

Geoff

What can I say?

Tragically taken long before his time, being probably the fittest amongst us and given his mothers and grandfathers life span one would have expected that he would have lived well into his eighties.

Now all we are left with are memories and regrets.

Regrets particularly from me that I did not keep in better contact, it was always going to be when we were fully retired and had a lot more time on our hands. We did E mail each other, but only three or four times a year. They usually took me several weeks to compile though, and I kept having to change them, someone would have had a baby, a hip replacement or a new knee. We had not kept in touch anywhere near enough.

And Memories which for the most part are only good ones.

I regret to say that they are very faint up to the time when we left Fowler Lane (I was only 5 at the time) and are generally only what have been passed on through Geoff's mum and Aunty Anne,

Of the time when one week we helped to re-fuel the car by putting water in the petrol tank and then the following week putting in sand, there is no doubt we would have been popular when the car broke down two weeks running on the way to 7 AM mass at St Wilfreds in Preston

Or of the time when we were supposed to have practised shaving on each other with Granddads cut throat razor, I remember there being quite a lot of blood.

One memory that is a bit more vivid when, and I am sure it was Geoff who borrowed a packet of 5 Woodbine cigarettes from what was Grandmas farm shop and we tried smoking under the hedge behind the outside toilet, I believe we were five at the time, I have never smoked since.

After having lived together as almost twin brothers for the first five years of our lives a bond was established between us that was to continue throughout our lives.

And so on to our growing up years when we would just go off and only come back when it was either going dark or we were hungry, To the railway track train spotting, or just putting pennies on the line to let the Royal Scott or one of the other magnificent steam engines flatten them, Geoff was always ahead at the train spotting, I was always a little bit jealous as he lived nearer to the line and always had better books, Or maybe on a cycle ride, at that time, on our very much second hand bikes which we always seemed to be repairing, or maybe catching newts in the pond at Oakfield , One time John Caunce was on a log bending over the pond when some one shot him in the seat of his pants and he went in head first, luckily it was a summers day because he had to strip off and try to get his clothes dry, He didn't dare go home in wet clothes, Other things we always seemed to be doing was playing hide and seek and tig around the farm when there would always be quite a crowd of friends and cousins,

Memories also of trips when Geoff's mum and aunty Anne took Geoff and several of us from Oakfield to places like Blackpool, Windermere, Holyhead or across the Mersey ferry from Liverpool to New Brighton. Memories of fishing trips to the canal or various local ponds and of one time when we were supposed to be going very early, I think it was five o'clock and the arrangement was for me to have a piece of string tied around my toe and hanging out of the window for Geoff to pull (I wasn't the best at getting up early) unfortunately it was raining quite heavily during the night and I decided the fishing would be off and removed the string, Geoff woke up more than me throwing stones at the window,

Then came the little parting of ways, with Geoff going off to the Catholic College at Preston and me only going on to the senior school at St Mary's

And of later years when we started to learn to dance, taking up dancing classes at Lou Davey's dance school over the Conservative Club at Walton le Dale, I dropped out after we had both attained Gold medal status although I think Geoff went on to get at least the Blue Riband if not further. We must have been keen because to get there it was two buses each way and sometimes waiting half an hour or more for the P20 at Tardy Gate in the pouring rain

Of times spent drinking in various pubs and then rushing off to the dance before they closed the doors especially of one time when after meeting a close friend of Geoff's at the Royal Oak at Riley Green and drinking five pints of Worthington E we raced back in cousin Peters mini to beat the 10-30 deadline, Peter was quite proud that he did the four or five miles in 12 minutes and got us there just in time.

And later when I got my first car and we could get around quite a bit more, To dances at village halls same as Barton and Bilsborough where most of the girls seemed to prefer dancing with the local farm lads rather than outsiders, or maybe over to Altrincham or Blackpool to either the Winter Gardens or the Tower Ballroom or maybe just go out drinking to a few pubs were the criteria would be an old fashioned atmosphere and good beer.

One time I particularly remember is one very cold February night when we went out to the Sirlion at Hurst Green and because the old Cortina I had at the time didn't always start in the cold we parked facing down a quite steep narrow lane at the side of the pub, When we left, probably at closing time, as expected the car would not start so we just jumped in, let it roll down the hill and jump started it on the way down, unfortunately it was at that point we realised that due to snow and ice on the road the car would not reverse out and there was no way we could turn the car round in the lane, after quite a while trying and each time ending up further down we ended up in front of a five barred gate leading into a field and so presented the solution to our problem, We would just turn the car round in the field, that was easier said than done, the field was quite slippy with the snow and ice and it took untill after 1 am using all the mats and carpets out of the car to get out, What state Geoff was in, who was doing most of the pushing, when I dropped him off I don't know, but the car was in quite a state.

And then after Geoff had had a car for a short time he came round one Sunday morning looking very shaken, He explained that he had been coming back from Blackburn through Brindle and just as he came over the top he hit some black ice, the car hit the bank, turned on its side and slid a considerable distance before hitting the other bank which turned the car back on its wheels He had come to see if we could go out there and look for the car accessories which had fallen out of the car, I seem to remember him saying in later years something about it being a great experience of how to control a skid.

Soon after this we began to lose contact a bit as he made his way up in the Midland Bank and began to move around the country quite a bit and we both got married, and with me not being one for letter writing the only contact we had was probably only at Weddings , Christenings and Funerals and the when he occasionally when he came back to Farington.

After leaving the bank he had a quite difficult time struggling to find any suitable work and it was not until he finally got his job with Cycling for Softies in St Remy that he finally seemed content and developed his love of France and the French people where he had a great number of friends,

We went over a couple of times with his mum when she was having difficulty without a wheel chair when Geoff would be trying to cram everything in to a few days, down into St Remy for his paper, a coffee, his daily local bread and the delicious confectionery for afternoon tea, He would also take us out to local villages and towns or places of interest.

And then when we saw quite a bit more of him when his mother was struggling to cope on her own and had to go into a nursing home when he came over quite frequently taking her out all over the place and then to somewhere for their afternoon tea, to finally when he spent a lot of time with her in the last few weeks of her life.

Geoff will be very sadly missed, although I still cannot, even after having been to his funeral, believe we will never see him again, The last few weeks have not helped by having him watch over us at tea time with his photograph sitting on the organ watching proceedings.

One thing I am sure of, sitting up there watching over us he will be pretty annoyed he is not with us today.

Finally I would ask everyone to also to remember Pete in their prayers who recently suffered a stroke and is thankfully making a good recovery, May he make a full and speedy recovery and soon be back to his normal self, and for our brother in law Adrian, who is fighting lung cancer and is struggling with the effect of chemotherapy, Hopefully he will go on to live quite a few more years although the prognosis is not very good.