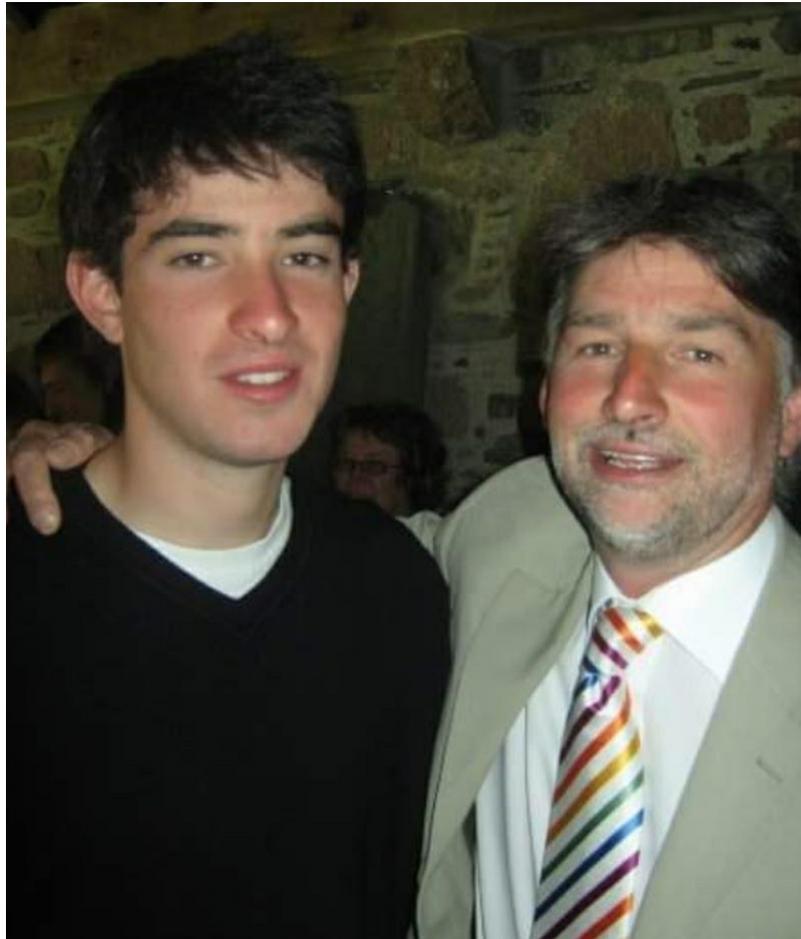


CALLUM MACDONALD

- March 04, 2020



The last time I saw my Dad, he'd just dropped me off at my flat after we'd been driving together. I failed my first test at the end of December and I've been practicing since to get it right the next time.

We clashed a bit during that day's practice. At the very first junction, the green light came on but I couldn't get the car to move. The handbrake seemed jammed. "Go!", Dad shouted. His impatience just made me more irritated and flustered. "Shut up! What do you think I'm trying to do!", was my bad-tempered response. Later, we were doing reverse parking. He was trying to show me how to do it through positional judgement, and seemed unconvinced by the step-by-step method I'd learned from the instructor and YouTube videos. Again, we snapped at each other.

There was no lingering bitterness though, and I hold no regrets about that happening, because we made up straight away. We'd long reached a point where those tiffs rarely

occurred, and even when they did, we were able to laugh about it pretty quickly. In that instance, he reflected on the different ways we learn - how it helps me to have a routine and to plan what I'm going to do first, especially with something unfamiliar. Whereas Dad tended to act more on feeling and instinct.

It might seem a mundane anecdote to highlight, but even in trivial, fleeting moments of conflict I was never in any doubt about how much Dad cared and how deeply he wanted me to be the best I could be. When I was younger, I often lacked self-confidence and he always strived to make me believe in myself more. Sometimes Dad used an analogy to describe my achievements that each time the bar was raised, I would clear it. That even if I didn't stand out at first, I was on a continual upward trajectory. That was his default mode - relentlessly supportive, encouraging and eager to help. I thought he should know how much that meant to me, and I wrote something along those lines in his 60th birthday card. He and Lorn had a laugh at the slightly formal language I used in the card, but I think he appreciated the message.

