

## **William Makower – Family Life tribute for Oliver Makower**

You might be wondering why we are here in a church. Judaism for Dad was about family, tradition and generosity. He would also want everyone to feel comfortable. For him it would seem entirely appropriate to him to be here next door to Drapers Hall, which he was associated with all his life, as well as having the service being officiated by James, his ordained son-in-law. Thank you, James for all the sensitivity you have put in to bring this service together.

Oliver's progressive and debilitating illness over the last five years robbed him and us of his personality. And whilst memorials are a reflection of a past-life there is so much legacy that Oliver leaves behind that talking only of his past would miss so much of what his life work was about.

And that life work is all around us here today. To repeat Wren's epitaph (not far from here in the crypt of St Paul's) 'If you seek my memorial - look around you.' And what greater memorial than all of you here today.

You are the embodiment of his legacy, as Trustees, members of Livery companies, Savilians, committee colleagues, silversmiths, silver collectors, local friends from London and Henley, the Royal British Legion, Masons, HAC comrades and of course family. Thank you all for coming and for your generous letters of affection and memory. As one school friend wrote, Oliver was "unusually well disposed toward mankind" - he found his happiness in

helping others and to quote another "he lives on in the legacy of the lives he touched."

I want though to start with his marriage. To understand Dad, we need to understand his partnership with Pope. It didn't start well. Not having a good memory, Oliver thought it best to ask Pope to marry on his birthday – 20<sup>th</sup> December. The ring was bought, the stage set but then the phone rang and Charlotte, his younger sister by 8 years, needed collecting from her party. Typically, and unselfishly, Dad decided that his sister should come first and so the engagement happened on 21<sup>st</sup> December 1962. Pope was a Gluckstein, the family behind the Lyons tea and hotel business. That didn't faze Oliver; he wasn't interested in grandeur; he wanted a partner of a similar background that would be strong and work with him. And by every measure Pope is and was that. Together they built a partnership over 60 years that was rock-solid and upon whose foundations they developed joint lives whilst being true to their individual selves. Dad was the outward face of that marriage, the ambassador, the consummate host; the one building networks and friendships. Whereas behind the scenes Pope was always there; wisely counselling, supporting. You could say that together they spun the threads that Dad so cleverly wove his magic with.

Into this milieu Jane arrived in 1964 and me in 1966. Like his grandfather Ernest, who Dad adored, Oliver became the playful father. He invented the drying machine, the tickle tunnel and endless games. The letters from his

nephews and nieces recall an uncle that wanted to play with them and was huge fun. We never had a paid entertainer at our birthday parties – Dad was in his element.

Around this time, Oliver became the Chairman of the Pirate Club; the youth club on London's Regent's canal that led on to us buying a rubber dinghy. Then, in typical Pope and Oliver courageous style, they decided that dinghies were all a bit pedestrian, a bit too easy. They swapped the 6ft rubber tub for Peace, a 14ton, 52ft steel narrow boat that was to be our floating holiday home for the next 20 years.

A childhood memory is Dad and me out fundraising for the Pirate Club. He'd set his mind on building a castle for the pirates, to replace the rusting barge that had buckets for loos and curtains for changing rooms. On this occasion we set off for Jack Straw's castle up on Hampstead Heath - a vast drinking emporium over 5 floors. At 12, I was given clear instructions – "Find a table of drinkers and encourage one to give, then they all will". Of course it worked wonders. Dad was demonstrating his innate understanding of how human dynamics work; something many of you will have witnessed in his committee, fundraising and volunteering work.

He became a consummate fundraiser for causes ranging from local youth clubs in Henley, Texprint, the Royal British Legion, the Making (a museum in Basingstoke), Minimus (the primary school Latin programme) and of course Bishopsland which Angela will be talking about. He would understand how to

bring funders on board; his warm voice, enveloping smile and easy charm made his persuasion magnetic.

But generosity was not something he sought in others alone. There was a family tradition of being generous going back to that adored grandfather who had supported musicians, artists and a wide range of London societies.

