

Memories of Dad

It is lovely to look out to an audience of people who knew and loved Dad. I would like to share with you a few stories that help to explain what made him so special.

Dad was a fun-loving man with a twinkle in his eye and a mischievous sense of humour. He also had huge determination coursing through his veins. When he wanted to do something, he did it. He spent a lot of his life working hard at what he loved – teaching kids outdoor activities.

I have spoken to many old friends over the last week and all of them have said the same thing about Dad. That he was the one to encourage their sense of adventure. He did the same for me and Anna. He taught us how to canoe, climb, abseil and soar down zip wires. What he was really teaching was resilience. What he was giving us was a love of the wild.

My memories of Dad mostly involve adventure. One summer, thanks to one of Dad's more over the top bouts of retail therapy we found that we owned a sailing boat. None of us knew how to sail but by the end of the summer we had precious memories of watching bottlenose dolphins bow riding, amazing close-up encounters with massive sun fish and swimming from the boat in the deep water of the Irish sea.

Dad had the ability to always make you feel as though everything was fine and even in a force 7 gale, that everything was going to plan.

On a mill pond like day on Aberbach, Dad and I decided that it was the right conditions to hone my eskimo roll skills – I was only about 9 or 10. Dad was standing chest deep in the calm sea. I was in the canoe with a mask on. I flipped over the canoe. The visibility in the sea was very clear and I could see my Dad's legs, slightly shivering as he waited for me, as I struggled to get the paddle in the correct position to flip myself upright again. If I was running out of air I was supposed to tap the underside of the boat. But he could never wait and each time he would roll the boat back over, with me exclaiming that I had loads of air left and was just about to master the eskimo roll skill. It wasn't until I had kids myself that I understood the parental panic that he must have experienced each time he left me underwater with the seconds ticking by.

One day, after Dad retired, he received an email from one of the 50,000 students who came through the outdoor education centre when he was there. She was in her twenties and living in London. She

was unlucky enough to be involved in the Marchioness disaster. For the younger people in the audience – it was a tragedy where a party boat sank on the Thames river. She wrote that she was below deck when the boat sank. It was dark outside and as the freezing water rushed in, all the lights went out. She told Dad that it was the caving experience with Dad that enabled her to keep her head, work out which direction the surface would be, to escape and survive. She wanted to thank him for saving her life.

There is one more story I would like to tell you. I only heard this last year when I was chatting to Stuart who worked with Dad 20 years ago. It has already become one of my children's favourite stories.

Dad was climbing with some friends in the Alps. They had been up early and had ice axes and crampons. They were on their way back down the glacier and my dad's knees were hurting. He turned to his friends and said he was going to jog down the glacier as it was easier for him and he would wait for them further down. He set off and as he jogged down, he approached a French guide who was standing with his clients. They were discussing how to cross a deep crevasse that had opened up and was too wide to step across.

Dad didn't see the crevasse until it was too late. He tried to stop but the spikes on his crampons stuck into the ice and flipped him into the air. He did a 360 degree summersault and landed on his feet the other side of the crevasse. He turned, waved Bonjour to the French guide and carried on jogging down the glacier as if it was all part of the plan.

That's how I'd like to think of him now, jogging down a mountain with that twinkle in his eye. Saying it's fine Flora, it's all part of the plan.