it". Then, for the benefit of everyone else in the waiting room or ward, he would announce loudly "that's how you do it".

Pat managed to find a positive with his head tumour. Any nurse that took a close look risked getting a sneaky peck on the cheek.

He remained positive to the end, and never once complained about his multiple serious illnesses. In his final weeks he did have one anxiety – the responses from the nurses to his chatting up was so positive that he was concerned that he was leading them on and did not want to hurt their feelings. He asked Shaun to explain to them that, like his own dad when his mother died, he had no intention of remarrying and was just being friendly. He also wanted it explaining that even friends would not be allowed to borrow Jean's cycle.

Perhaps he imagined that she would be meeting him at the pearly gates on her bike.