

Memories of Ken

Ken was born in Birmingham on January 2nd 1948, the second child of George Thomas and Violet Hannah Brown. He lived in Popes Lane, Oldbury, before moving to Kingswinford in his teens. By this time a much younger sister, Mandy had been born.

Family life was loving, but not always easy. Ken would recall that as both their parents worked, he and his older sister, Jenny had to help with the housework. Jenny hated cooking, but was happy to do the cleaning. Meanwhile Ken enjoyed cooking, but hated cleaning, so they came to an arrangement that suited them both.

Ken was clever. He passed his 11+ and went to Oldbury Grammar where Jenny claimed he would embarrass her in front of her friends. He especially enjoyed Maths and Science, but didn't always apply himself as well as he could. His final report for Chemistry reads, "I hope he has passed". He did pass and went off to Sheffield University to study Chemistry. Unfortunately, the lure of the Student Union bar, the Drama Society and his landlady's freshly cooked breakfasts (meaning he always missed the first lecture of the day) proved too great and he failed his first year exams.

Back home again, Ken found a job working in the laboratories at Albright and Wilson where he gained his HNC on day release in college. They sponsored him to spend a year at Salford University where he completed his Graduate of the Royal Institute of Chemistry qualification. Unfortunately he was then too qualified for them to re-employ him, so he decided to study for his PhD at Salford.

It was there in June 1972 that he met Ros at the end of year disco. On the morning of her first day back at University, Ros found Ken alone in the kitchen of her student house, fixing a housemate's stereo. They went to a party that night and were together from that day onwards.

Ken and Ros both finished their courses in Summer 1974 and entered the world of employment, Ken as a research chemist at Lankro Chemicals in Eccles. Ken was to remain at Eccles for the rest of his working life, where he became a Chemical Plant Manager before taking early retirement in 2005, when once again his cooking skills came to the fore as Ros was still working.

Ros and Ken were married at Rose Street Methodist in Wokingham on March 29th 1975, a snowy Easter Saturday. A year later they bought their first house, a small semi in Prestwich, before moving to Warlingham Close, Bury in 1980. In those early days, they had a wooden canal cruiser, Smuggler, which was moored on the Upper Peak Forest Canal near Whaley Bridge. They spent a number of happy holidays on Smuggler but it was a constant battle to keep her afloat. In September 1982, they decided to have a relaxing holiday in Greece instead and 9 months later Andrew was born. Suzanne came along 20 months later and the family was complete.

Meanwhile, Smuggler was sold, but boats were often a part of the Brown family holidays canal or river cruising or a boat trip around whichever Greek island they were staying on. When the children were grown up, Ken and Ros started to enjoy sea cruising. It was on one of these holidays in 2008, that a sudden fall whilst ashore in Amsterdam was the first sign of an illness that would come to dominate his life. Already diabetic, Ken was diagnosed with Inclusion Body Myositis, a progressive and incurable muscle wasting condition. He later developed chronic liver disease.

The month of June 2017 was bittersweet. Ken's first grandchild, Ava, was welcomed into the world the same week as he was diagnosed with gastric cancer. Although the cancer was found early, the combination of other medical conditions meant it could not be treated. Meanwhile, Ken became increasingly disabled and after a fall in January 2018, completely wheelchair bound.

His second grandchild, Theo was born in June 2019. Grandfather and grandson had a special bond – perhaps it was because grandad had wheels. One of Theo's first words was "Ganda".

A lifelong West Bromwich Albion supporter, Ken would annoy his family, and no doubt his friends, by slipping the words "West Brom" into almost any conversation. However, Ken was friendly, generous and kind. He loved helping people and was never happier than when he was fixing someone's computer, free of charge. On more than one occasion, Ros came home from work to find he had "upgraded" her computer, so he could use a part to repair someone else's! He repaired his final computer the week before Christmas. He retained a large circle of friends, especially a group of former work colleagues with whom he had lunch once a month until lockdown.

Ken's life became progressively more difficult and he finally passed away on January 2nd 2021, the morning of his 73rd birthday. His passing was quick but peaceful. He was at home as he would have wished, lucid till the end and Ros was with him. The family are sad that they were unable to share that last birthday with him and that he never got to open his presents, but glad that his suffering is over.