

GEOFFREY BINGHAM: A FAMILY EULOGY

In those last dark, cold nights before someone you love dies, you think about what makes that person unique—how do you sum up what it was to be the wife, child, grandchild or great grandchild, of a life so dynamic, so vibrant that it defies description?

A life lived at such pace that sometimes we were left behind, a life that had so much love that we had to forgive his failings because we knew we were loved by someone who understood people, who though a stranger to small talk, could speak to people at the heart of their beings and change lives with what he understood. He watched and listened and knew. He always, always, saw the best in others and especially in his beloved wife, and family.

His marriage to Laurel, his bride in post-war 1946, was a great love story of 63 years although not always smooth sailing with two feisty strong spirits together. He could not have done what he did without her support of his ministry. They had an unswerving faith which made them leave the comfort of home and family to travel to Pakistan—to an unknown future with five children, with their sixth born there. Much later, along with Mum, he was devastated at the death of his fifth child Ruth in 1974. How fitting that some of his last words were, 'Ruthie' and 'Abba! Father!' We believe he saw heaven and, as he would say, never felt the bump as he moved from this life to the next.

Yet for us, what made him the husband, father and grandfather we loved was his passion for life; whatever he did, he did. He loved his gardens—from the flower gardens he created from the desert at Hyderabad in Pakistan, to the huge veggie patch at Ackland Hill. The grandchildren remember him as 'strawberry grandpa'—he delighted in taking them to what was surely the biggest patch ever and letting them pick their fill. Danielle recalls wondering how Grandpa knew when he would be walking ahead saying, 'You think I can't see you picking those strawberries'.

In the words of his grandchildren: 'Thank you for letting us try and get fat in your strawberry garden. Thank you for allowing us to play for hours in your hot houses and on the big hill at your place. Thank you for slipping us an extra few dollars when Grandma wasn't looking. And for turning a blind eye to Kate and Jen feeding the biscuits to Soxy the dog'.

For his children he was a strict disciplinarian—we knew we were in for it when he would line us all up! He never really understood teenage girls at all and mum often had to rescue us from his wrath. But he was keenly aware of his failures as a father. He set high standards for himself and others, and his family were no exception—that made it difficult for some of us growing up but we know now he loved each of us deeply.

He loved to visit our homes and help us establish our own gardens (or paint our houses), sometimes whether we liked it or not. He adored his birds—90 budgies and finches made it very difficult for boyfriends to sneak past late at night. He could spend hours watching his birds.

Daily devotions (which trust me was far more than a quick reading and prayer!) set the foundation of our faith and love of the scriptures—we were the sometimes-unwilling congregation but we listened and learnt so much! Anyone who used to go to his fiery preaching would have sympathy for his children and grandchildren when they were slightly inattentive during sermons.

The tradition of reading the Christmas story before opening the presents was invariably marked by trying to stop impatient, giggling younger grandchildren from getting the Grandpa look. Despite this, the grandchildren have said, and we quote, 'Thank you for telling us to be quiet during the Christmas story, Thank you for praying for us everyday, Thank you for your Grandpa newsletter when we were growing up. And mostly Thank you for showing us what it means to love the Lord and love your Grandkids. We love you with all our heart. Love, all 11 of us!'

Truthfully he was for our early years often an absent father and husband, not only spending many weeks away preaching and teaching but hours in his study writing. He would inevitably have huge regrets for doing this and promise to reform but we would know that very soon he would be unable to resist what he had to do. After every meeting he would come home and be amazed at the way God had worked—each time was 'the best we ever had'. We knew he could no more stop preaching and writing than breathing.

He was puzzled by our need to take time out for holidays because he said he was surrounded by God's creation wherever he was. We did have a few memorable holidays at Murree—I remember Dad laughing uproariously at Mum sliding down the snow-covered slopes on metal trays; being woken in what felt like to us the middle of the night to watch the miracle of hundreds of tiny turtles hatch at Sandspit, a beach near Karachi; also trekking to a volcano near Ziaret in the wild northern frontier of Pakistan, and a narrow escape when he took us walking in the Blue Mountains.

Driving with Dad, I have to say, was never a pleasure as he was often way too preoccupied to worry about other cars—we think the guardian angels in heaven assigned to his watch ended up on work cover and sang the hallelujah chorus when he could no longer drive. But I did like cycling behind him in Pakistan to the poorest Kooli outcast street sweeper villages where I learnt our Dad knew how to share the liberating love of God to people who were as important to him as any head of state.

He was incredibly generous and luckily for him Mum also believed in always sharing what they had with others—it was their way of life. Their meal times often included guests. He loved to tease and puns would come thick and fast at family times.

God always provided, Dad knew, but sometimes Mum had to do some creative accounting to make ends meet or he would have given away their last cent. He sometimes found it difficult to understand Mum's preoccupation with worldly ideas, such as wanting a washing machine for six children in Pakistan.

You cannot fully encapsulate his life at a time like this but don't worry, in the last year of life when we thought the frailty of his mind and body had finally caught up with him, he handwrote his last book with incredible insight! We want to thank Gillian Borgas for her encouragement that made it possible.

On behalf of Mum and our family we want to publicly thank those, who made his last difficult years worth living. From his beloved family, to Martin Bleby, John and Beryl Skewes and all from New Creation who journeyed with him, and faithful friends like Peter Greeneklee and David Lines who weekly visited Dad to share scripture. Also his friends from Redeemer especially Jonathon Cannon who ministered to Dad in his last days and the wonderful staff at Burnleigh who treated him with amazing love and respect.

As his family we remember with love, tears and a lot of laughter his amazing ability to embrace life and live it to the full right until the end. In his last year he appreciated afresh the importance of his family and to walk into his room and see his face light up made this a precious time. For all who loved him this is a bitter-sweet day—as his family we remember him with love and we know that he would say with an air of complete surprise this has been 'quite indescribable really—the best ever'.