

“World’s Greatest Dad”. I came across a pair of socks the other day, given to me by my wonderful daughter, Lucy, with that very phrase written on them. I thought to myself, “Well, it’s not really true, is it!” And the reason why it’s not true is because that person is MY dad who, in the enduring words of a certain famous boxer, was THE GREATEST. Let me elaborate.

It's sunny and it's the holiday season, Dad's favourite time of year. As kids we were very lucky with both Mum and Dad being in education, as they had the whole summer off with us and we got to spend time with them for the whole six weeks....some would say that Dad in fact had 52 weeks of the year off, as he didn't really have a proper job like everyone else, did he! During the school holidays we had the run of his college, and as I loved sport I felt like a kid in a sweet shop, flitting between the gymnasium, tennis courts, ping pong, swimming pool and playing fields. Dad used to keep the trailer tent under the gymnasium there, and we'd dust it off each year prior to our yearly European vacation. We'd get up at the crack of dawn and hop on a ferry to Calais. The holidays were always meticulously planned by Dad, they were always different, and culturally very diverse and educational. Those 2-3 weeks were packed with fun and places of interest, we learned so much and all became well-rounded Europeans; and those holidays always united us as a family....despite the frequent squabbles over who won Monopoly or pétanque, and whose turn it was to sit in the middle seat at the back of the car! I'd go back to school each September and inevitably conversations would turn to where you'd been on holiday. Generally my friends would have spent a wet week in Camber Sands, or a soggy sojourn in Scotland. I couldn't help but feel smug when I explained that we had been climbing mountains in Switzerland, picking cockles in Brittany, drinking wine in Germany, going down water flumes and death-defying summer toboggan runs, and finished by sunning ourselves on the Côte d'Azur. Dad put in an enormous amount of effort every year to ensure we had the best holidays, and boy, did he deliver – I have such special, lifelong memories of those treasured times.

Sport. With parents like Mum and Dad us kids were always going to inherit the sport gene. Looking back on my formative years I'm really grateful to both Mum and Dad for ferrying me around to various locations each week, all year round. It's not a cheap pastime, but Dad always ensured I had all the gear; I never had to put my hand in my pocket, and I never had to ask for anything....he always provided. I wondered where all the gear came from, but never asked as I'm sure half of it was off the back of a lorry! Anyway, as you all know sport was Dad's life. I had the chance to see him in action a few times, be it at gymnastics events, hockey, squash, or cricket. The game that really sticks in my mind was the 1985 Dr Challoner's Grammar School Teachers vs Dads annual cricket match. I turned up to watch with a few school friends. It was all quite sedate until Dad got in to bat. He started spraying the ball around the pitch from the get-go, and then he got a juicy half-volley from the English teacher, Mr Chapman. Dad's eyes lit up and he hit the ball like an Exocet missile to mid-on, which had 4 runs written all over it from the moment it left the bat. Well, it would have been 4, were the unlucky Mr Carpenter not positioned there. Now, in his shoes I would have just stepped aside and let the ball go to the boundary, but fair play to Mr

Carpenter, he tried to catch it...it was a good effort but he spilt it. Then he crumpled to the ground. He was taken to hospital with a broken finger – I saw it, it was disgusting, his finger had quite literally exploded. Two overs later and facing an increasingly worried-looking set of fielders, Dad once again faced Mr Chapman. This time a straight one, Dad took one step down the pitch and unleashed a shot back over his head. To this day, I have never seen a ball hit so hard or so high. At that end of the ground there is an enormous oak tree. Dad's shot went so high that it hit the very top branch. We all watched as the ball then descended, seemingly in slow motion, and smashed the back windscreen of Mr Harris' prized red hatchback! Me and my mates were in hysterics...Mr Harris was not so amused! Anyway, Dad had to retire as they couldn't get him out and he needed to let others have a bat; he then proceeded to claim 4 wickets when it was the Dads' turn to bowl – it was a brutal exhibition of powerplay that earned him "Man of the Match". On the Monday I walked into school and news of Dad's antics had spread like wildfire! Everyone was coming up to me, patting me on the back and wanting to hear the story of the carnage that Dad had left behind! My own sporting achievements had never sparked such adulation in the 6 years I was there...but I felt enormous pride! Oddly, Dad never again got an invitation to play in the Teachers vs Dads cricket match...which was a constant source of amusement to him!

Dad had an aura. He was the fittest, the strongest (he even had muscles on his eyeballs!), the loudest, the most outspoken, definitely the most opinionated! He would quite literally talk to anyone. He drunk pints of beer whilst doing a handstand. He was a lifeguard...he also saved lives...is there no end to this man's greatness! Not in my eyes. As you've already heard from Tracey's quotes, this man was revered by everyone he met. The vulnerability he showed us in his last few days was something I had not seen before in him but it just endeared him more to me, somehow making him seem even more powerful....That's why he was indisputably the world's greatest dad.

All these attributes make me feel intensely proud of him. As his son he was immortal to me, a giant of a man, a demi-god. But he also instilled morals in us, to live life to the full but in an ethical manner. If I can be half the man he was and instil some of those values in Lucy I'll have done a decent job.

Dad is, always has been, and always will be my hero, mentor, moral compass and guiding light. I'll miss him greatly.