

With this commemorative account, I am representing the rest of my family, particularly my Mum, brother and sisters. So, I will use a collective term in place of 'I' in much of this account. I'm afraid I don't have the capability to commemorate a man as complex and entire in character as my Dad within eight pages, but here goes: -

Our Dad, Roland Guy, preferred to be known as Ron. He grew up mainly in Dagenham, one of three boys. His mother did have a longed-for girl, but her death as an infant, impacted heavily on the family, especially Dad's mother, Dorothy. Dad's father, Frank, was a train driver who had served at The Sommes in WW1.

Dad was a respectful, athletic and intelligent son, with a rebellious streak. His mother was very houseproud, Dad, being a rough and tumble boy with lots of energy, was often in trouble. His two brothers were less athletic and more studious. Dad always said his Mum was a good cook and he was always well-clothed and well-fed. If Dad needed reprimanding, his father would give him the belt as directed by his Mother, which was a fairly normal punishment in most of the nearby households at the time.

Dad signed up with the RAF when the Second World War began, he was only 15 years old, but eager to serve his country. His father, having lied about his own age when he enlisted in WW1 suspected as much, and informed the RAF of his true age. But the moment Dad was legally old enough, on his 17<sup>th</sup> birthday, he joined the Royal Marines. Soon after he enlisted, they asked for volunteers for 'Hazardous Duties' and Dad stepped forward. He didn't know at the time he was to be trained as a Commando, which were a new force at the time.

Dad spent the next two years training, mainly in Scotland and Wales in preparation for the invasion of France and Germany. He was trained as a sniper, in Rock climbing, explosives and unarmed combat. He was recruited into the 30<sup>th</sup> Assault Unit, an Intelligence gathering force, whose Commander was Ian Fleming, later to become the author of the Bond novels. A sub-unit of 30AU was X troop, which, was so secret, it did not exist. Dad served in this unit too.

Dad never really spoke about his actions in the War, he had signed the Official Secrets Act after all, but he would offer an occasional snippet of information, always retreating if pressed for further information. I can remember him saying when he passed out and received his Green Beret, it was one of the proudest moments of his life.

His unit landed in France in June 1944. On their first night at St. Mere Eglise, they were strafed with gunfire from the air. Some of the comrades, who had become like brothers to him over the previous two years were killed and many wounded. At this time, Dad was just 19 years old.

His Unit made their way through Northern France mainly concerned with the V1 and V2 rocket sites and secret weaponry. They arrived in Vannes, Brittany in August 1944. This is where he met Mum who was in The French Resistance. Our French Grandmother, Aunt and Mum were later awarded a certificates from the American President, Dwight D Eisenhower for service to the American people, hiding airmen who had been shot down over France, getting them through an escape network and back to England.

Mum had been a student at The Beaux Arts when Blitzkrieg cut her studies short. She was eight years older than Dad and considered French bourgeoisie. Dad was from the East End of London and from a very different class, culture and background. I'm sure they would have never met in normal circumstances.

Dad was only in Vannes for two weeks and met Mum here, a handful of times. Our grandmother was helpful to Dad's unit as she spoke perfect English and could pass on a certain amount of intelligence concerning German positions and Resistance networks. Therefore, the commanding officer, along with Dad came to their house a few times. Mum and Dad then continued getting to know each other, corresponding by letter. This courtship by post, culminated in their marriage early in 1947.

Dad's unit was sent to Germany in 1945, where they continued their Intelligence work, mainly directed at V1 and V2 rocket technology and the apprehension of German scientists.

Once the War was over, Dad was sent to Hong Kong. He was in Hong Kong for nearly two years. One of his main duties was guarding Japanese prisoners of war before their trial. He became particularly close to some of these inmates, going into their cells to learn jujitsu, also exchanging small gifts. In later life, he did speak of what he considered the injustice metered out to some of these low-ranking soldiers. He felt that while the true commanders and perpetrators of hideous war crimes, often escaped the death penalty, because they were tried later, once the fervour of war had subsided. Instead, the truly responsible were given lighter sentences, and it was the foot soldiers, many of whom Dad became friendly with, were those given the harshest penalty of death.

Dad's duty was to guard these prisoners, take them to the courthouse, march them to the gallows and watch them hang. Dad was only 20 and 21 years old during this period.

The one person in the world he would confide in was our Mum. He adored her and she him, and he was immensely proud of her many talents. In her opinion, it was not the liberation of France, nor the invasion of Germany which damaged Dad's mental well-being. In France he met the love of his life and helped liberate an occupied people. In Germany he helped halt the proliferation of advanced weaponry aimed at his countrymen. It was in Hong Kong, in the stillness of peace, the real damage was done.

Dad had signed up for twelve years, unlike many of his comrades who were 'hostilities only,' so were on Civvy Street once the war was over. Dad did not want to wait until 1954 to be with Mum. He did not want to serve his country by taking young men, like himself to the gallows to watch them die. The only possibility to escape this mental torture would be to buy himself out, which he could not afford. He had to find another way to be discharged.

