

Hello everyone, I'm Ralph, I'm something of my dad's 'mini me', except I'm taller than him.

Don was born in 1937 in Greenwich to a humble and quite a difficult childhood around London. He left school at 15 with few qualifications and had a brief stint in the Merchant Navy before going into National Service, which proved surprisingly hazardous, with oil soaked mountain roads and having his truck pushed off the road by officers in armoured cars.

On leaving the Army, he started working for Plessey on various MOD defence projects. At one time he had to stay on an army base, but the army couldn't cope with civilians and so gave him and his mate the token rank of Field Marshal. I seem to remember his mate got caught with a woman in his room, so they were asked to find lodgings in the town, and that was presumably the end of his rather senior, if only decorative rank.

Something you may not know is that my dad invented the Long Phosphor Radar Scope. If you've ever seen any old war films, the radar scope shows a sort of line that goes around in a circle and aircraft show up as a little spot that fades out gradually. Well, before my Dad, that little spot appeared and disappeared almost instantly. Don looked at it and said "that's a short phosphor, why don't we use a long phosphor and it'll be easier to read the scope". The MOD tried it, and it worked. Sadly for Don, if you invent anything on MOD time it's theirs and not yours, and they traded the invention for favours with the Americans and so Don got no credit for it at all. However, he'd go on using his knack for looking at things and understanding them in simple terms many more times throughout his life.

Back in those days, if you wanted to program a computer in the UK, you had to be a professor of mathematics. Some professors had written some software to control a spinning radar tracking system but they hadn't taken into account the mechanical

realities of what they were doing, and with a huge squirt of oil, the whole thing broke down. Don looked at it and explained to the professors where they'd gone wrong. They adjusted their programs and the system started to work as it was supposed to. And thus, Don's career in IT started .

Don's career in defence ended when he was working on a radar system which would target tanks on a battlefield. One night he received an anonymous note that the Americans were looking to buy this technology to use it to target villages in Vietnam. This wasn't 'defence' as he had signed up to, so the next morning he assembled his team of engineers and they all agreed to immediately walk off the project. Having a conscience in the MOD isn't really allowed, and so he was never allowed to work for them again.

He left all things military and worked at computer company called Modcomp as a Systems Analyst. There was a rule that if you went to a prospect to get a contract signed and didn't make the sale that you got fired. He and a few others had gone to a prospect's offices to get the paperwork signed, when suddenly the phone in the meeting room rang. The host answered, and promptly left the room and didn't return. It turned out he'd just been fired and so never did sign the contract, but Don managed to hang on to his job. A lucky escape – something it seems Don had a knack for.

Sometime in the early eighties, Don struck out and started his own business with a partner, initially on our dining room table, soldering up electronic circuits. The business was called Cumana, and they made floppy disk drives for personal computers (which were quite a new thing at the time). He'd later tell me that felt he had to start his own business because he was 'unemployable' (I took that to mean that he could no longer put up with being told to do things he thought were stupid).

Cumana went on to be incredibly successful, employing some 20 odd people, I think. The company became something of a household name because they managed to

scoop up the vast majority of the education market for disk drives at that time – quite a coup for a small company in Guildford.

For a time things were pretty upbeat and buoyant. However, someone wasn't paying enough attention and accidentally sent a Winding up Order to Harrods. They could have sued Cumana into oblivion, but Mr Al-Fayed was busy with a law suit of his own, and so Harrods paid their bills and no more was said about it. Another lucky escape.

The company also provided Don with a company car or two. He once had an enormous and very powerful Mercedes, in which he'd get caught speeding at 108 miles an hour. You and I would be banned from driving and probably see the inside of jail cell for that. Don being Don got a slew of business people to vouch for him in court, and managed to keep his license and indeed liberty. Another lucky escape.

I did a bit of summer work at Cumana once. The people there told me they used to call Don 'Rock' because seemingly no matter what, he was there, every day, working hard to try and make it a success. It didn't matter what knocks he's taken the day before, the next day he just started to build from wherever he now was.

He took his leadership responsibilities pretty seriously. He lead by example, was honest about what was happening and took responsibility for his actions. One of Don's great leadership traits was to definitely, without fail, do the things he said he was going to do – and the determination to do that knew no limits, it would seem. These days in business circles that's called 'being accountable for your commitments', but to Don it was part of him and just how to be.

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Some years later Don would retire from Cumana and then decided to go travelling. He'd been to Nepal a few times for a few weeks at a time, but this time he'd go there

and elsewhere for a good 2 or 3 years. I know many of you have tales to tell of your times with him there, and I dread to think what you all got up to. He never really told me very many stories, probably because most of them were ill-advised mis-adventure, life-threatening or damn-right stupid.

For example, the time when he wanted to climb up some mountain or other, and decided to push through the effects of the altitude until he lost vision in his right eye. Thankfully, even with just one good eye he saw sense and descended for the night. Another time he had a nap on a glacier, and woke up just in time to see some vultures trying to work out if he was dead so they could peck out his eyes. More lucky escapes!