When we were wee boys, Dad used to tell me and Lorn that he loved us almost every day. I remember that quite vividly. He's consistently been a really hands-on father and when we were that age it seemed that so much of what he did revolved around us. I was told once or twice by other parents that Dad spoiled me. I remember being in Global Video rental shop once, choosing a film with a pal and his Dad, but I had seen everything they suggested. I actually pretended I hadn't seen the film we eventually chose cause I was too embarrassed say I'd seen it too. So he probably did spoil us a bit, but it's partly because he was a big kid himself. Of course, he enjoyed spending time with us, but having kids gave him the perfect excuse to go ten-pin bowling, watch films Mum would have no interest in, embarrass himself on the Playstation and play football and tennis. He approached all these activities with characteristically boundless energy, infectious enthusiasm and good humour, as well as an intensely competitive streak! We would almost never finish a kickabout without Lorn and Dad falling out over something - their stubborn personalities both refusing to back down. Paul and Hamish in particular can testify to that!

Not only did Dad teach us to play, but some of the formative experiences of my life are of us watching football together. I see it as something of a miracle, divinely inspired, that we were living in Kirkcaldy for Raith Rovers' League Cup Final triumph over Celtic in 1994. We were there for eight years, when Dad was Minister at Torbain Church, through the club's golden era that also included the iconic UEFA Cup encounter with Bayern Munich, which Rovers' preposterously led 1-0 at half-time in the Olympiastadion. While retaining an affection for Dumbarton FC, Dad took the Rovers to his heart. A Son of the Rock in the Lang Toun.

I was five at the time of the Celtic match and recall only fragments of the big day. Dad always insisted that when Celtic went 2-1 up with 5 minutes to go, he had a "feeling" that

this would not be the last act. Sure enough, Gordon Dalziel stooped to nod home and take the game to extra time - with the green ribbons already on the trophy, so they say. I think I vaguely remember the penalty shoot-out, looking at the scoreboard and understanding that if Celtic missed the next penalty, we would win the Cup. Most clearly, though, I recollect seeing an old man on the bus home with tears in his eyes, and asked Dad why he was crying. Dad said because it was the first time he'd seen Rovers win something. Twenty years after that match, we shared another special moment, as Raith defeated the other half of the Old Firm in the Challenge Cup Final. Dad would also frequently use football to make analogies about life. One of his favourites was drawing a parallel with being a Minister or leader of the Iona Community to being a football manager.

In this respect he followed in a long line of Drumchapel Amateurs alumni who'd gone on to have distinguished careers in leadership roles. He took particular pride in being asked to lead the prayer at a Drumchapel Amateurs reunion night, attended by all the greats, including Sir Alex Ferguson. Along with my Mum, Dad instilled a strong sense of justice and fairness in me and Lorn. Our own politics have largely been shaped by their principles and life's work. I've always admired Dad's courage and directness in speaking out against wrongdoing. He wasn't put off by superficial notions of decorum, nor did he care much what other people thought about him. I want to use his example to be braver in that respect.

I'm grateful that I share a very similar worldview to my Mum and Dad and consider them friends as well as parents. However, one area where Dad and I had different perspectives was religion. I would probably say I'm agnostic and struggle a little with the idea of God. Through my teens I had a series of long conversations with my parents about these matters. In September 2008, when I was 19, I asked Dad directly - what is God? How do you define it? I chose to email him this question so that he would have time to reflect and compose a considered response. His three-page answer took me on a fascinating tour through ancient cultures and modern secular materialism, from Richard Dawkins to Max Planck and quantum physics, to theories on how consciousness can create or alter reality itself.

Dad described his thoughts as "notes on the journey rather than a conclusion" and that's similar to how I regard this speech. This is not my final word on him, or even a goodbye, because I know he'll always be with me. Dad's letter ended with the following passage: "Looking for God is a bit like looking for the atom, you cannot show where God is but you can know where to look. Jesus said that we find God in the world around us, other people – friends, neighbours, enemies and especially in those in need, and we find God within, love your neighbour as you love yourself. Because of my faith I know that I am loved or maybe because I am loved I believe. Either way, Callum, I don't really care whether you are able to believe in God or not so long as you know that you are loved so, so much. I love you and I believe God loves you too."

This, to me, gets to the core of who Dad was. It encapsulates not only his capacity for love but also his deep compassion and belief in the essential benevolence of life and the universe. I'm reminded of one my favourite quotes by Martin Luther King:

“Power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anaemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love.”

That's what Dad's love was: powerful, courageous and in service of justice. His love lives on in all of us.