The correspondence between Mum and Dad, from 1944 to late into 1946 serves to verify much of what Dad insisted was the true history of his mental illness and his subsequent discharge from the forces on medical grounds. He was eager, for us to know his initial stay in a mental hospital in 1946, was orchestrated by himself, and it had no bearing on his problems in later life. He saw mental illness as a shameful weakness, especially in himself.

But whatever the truth, he must have been a desperate man. Even though the letters between our parents were censored at the time, it is obvious they longed to be together, and Dad had a plan to leave Hong Kong, so he could marry Mum and leave this torturous existence behind. Dad said he feigned a mental breakdown, in order to be sent home.

Dad carried out his plan and was given a lumbar puncture, (which at the time was believed to ease pressure on the brain,) He was then boarded onto a hospital ship and caged deep down in the dark of the ship, without windows. The mentally ill were allowed on deck occasionally to take the air. Dad ventured out of his caged dungeon and onto deck once during the whole six-week voyage, as he couldn't bear a repeat of the humiliation he suffered, the first and only time; an audience of passengers staring and pointing, mocking the mentally ill.

We are proud of our parents' role in the war. Dad's small role to find V1 and V2 launch sites, retrieve secret documents deep within burning mines and from booby-trapped bodies, undoubtedly saved lives. This new weaponry was causing destruction and terror in our cities and the necessity to understand and halt what were the first ballistic missiles was essential to

winning the war against the Nazis. He never collected any of his campaign medals, believing he didn't deserve them as he was no hero. The heroes in his mind, were those who never came home. But we know, survivors like Mum and Dad do not go through war and come out the other side unscathed. They spend their lives as the walking wounded. Dad bore a living sacrifice with painful memories, he buried deep within and never spoken of. But we can piece together a little of his suffering.

Regardless of all his training and intelligence, many like our Dad, felt they were left on the scrap heap and found it difficult to get work after the war. Despite the dreadful treatment he had endured as a mentally ill patient, the previous months, he was determined to provide for his now wife and growing family. Dad became a Heating Engineer, running jobs mainly at Oil Refineries, Industrial sites, Schools and Universities.

Mum had five girls and one boy over the next ten years. Our parents bought their own home and Dad worked very hard over the next fifty years. Not bad for someone who suffered from depression and undulating moods.

We had a frugal upbringing despite Mum's heritage. The wealth was and always remained in France, but this is another story.

As children, we knew Dad had a temper and would avoid making him angry, running for cover when we did. He was, however, a very kind and generous person. He installed central heating to many of our neighbours' houses, only ever charging for materials, giving his labour and time for free, even when money was short in our own home. Give Dad a screaming baby and he would pace up and down tirelessly, singing 'Swing Low Sweet Chariot' in smooth baritone. soothing and rocking gently, until the infant settled in his strong arms, no matter how long this took. He was a deft, self-taught tap-dancer. He taught us how to knit, play cribbage, chess and bridge, his grandchildren too. He would sit alongside Mum at her easel and capture the scene wonderfully with a sketchpad and charcoal. He was sociable and friendly but would have bouts when he would get down in the dumps and sometimes go to bed for a week or two, lose his appetite and not want to involve himself in much at all.

The rest of the family would carry on as normal, knowing Dad would eventually pick himself up and carry on. This was Dad's pattern for decade, after decade until he went to see a GP, subsequently being placed under the care of Essex Mental Health. The doctor prescribed him anti-depressants of some kind. This, for unknown reasons was the doctor's first and only

approach. No offer of counselling or getting to the root of any problem. The doctor didn't even know Dad. He had never treated him before. The doctor was not a psychiatrist or a specialist in mental health, he was a general practitioner. We feel this was an irresponsible and neglectful approach. Dad had never taken any medication for his problems until this point in his life. He had never had any help at all from outside his family. The antidepressants were prescribed in 1994. Even though Dad had proudly and freely given to his country, he only asked, just once, for anything in return. And he was let down; appropriate, effective help was not given.

This visit to the doctor was the catalyst, when we all witnessed him change beyond our recognition, never to see the Dad we had previously known again. Only little glimpses. The undulating mood changes which would take years to complete a cycle, and he had always experienced, became mountainous highs and the deepest lows. This new cycle would complete in very rapid succession, then start all over again. After taking the antidepressants Dad experienced a 'high' we found frightening, followed by the one and only time he overdosed, in an attempt at suicide. He had never tried to kill himself before. Our Dad was brought up in a prudish, Victorian and careful household and yet suddenly he had become a completely different person.

I will try to describe, as best I can, this new pattern of his and our suffering: -

He begins making lewd and suggestive jokes, which makes us feel extremely uncomfortable, especially coming from our prudish, Victorian Dad. He is normally friendly and sociable, but he becomes loud and dominating. Our frugal Dad visits jewellery shops and buys us all gifts, spending hundreds of pounds at a time, lavishing money he had worked hard all his life to earn. We consider getting power of attorney to stop him spending his own money.

