

Bruce Farthing by Richard Farthing

5th July 2007

Firstly thank you all for coming today; it's a wonderful tribute to my father to see so many friends and family here from all periods of his life and career...

I'd like to share with you something of my father's early life, a few of his Sporting and Artistic achievements and abilities, and the lighter side of his character.

In 1940 as a 14 year old schoolboy, he was evacuated to Maidstone, and immediately found himself a spectator of the Battle of Britain overhead. So he was evacuated further, to Rossall School in Lancashire. This is where he started to learn his music and sport, ultimately becoming captain of the cricket team in 1943. A year later at the age of 18, with the war still in progress, the opportunity to go to University was replaced by the opportunity to volunteer for National Service.

He trained with the Officer Cadet Training Unit, and there made one of his first international connections – with members of the Dutch Resistance. The friendships that resulted were so strong that he continued to organise biennial reunions until very recently.

He was commissioned into the 7th Royal Horse Artillery and first stationed in northern Germany (somehow still managing to play cricket), and in one of his letters home in 1946 said he was "really rather excited" to be sent to Northern Italy. After fitting in some skiing, life became a bit more earnest with a peacekeeping role in Palestine. He spent the rest of his military career there, recalling, after Alan Johnston's recent kidnapping, that fighting the Stern Gang was even more dangerous than life there today, despite the political correctness of the time that did not allow the Army to call them terrorists.

Undaunted by the circumstances, of course he set about playing cricket, and I have a photograph of him in an Army team of 1947 in, of all places, the Gaza strip! While there, he somehow also found time to paint watercolours, and promptly won the forces middle-east art prize.

With Palestine handed over in 1948, he used his artistic abilities to obtain a choral scholarship to St Catharine's College, Cambridge. His elder brother Roger had preceded him with an Oriental scholarship and exhibition, learning Japanese as part of the war effort. Roger was no doubt responsible for teaching him the one liner that he used as a party trick in later years, presumably though, not in the company of the Japanese members of CENSA for whom, ironically, he worked in the mid 1970's.

He spent much of his time at Cambridge finding extra-curricular activities, a gene that I may have inherited. He sang in the choir, played the clarinet and

piano, played squash and (of course) cricket. In 1951 he produced "The Cats Whiskers", a forerunner of the Cambridge footlights and some pictures and an old 78 record of it survive. But as for his degree in Law, his tutor appropriately said that he hadn't quite played a "straight enough bat", and the innings had suffered somewhat as a result... Notwithstanding that, connections remained strong, including those with the Incogniti cricket team, and just earlier this year he organised a college bursary in his name for future choral scholars.

In 1954, he was called to the Bar by the Inner Temple and started his first job, which is listed in Who's Who as five years of mysteriously vague "Government legal service". I have discovered that, upon failure of the tea trolley service in Thames House, many afternoons of Government Work were in fact carried out at the Lyons Tea Shop. There were also several investigations, not so much into the misappropriation of government benefits, but into the characteristics of clockwork mice, the aerodynamics of toy grasshoppers, and alternative uses for water pistols. It was exactly 50 years ago this month that **he** really "had never had it so good".

He met my mother in the aforementioned tea house, married in February 1959, and with my sister Anne on the way in September of that year, he realised that the game was finally up! His interest in maritime affairs started when in 1957, in a storm force 10, he had crewed the Fastnet race in a wooden yacht named Bluejacket. He went on to crew two more races, including the 1959 race in which Bluejacket came 6th. The menu for the after-race celebration dinner is annotated by fellow crew members as follows: "Bruce makes an excellent cook for a new bride. Performance improves with wind". When a legal job was advertised in the British chamber of Shipping, it was naturally his.

It was equally natural that when I was young, he taught me to sail, and that with those legal connections we should inherit a dog from the Inner Temple, named after Lord Chief Justice Rayner. I remember the first occasion I took to a sailing boat - aged 6 in North Wales - then later at age 9 or 10 in the South of France. Part of this training involved inauguration into the special "Bluejacket" sailing language of "chillibox" or "chiilibox archie" meaning cold or very cold, and "coming on a Giler" which means the weather's deteriorating, and various other expressions too rude to mention here. In my teenage years we crossed the channel to Guernsey and northern France on 2 or 3 occasions. We spent my 18th birthday moored by old Harry's Rocks near Poole after a night crossing back from France. It was during that trip that he taught me some of those so-called "excellent" on board cooking skills - a dish of SPAM and deep fried courgettes... no wonder I'm vegetarian now!

So, back to the Chamber of Shipping. My father met Erik Nordstrom in the mid 1960's, and I will now hand you over to him to tell you a little about that time.

Thank you