



RONALD GROVES



22 October 1944– 31 December 2020

10.40am Tuesday 2 February 2021

South Essex Crematorium
Ockenden Road
RM14 2UY

ADDRESS by The Revd Jonathan Aitken

A funeral of a much loved man, father and friend pulls at the heart strings in two directions. Part of us needs to feel sad to mourn perhaps to shed tears. When we go through such emotions we tread on holy ground, for as the good book tells us:

“Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted”

But simultaneously we mourners need to feel grateful, joyful and proud.

For Ron the man whose earthly body we say farewell to this morning will live on in our hearts, minds and memories because he was such a fine and life enhancing Character with a capital ‘C’.

I knew Ron only for a short period of about six months but we shared such intense experiences that I felt I knew him well enough to offer this eulogy today.

The circumstances in which Ron and I met were not ideal. We both made our mistakes and as result were both guests of Her Majesty.

But that was a situation which had its humorous side and it was that dimension which bonded us together as mates sharing both the comedy and the adversity of prison life.

Prison can be a sad place but not if Ron was on your Wing.

In Hamlet there is a character called Yorick of whom Shakespeare wrote:

“His flashes of merriment kept the table in a roar”.

That was Ron! Or Grovesy as he was also known. He kept me and others in stitches with his stories, his quick wit and his exuberant love of life.

He was forever taking the mickey out of me with both jokes and practical jokes.

One day he introduced me with great enthusiasm to a Mr Dipper. The name meant nothing to me.

At the end of our conversation Mr Dipper gave me an exceptionally warm handshake so warm that he removed my wristwatch without me feeling it or knowing it. Then Ron, tongue firmly in cheek, started innocently asking me what time is it Jonno?

To my horror I discovered that I had no watch. Ron had it. He gave it back with a flourish saying that I need to brush up my rhyming slang and to look out in future for dippers or pickpockets.

Some joker on the wing called us Jonno and Ronno the odd couple. Perhaps we were. But we spent many hours together enjoying each other’s company.

One day a paparazzi climbed over the wall and without us knowing snapped us sitting on a bench. It ended up as a full page photograph in a well known Sunday newspaper.

Ron enjoyed complaining: "I haven't led a perfect life but I never got my picture in the News of the Screws until I met you!"

Ron was comfortable in his own skin. He was proud of being a Barnardo's boy and of having graduated from the University of Life and Lorry Driving. He thought that was every bit as good as me being a graduate of Eton and Oxford.

One night we were partners in a prison quiz. The odd couple won the first prize. Ron explained our success over the tannoy to the audience:

"Jonno had the education but I've got the brains!" he declared.

In all seriousness Ron did have a lot of brains and a lot of character.

He was a voracious reader with an intelligent and inquiring mind. He was a loyal man. And he was a kind man.

Always the first to put his arm around a nervous teenager arriving on the wing or to try and cheer up someone who was down, I remember him saying:

"If I was running this nick the way I used to run me pub" he used to say somewhat fancifully: "I'd give old so and so a free drink or maybe two free drinks". He was a generous man.

Ron talked to me a lot about his family. I may look like a stranger to you today but several of you are not strangers to me for he talked so proudly about all of you and above all about his beloved Phyl.

He once told me that after he fell for Phyl he never looked at another woman again – and I knew that was true because that kind of deep golden loyalty ran like a gold seam through his heart.

Through our sadness today there are consolations.

As the family tribute reminded us Ron lived life to the full, achieved much and laid up his treasure in the hearts of his family and friends.

Maybe he will have to dodge and dive a bit to get through the gates of Heaven.

But I bet he will make the angels at the gate laugh. Then they will let him in so that he can be reunited in Heavenly joy with Phyl.

It's an honour and a joy for this surviving half of the odd couple to be sending him on his way to Heavenly eternity.

May Ron rest in peace and rise in Glory. **Amen**