He knows everything; the fountain of all knowledge. He talks and laughs incessantly. Conversation is one-sided, it is never your turn. His laughter booms from wall to wall. It's embarrassing and unpleasant being near him. Saying this about the Dad we love, and our children love makes us feel terribly sad and guilty. But it is the truth. He has a gargantuan appetite, which cannot be satisfied. He stokes this high with cakes and coffee. His whole demeanour is manic, loud and exaggerated.

Gradually, the laughter disappears. He shuns company because it is distracting him from his obsessive mission. This quest is serious business. He stays up all night composing letters to MPs, The Prime Minister, the

multitude of bureaucrats he detests and the one or two he admires. As the days pass, the writing becomes less legible and the content more bizarre. He draws colourful patterns, and, in his mind, they signify something. There is an all-consuming urgency to chronicle his message. He has invented a new language of bold, swirling colour. Thick lines at the outer page edge, squeeze down to central infinity. It is necessary to communicate in this visual code. If not, Bill Gates, MI5, The Pentagon, our family's Doctor and even the newspaper boy will give his secrets away to THEM. Spies have been infiltrating his TV and telephone. Only a genius on a similar astral plane will have any hope of understanding his cyphered pleas for help. We don't recognise this person; we cannot identify with him at all. Our ageing Mum is distraught and bewildered. She begins to retreat into a world of her own. Anger and frustration ooze from him. He paces like a caged gorilla as he struggles to express himself, he cannot. There is so much he wants to say, but he can't verbalise anymore. Each sentence begins with a stifled energy that queues impatiently like a traffic jam at the tip of his tongue, bunching up behind the barrier of his clenched teeth. Unable to escape into words, a few stunted grunts, relieve the building pressure of frustration, he unsuccessfully attempts to speak, again and again. Dad wants to lash out, bang and crash. His eyes are murderous. I think he wants to hit me. We avoid him. So, he begins to believe, no-one understands. No-one cares. Dad sighs a lot. Lungs full of air expel their content in sharp bursts of despair. We prepare for a deeper plunge. He knows what is coming. His deep blue eyes glare with terror. As though he is descending into Hell. He reaches and grasps to save himself. Like Clawing fingernails screeching against the impenetrable sides of his black hole, he is sliding, slipping, he cannot cling on, screaming tinnitus rebounds around his brain. He takes to his bed and stays there. Dad is not hungry. He does not eat or drink. He must be coaxed or he will starve. He doesn't want to touch or be touched. His soul has been sucked away into a black void. His deep blue eyes are empty. There is no-one in. Vacant. Silent. Nothingness. For us Peace, relief and guilt.

We can breathe, we can recharge, we can pretend he doesn't exist. How horrible this makes us feel - to say this about our Dad.

This becomes his extreme pattern of suffering, one phase, leading to the next in a continual and rapid cycle of agony for all concerned. This sequence of behaviour accelerates, so the whole process from mania to deep depression covers a period of a couple of months. This is his life for twelve years, until he dehydrates and starves himself to death under the care of Essex Mental Health Services.

Many times, we would try to contact and engage health professionals to help our Dad during each of these phases. The health professionals only ever seemed to step in and propose any help at all when the situation became desperate, and Dad was deeply depressed. He was regularly sectioned during the depressive phase and taken to Runwell Hospital.

Each time he was there, we were pressured to give our consent to electro-convulsive therapy. We were told our Dad is willing to have it. This would always be when Dad was deeply depressed and starving himself. If someone had asked Dad if he would like to end his life at this time, he would have agreed to it, so it was a ridiculous proposition and inappropriate to be pressurised in this way. We knew, in his logical state, Dad would not want it. We had to fight his corner; he was incapable.

Dad's extreme suffering began in 1994 and ceased with his death in 2006. We feel this extreme suffering could have been avoided with appropriate help and care. We hate the fact he suffered in this way, and we hate the fact he did not get the right help. These feelings give rise to our own self-hate.

Our Dad lived a full life, we are grateful for that as we know many who were failed have been denied a this. All sufferers and their loved ones are in our thoughts and prayers.

We will give credit where credit is due, though. Runwell Hospital was set in beautiful surrounding countryside, green grass, trees and rabbits, visible from every angle. As Dad improved, we could go for walks in the grounds and sit outside and have a cup of tea, even take him out to lunch at a local pub. The immediate world outside his ward was conducive to him wanting to get well. Sadly, it is now a luxury housing development.

In the days before his death, Dad was transferred from Runwell Hospital to Southend General Hospital. He was badly dehydrated and in a poor physical state. When it was obvious Dad had no hope of surviving this last starvation ordeal, the Sister at Southend Hospital allowed his children and grandchildren to gather around his bed to say a final farewell and were there, by his side as he took his last, laboured breath. He was taken long before his time, but his suffering was, after twelve long and torturous years, finally over.



Mum and Dad 1991



Mum and Dad, Vannes, August 1944



