

Family Memories of Paul Pole-Baker



Bernie's Memories

I have so many treasured memories of my dad. He was a loving and generous man whose kindness touched countless people. His Catholic faith guided him throughout his life and shaped us as a family.

As a young man, Dad worked as a lifeguard in the military Command Baths in Aldershot and taught me to swim, despite my fear of the water. He loved the outdoors—whether walking briskly through the countryside, watching birds in the garden, or exploring the beach at Herne Bay. The annual family holidays were always an adventure. I remember waiting with him at Farnborough Station as he piled us—and one very heavy suitcase—onto the steam train, destined for Herne Bay, or Swanage. Later, when he bought a VW van and a tent, we set off camping in the West Country, beginning years of happy family journeys together.

He was never happier than by the sea. He taught me to fish and to catch shrimp with my Uncle Mike's shrimping net and we enjoyed cooking and eating what we caught. He later became an enthusiastic follower of the TV cook Rick Stein, especially for fish recipes. Around the dining table, his stories kept us utterly gripped—particularly the one about a ship trapped in a cave, long before *The Goonies* came along! More recently, at my elder son Tom's wedding, we took him to North Berwick where he delighted in his fish and chips meal whilst looking out across the Firth of Forth to Fife, and at the nearby Bass Rock. Dad was a family man with a strong sense of providing for his family and encouraged them to adhere to Catholic faith.

Dad was always there when it mattered. He would pick us up from parties, even late at night. When I began my nursing training, he and Mum drove me to London, and at

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Christmas, if I was working a half day on Christmas Day, he would drive all the way after Midnight Mass so that I could still be home for a late lunch the same day. That was Dad—selfless, dependable, and full of love.

Faith was central to him. With Mum's support, he trained for the diaconate at Womersley Seminary, following in his father's footsteps. His ordination in our parish in 1990 was a proud and joyful day. He often rang me to share and discuss his homilies—so I was lucky enough to hear them more than once!

In his final months, we often prayed together. Those moments were deeply meaningful, and we both felt the loving presence of our Lord and His Blessed Mother.

Dad was a man of love, deep faith, and generosity. We will miss him dearly, but his spirit lives on in us. May he rest in peace.

Teresa's Memories

Dad was always making things. Every Easter, he used to paint faces on the shells of hard-boiled eggs, stick on cotton wool hair, and serve them for breakfast, one painted especially for each of us, with our names on them. He made the garden swing, a sandpit and then a slide. Except he made it out of splintery wood and hardboard, and it wasn't very slippery, so it was chopped up for firewood. Perhaps that's why no-one remembers it any more except me. He made me a hand-crafted stepped bookcase made of oak, painted and fixed to the wall. I wish I still had it. One day, while he was sawing something, he cut a deep gash in the kitchen table. I think he was banned to the garage after that.

As children, we take these things for granted. Our parents are our idols, providers and rule givers. But one day, while I was looking round my bedroom at the things that my dad had bought or made or painted for me, I suddenly realised; my dad loves me. He did these things thinking of me. He was always thinking of us, hoping for the best for us, and believing us to be smarter and more gifted than perhaps we really were. He was so proud of me when I finished my first degree at Bath University, probably not quite realising that I'd had three years of partying. Or maybe he did...

He also trusted my choices. When I decided to move to Portugal after meeting someone on holiday, he believed in me. He could see what I could see in my future husband and then thoroughly enjoyed the gastronomy when he visited us. Later, he loved meeting his grandchildren but used to terrify my daughter Sarah by telling her he'd put her in a pie. But later he was thrilled when my eldest, Emily, became an engineer like him and visited my

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parents at weekends while she was working at Bentley (taking a company car for further testing).

I felt dad's love again in his last days. I didn't think I'd make it back from Portugal on time, but he waited. When I saw him, he opened his eyes, said "Oh, it's Teresa", then grabbed my hand, and, with a twinkle in his eyes, said "naughty girl".

Mum and I were with him during his last hours, which were as peaceful as could be. I'll miss you, dad.

Judy's Memories

One of my strongest memories of Dad was our Sunday Lunch. Dad would prompt us to sit up straight and if that failed, he'd put a large finger in between our shoulder blades.

After roast meat or stew was finished he would command, "Emmy, the cruet" so that the salt and pepper were removed from the table. Then we'd have pudding: apple pie and custard was Dad's favourite. Who wants the cow's trousers (skin on the custard)? he'd say.

When lunch was all eaten and the plates cleared away all five of us children would sit in hopeful silence that Dad would tell us one of his stories of a smugglers' cave he found via a tunnel from his great aunt's house or maybe how he'd ridden a horse which bolted scattering workman mending the road. Stories of chickens without their trousers on or being asked by a policeman "what's in your sack, Sonny" after fishing overnight (fish of course).

I realised in writing about Dad how much I loved him and that eating together was something I love to do with my own family. It was an expression of how much he loved each one of us.

Mike's Memories

Dad was a family man with a strong sense of providing for his family and encouraged them to adhere to Catholic faith. Perhaps he realised an unspoken dream when he became a Deacon.

During the weekdays he was up and out to his work, initially at the RAE and then later in London.

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He loved to come home and spend time with us. Mealtimes were a communal time but often ended with an adventurous story. Some of them were exaggerated but often stemmed from his childhood experiences by the sea. One memorable story involved being stopped by a policeman in the early hours of the morning after fishing expedition with his uncle in Herne Bay Kent. He was carrying a bag over his shoulder, and the police man put his hand in the bag to encounter a crab!

We also had several holidays to Kent, the first by steam train via London.

He loved his Peace & Quiet (as I do) and often enjoyed being in the garden growing fruit and vegetables.

Some of my individual moments were doing a 25-mile sponsored walk with him, swimming and even a night-time swim in 'the puddle' the outdoor pool in Farnborough. In the last years of his life he talked proudly of all his children and appreciated us all for caring for him and mum.

Louise's Memories

I often referred to "my big daddy" as that is how I thought of him when I was little - tall and strong, picking up four suitcases at once and striding down the road to the station for our summer holidays in his hometown of Herne Bay. Holidays usually included a trip to the beach, a long walk or two after visiting what he jokingly called "a pile of stones" (a castle) and, if we were lucky, fish and chips or a trip to Macari's ice cream parlour for a 99. Dad's jokes were legendary - we'd say "groan, it's number 110 again!" while secretly loving his cheeky humour - this also included clasping his hands and twiddling his thumbs (we'd all copy him), thrilling us with games of knuckles and tickling us till we squealed! But most importantly, Dad always looked out for us. One day, when I moved to London, I called to borrow £10 and travelled down to his workplace, where he was waiting with a bag of shopping (and the tenner) and the usual assertion that I could always come home. And when I did visit, he was waiting with his Big Daddy old brown jumper, which came down to my knees, making me feel cosy, loved and secure.

Although I didn't appreciate it when he first became a Deacon, I came to see how his faith opened his life up to people from many backgrounds, giving them comfort during their own bereavements. And he did this as an act of service, with no recompense. Praying at the end gave him comfort and I found it very moving