Don was insanely fit. I don't have the exact details, but there's a mountain from which you can see Everest and two foothills (which makes a beautiful picture). My brother-in-law, Jon is a professional photographer and an occasional trekker. He took a guide and tried to get up that mountain to take that picture of Everest, but had to descend for nightfall before reaching the summit. My dad, did that same climb in a pair of shorts and carrying just a day sack and his camera, took the picture and made his descent. Whilst not a technically brilliant picture, so few would be able to take it that Jon carried it on his photo library.

After all that, Don returned home to Guildford, which he told me was the "only place in the world I want to live". Whilst it's got a picturesque high street and is good for shopping, I was quite surprised by the strength of his attachment to the place (not least because he hated shopping). I guess having spent so many years here, having watched his family grow up here and having decades old friends here really counted for something for him.

The mountains had rubbed off on Don quite a bit - he had grown to understand and respect the Buddhist way of life the majority follow there. The people there are

predominantly very poor and suffer some terrible hardships that we in the privileged West would consider an injustice. However, these people are some of the happiest and most fulfilled on Earth. I took it that he'd learned that it's important to let other people do and say what they want without judgement, that possessions aren't really terribly important and that there are very few things in the world we really have any command over. There's no point worrying about something you can't do anything about.

I've had the sense that Don had shed a great deal of the emotional baggage of the past in those mountains and had developed something of an invisible coat that would shield him from the stresses and strains of our Western lives. He'd let go the things that had wounded him, the injustices and difficulties and was now doing what he'd done all those years before – it doesn't matter where you are, just build from that place. There's no point lamenting what could have been. After all, we really have command of very few things in the world.

From his new base of operations, amongst other things, Don played in a 10 pin bowling league, and frequented the Friday Evening Club with a few pals in a local pub, saw some opera and flirted with the baristas in Neros to get double stamps on his loyalty card.

He also tackled a few local walking clubs, such as the LDWA and the Surrey group. For those not familiar, these aren't the Ramblers or anything so sedate. These folks don't consider it a walk unless it's 25 miles or more, and many of them have done hundred mile walks through the night, and worse – on more than one occasion. Don obviously followed suit.

Don also became the social secretary, and as I lived in London at the time I fed him restaurant recommendations. I had a pretty easy job, as his first request was “find me a good curry on Brick Lane”. One thing I noticed about going out on those evenings

was how lovely all the people were, and how much they loved and respected Don. I never did take them up on the offer to go on a walk, but I suspect they found in Don his many leadership qualities, determination and quiet strength of character that had held him in good stead for most of his life.

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Latterly, as you probably know Don was diagnosed leukaemia, and was given a matter of weeks to live. For most normal people that'd just be the end of it. But of course, not for Don. His insane fitness confounded medical science when he managed to run on a treadmill far longer than anyone with his blood cell count should have been able. He was given treatment at the age of 79 that no one over the age of 60 has ever had (in part because of his fitness, but also because of his stoic outlook on what he was undertaking).

When he told me about his initial diagnosis, I was obviously in some shock. He told me very calmly and told me 'it's just my karma' - he didn't seem angry or particularly upset even. He'd later say that he thought you get a certain amount of life – be it 5, 50 or 100 years, but that's your lot. There's nothing much you can do about it, you've just got to make the most of whatever you have. I think it's fair to say Don made good use of the years life gave him.

With treatment over, just before Christmas, he went for a beer with his pal Steve, and sadly suffered a stroke. Again, for most of us that would probably be the end, but Don carried on. Thanks to constant visitors, and particularly to Jill's regular visits and occasional tough-love he started to recover.

Not so long ago, he left hospital and moved to Springfield Manor. Even there, without the benefit of clear speech, he made an impression on a number of people, such as the manager, Ajay (who's here today – I bet she doesn't come to them all) and indeed her little puppy called Bear. I don't imagine it was anything like how he had

hoped his end-of-life would be, but I'm glad he had some good times there, watching Grand Prix or having lunch on the terrace with Jill.

Whilst all this comes at the end of his life, and probably isn't his favourite part, honestly, in 80 years, it was only a blink of an eye. Rather than to dwell on it though, I prefer instead to concentrate on the many of you here today, and to the years I knew my dad as the man who was able to achieve great things, to reach great heights, to touch many people and to light up some corner of our lives which we didn't really know was dark.

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At times like these, we often find ourselves thinking of ourselves. To that I'd ask if we are diminished by his passing, or perhaps enriched by the time we had with him and the memories we now carry.

With that, I'd like to thank you all for your support, especially over the last few months. I'd also like to invite you all to shortly head over to the pub to celebrate Don's life in a manner perhaps more familiar (although I can't promise Kingfisher and curry). As we continue on our journey, it just leaves me to say, and perhaps you'll join me: "happy travels, Dad".