

Frank Hercliffe 8 May 1922 – 22 September 2013

Each of you will know a part of Frank's life- a very full and colourful life. I found myself wondering if Frank had been a colour, which colour would he have been – certainly red- for love- perhaps yellow for vivacity- green for his youthfulness even in his advancing years- perhaps you have even more ideas!

Frank began his life in Lincolnshire, and grew up there, before moving with his family to Blackpool.

I always knew of his associations with the RAF, but he didn't begin his career service there – he began in the Senior Service- the navy as a telegraphist, and then joined the Fleet Air Arm, where he got his first experience as a pilot, flying the Seafire (the Navy version of the Spitfire)

Back in civvy street he had a variety of jobs- driving a lorry- working as a carpenter and for a time as a cocktail waiter!

He met Dorothy in Blackpool and they married on New Year's Day in 1948- he never had an excuse to forget their wedding anniversary- though it might sometimes have been celebrated with a bit of a hangover!

Still looking for his vocation, he joined the RAF and on the 1st Oct 1953 was proud to become Flying Officer Hercliffe. He served in the RAF for 20 years- ending his flying career as a Sqn Ldr- it was only when health problems came along, which would mean "flying a desk"- that he decided to retire.

And so it was that Alan and Wendy grew up as part of the RAF family- living in numerous places- attending a number of schools in various places, but always grounded in the family life that Frank and Dorothy had created. There were exciting moments for the son of a pilot- sitting alongside his dad on plane trips courtesy of her majesty. During one flight to Gibraltar, they flew over the Queen Mary on its last voyage, and in addition to flying, Alan also honed his snooker playing skills in the officers mess.

Family holidays were a highlight – hitching up the caravan and driving across Europe to Italy, Germany, Holland – often in convoy with friends.

Wendy had made her home across the pond, and Frank loved to visit across there- he was "Pop pop" to his 3 grandchildren and 11 great grandchildren- and time with the American side of the family meant watching ball games, going to concerts, visiting schools, storytelling and of course, regaling one and all with his famous jokes and stories.

In retirement, he was not to sit back and twiddle his thumbs. He trained as a driving examiner, first in Leicester, then in Blackpool- and in true Blackpool tradition, he and Dorothy welcomed guests into their home, always going the extra mile to make the

holiday special.

Then 20 years ago, Frank and Dorothy moved to Grundisburgh to be closer to Alan and Barbara and their boys Alan and Matt. He was “Pop-pop” to his 2 grandsons this side of the pond and was always on hand to collect from school, and playgroup (Matt running on ahead to get home to Dorothy’s homemade cake), go to football games, help out with cycling proficiency and always being willing to give sage advice and guidance, along with a joke or two!

In the last few years, in the years I have known Frank, there hasn’t just been Frank, but Frank and Joan. I was a fly on the wall, as I guess quite a few of you here were too, as friendship grew into romance. I first met Frank through the Golden Club, and a Christmas dinner, at which he was in charge of entertainment- clearly he loved music- so much so that he learnt all the words of a Frank Sinatra song and stood at the gate of Unicorns to sing it to Joan. Every morning, as he wooed her love, he would ring at 9.00am and play Beethoven’s Für Elise. The years of driving experience stood him in good stead, as on the occasion when he drove all the way to Southend and back, to count the number of steps, and ensure that there weren’t too many for Joan- as they went together to a Glen Miller music concert.

He always had a story to tell me, and a joke; my favourite was a time in the RAF, when after the war he was asked to fly to Berlin and take a young officer over for the weekend. He was happy to do so, and being the person he was, he enquired of the young man, what plans he had, and offered to show the young man round, but the young man assured him that he had friends and was OK. On the flight back he asked how it gone, and was told how the young man had gone to a nightclub, and was getting along famously, until, in a intimate moment, he realized, something was amiss- “oh sir, he said “it was great until I discovered that she was a fella”

There are other jokes that I could recount, not least the one about the 3 legged-chicken, but that is perhaps best told later at the village hall, where all of you are invited to join together for a cup of tea and a bite to eat.

But before I finally finish, Frank would often come here with Joan on a Sunday morning, and sit in a pew at the back near the door. On occasion he would talk to me about the building, but modest fellow that he was, he never told me, that he is immortalized in stained glass, in Lincoln Cathedral, in a window dedicated to Bomber Command- complete in his full flying suit.

Frank was a true gentleman- and our lives are so very much the richer for having known him – and for that we give heartfelt thanks today.