

A Tribute read at Norman Lewis's funeral on 3rd February, 2010.

It is an impossible task to sum up someone's life in just a few minutes, particularly someone who has lived such a long and full life as Norman, but the following tribute is an opportunity to touch on just some of the facets that made him the unique and much loved man we are remembering and celebrating today.

Norman was born in Sheffield on the 7<sup>th</sup> January 1919 to parents Alice and Ebenezer. He was the youngest of their 4 children and their only son with three much older sisters; Stella, Marjorie and Lena, who between them encouraged him, enlightened him, bullied him and spoiled him in equal measure.

When the family moved to Sutton Coldfield, Norman, obviously very bright from an early age, went to Bishop Vesey Grammar School where he became friends with a group of equally academic boys, and he excelled.

Norman naturally progressed on to Cambridge to read Geography, but after his first year there, war broke out and his education was put on hold.

Norman made the considered choice to become a conscientious objector and then courageously joined the Friends Ambulance Unit. With them he spent a couple of years in Britain as a male nurse in the heart of the Blitz and then he was attached to the army unit that went into North Africa. He stayed with the North African campaign all the way through to the end, dodging direct fire to rescue and carry the injured and dying on stretchers to mobile units. Norman was considered to be the best male nurse the Friends Ambulance Unit had.

At the successful end of the North African Campaign, Norman felt himself to be at a bit of a loose end, but a posting to work in the mobile clinics in Syria became the catalyst which awoke Norman to one of the most overriding passions of his life. He fell deeply in love with Syria and with Arabian Culture; with the Bedouins, the nomads and with village life and it was a place he was to return to in his thoughts or in reality time and time again throughout his life.

Norman returned to Cambridge, possibly somewhat reluctantly, in 1946 to complete his education. Here however, he then met the other overriding passion of his life, Rosemary. Both he and Rosemary had independently arrived a day early for the start of term and were staying at a youth hostel where Rosemary had missed breakfast as she was putting her hair up for the very first time. Norman took her out for breakfast and in that fortuitous first meeting he also told her that he was going to write a book all about Syria. True to his word, that book was published 41 years later, and '*Nomads and Settlers in Syria and Jordan, 1800 – 1980*', was to become a classic textbook in every university in England.

However back in 1946, Rosemary, who was reading history, and Norman, who continued with Geography, fell in love.

When they had both finished at Cambridge, Norman was appointed to be the principal instructor at the Middle East Centre for Arab Studies in Lebanon.

They agreed to get engaged to prevent them from drifting apart with the distances involved, but then Rosemary received a letter from Norman telling her that his digs were horrible and that he would receive much nicer ones if he were married.

Detecting a proposal of marriage in there somewhere, Rosemary telegraphed Norman back in the affirmative, packed up her life in England and went out to join him by ship.

Whether or not Rosemary heeded The Captain of the Ship's advice to:

"give your man a clean shirt every day and never cross him"

I cannot say, but Rosemary and Norman were married in Shimlan, Lebanon on the 7<sup>th</sup> October 1948 and they enjoyed 61 years of extremely successful marriage. Hilary and Stella told me that they were totally devoted to each other throughout their lives and that their love for one another was humbling. They were a true partnership.

Rosemary shared Norman's passion for Lebanon and she described their time there from 1948 to 1955 as 'A golden life'. They had the best of everything. The times were peaceful, the landscape was stunning, the work and the people were stimulating and if they wanted the sophistication of a bigger city they would pull their evening clothes over their wellie boots, walk through the field and catch a ride to a party in nearby Beirut.

In 1950, Stella was born and she was joined by her sister Hilary in 1951. Life became even more golden as the young girls blossomed in the safe and free rural environment. They were part of a large community and were free to roam and explore and discover. Hilary particularly remembers riding on the back of an oxen drawn sledge as it thrashed the corn and says that her early years in Lebanon undoubtedly shaped her love of certain flowers, smells and colours in later life.

In 1955, the decision was taken to return to England as Stella had reached the age that she had to go to school.

Norman was passionate about Lebanon, but he was also a responsible and loving father who wanted the very best for his family, and so the family finally settled in Croydon where the good schools were.

Through word of mouth from his travels in Beirut, Norman got himself a very good job as a negotiator for Gulf Oil. It was perfectly suited to his communication and mediation skills and that became his happy and successful career for the next 26 years.

In 1957, their third child and first son Christopher was born and then in 1959 the family was completed with the arrival of Stephen.

The children would enjoy visiting Norman in his office in Marble arch, playing in the lifts and then having tea in Lyons Corner House afterwards. It was a childhood filled with jokes, charades, bedtime stories, wonderful family holidays in their cottage in Paracombe, as well as many other places, and, accompanied by their dog Lassie, lots of very, very, long family walks.

It was also a childhood filled with the sense that whenever their father wasn't at work, he was writing a very important book. Stella describes how there were always maps and papers around and in his mind Norman was still travelling the curves, contours and

history of the land he had grown to love so well.

In 1975, Norman and Rosemary moved with Gulf Oil to Houston where they had re-located their London office, and then in 1981 Norman retired and they came back to England.

They came back to England... and then drove the whole way to Northern Syria to work on a Dutch led archaeological dig in a very rural village. They made several visits and stayed for a number of weeks making themselves useful as dogsbodies to the expedition; fetching water, shopping, making sandwiches and other housekeeping duties.

As Norman spoke Arabic and could speak to the local Nomadic people he was an invaluable asset on the dig. But it was also an instrumental time for him as he gleaned more and more of the knowledge that he needed to complete his book.

And when he had completed the book, 41 years after first telling Rosemary about it at their fateful meeting, his thirst for academic research by no means diminished. He was constantly writing papers and articles on Middle Eastern subjects and well into his 80's he learnt to use a computer to aid him in his work.

Most recently he worked on a collection of papers about WJ Bankes and his journey to Petra in 1818. Norman was helped with this by Stella and also by Michael Macdonald who was a tremendous colleague over many years.

And of course the arrival of his grandchildren was a huge benefit to Norman in his later years. He loved them and delighted in them, building strong relationships with each one and taking great pride in their achievements.

Norman was an extraordinary man. Brave, caring, intellectually and morally rigorous, an explorer, a romantic, a dedicated and passionate family man; he will be dearly missed but also so very dearly remembered.