When the decision was made to sell the Australian arm of the family business in 1972 he put funds aside to set up the Penelope and Oliver Makower

Charitable Trust. This has now commissioned over forty pieces of contemporary silver. His brilliance though was to form a partnership between the young and aspiring maker, a national museum and him and Pope.

Commissioned pieces were paid for by the Trust and then loaned to the museum. The museum got a new piece and the maker was, more importantly, given gallery space in a national museum so giving credibility and visibility to their under-represented craft. The letters from those grateful awardees are testament to this creative ingenuity.

Oliver took over the family textile business from his father in the 70s. That was a torrid time for UK textiles with imports from China undercutting the UK base. He stuck to it but most of his career was about innovation (to stay ahead) and shrinking (to minimise the cost base). Both Jane and I had the joy of working with him in the business.

Dad and textiles taught us many life lessons; that selling was part of life so you'd better get good at it, that too few bad debts identified a business not

being stretched enough or, most importantly, that business could only be done between friends who trusted each other.

Through the business he became a liveryman of the Drapers and the Weavers where he was Chair of the Weavers textile committee and Upper Bailiff in 1985. The livery companies provided Oliver with a natural link between his textile bloodline and his conviviality and expansive creativity. I gather huge strength and joy from my lifelong friendships with the Weavers' and their families who knew and loved Dad for over fifty years. I know Jane feels the same with members of the Drapers' Company and I'm sure my children will in turn.

For Dad the family business was the connection between the past and the present but, when the time came, he bravely accepted that it would have to close. This was a hard decision and he wrote at length, using letters to his grandchildren, to explore his emotions about this and other aspects.

Those letters are a treasure trove written to the grandchildren he adored as they came in to the world.

"How grown up you have become Letty, A merry, sold little person full of fun and a healthy appetite. Minty (Clementine) showed us her school book. Most impressive but to be fair, I was more intrigued with the amount of work the teacher had put in than with the excellence of your crayoning."

And in 2000: "Welcome to Louis. You're already 3months old and a most gi'normous fellow. Apparently, your rate of growth is in danger of entering the Guinness Book of Records and somebody calculated that you would be 14ft tall by the time you are sixteen."

Bishopsland was of course Pope's and his joint enterprise which played to all their strengths. They took on a derelict farmhouse and outbuildings and with determination, perseverance and working closely with professionals slowly converted the place into the UK's premier residential charity for teaching silversmithing and jewellery. He would be up at all hours writing funding applications, to local planning officers and building networks. Pope's teaching and leadership is visible in the 250+ students that have been through the one-year course. Less obvious are the hours and hours Dad spent, with Pope, building the enterprise. Together they won awards – the Craft Skills Awards given by Prince Charles, a lifetime achievement award from the Goldsmiths' Craft and Design Council and being made joint honorary Liverymen of the Goldsmiths Company.

But there were times when tiredness and exhaustion would get the better of him.

On one particular occasion Mum had asked Dad to collect someone from Reading station and he'd forgotten. Cross with himself he invented Hughes, an old family retainer who lived up in the attic. "Hughes" he bellowed from the bottom of the stairs in earshot of Mum "why have you not gone to Reading

station as I asked you to” and then he’d walk into the kitchen and say to Pope ‘If he forgets one more thing, he will have to go”.

Hughes became the family scapegoat; lightening the situation was Dad’s stock-in trade.

And finally, of course, there is the family. As Peter Makower, his 2nd cousin so wisely wrote, Oliver “was the precious pillar of the family structure which means so much to all of us”. The family to Dad stretched as far back as one could remember and as far forward as one could imagine. It included therefore not just our immediate family but every cousin of any number of removals; and each as vital as our direct line.

His 70th birthday party request was a re-enactment of his grandfather Ernest's invention - the bad manners tea party. 16 nephews and their partners along with 17 offspring under the age of 8 came to Bishopsland to pour tea from their chairs, smudge cream on their faces and wipe jam onto the tablecloths. Pope studiously kept away but Oliver was in his element, recounting and leading the Family Coach parlour game in his deep, base voice whilst all the while beaming out that enveloping smile.

His legacy is indeed all around us.