





Ronald Thomas Radford

By Connor Brennan, Birmingham, 2024



### **Ronald Thomas Radford**

My grandad's name is Ronald Thomas Radford and he was born in Rotten Park Road, Winson Green 16th on the of August 1937. I don't know a lot about his childhood because he never really spoke about it.

His first job was on Wiggin Street and that's where I worked for eight years. He was a mechanic and I think he did his apprenticeship there. I was unaware of the fact that we had worked on the same road until maybe a year or two before he passed. It's weird to think that my grandfather and his brother have worked there and now I'm there. Sometimes I think your life's mapped out in a certain way.

My grandad was one of six. A lot of them had passed by the time I was born and we never really met his family. I had an idea that two died, his brother and sister died in childhood. He didn't really speak about it.

He was an important figure in my life. He was the main male role model in my life. My earliest memories are of going around there as a kid, and we would be singing the little songs as you do with kids. He gave me the nickname 'Conker'. He was often the clown. He'd be sitting there and he'd start singing these songs. I had a lot of happy times around there. When I was a child it was my second home. I have nothing but good memories with him. There were lots of good jokes, messing around, having fun in the garden, picking the plums off the tree. Going down the park with him. Going out with him and my grandmother.



I have three older brothers and they were close to him too. We all used to be there. If we weren't here at home, then we were up there. Growing up it was a safe haven for us. There was never any time in my life that I could say that I wanted to stay away from there or there was any kind of grievance going on. If there was anything ever going on in my life, I could always go there.

He was a joker. But he was of that older generation so he was not an emotional man. But if I needed advice, he'd always give it. Even if you didn't ask for it, he would give it. Sometimes without saying it he knew what was going on with you. He cared for us all.

He'd retired early. He'd suffered a heart attack, so he had to retire early when he was 59. He was very lucky. He changed his lifestyle after that, he stopped smoking and started exercising. And he lived to 85. He was a family man. When I was younger he did have a few friends because and they used to go to Torquay and other places. When he retired he slowly lost touch with people. It was his health and family that became his priority.

I was about four when he retired. If mum and my dad were working, then my nan and grandad would look after us. They'd come to get us from school and we'd go there, or they'd come to get us and we'd all go home and they'd wait until my parents got home. So they were another set of parents to us.



As I grew older my relationship with him didn't change that much. I think he always saw me as being the youngest. It doesn't matter how old you are, in your grandparent's eyes you're still very young. But as a grown man I could have adult conversations with my granddad. If I was having trouble at work or anything else, he would always just tell me what he thought. I remember him saying to me one time, "The problem with wisdom, son, is that by the time you're old enough to have enough of it, you're dead!"

I'd come and talk to him with little things and say something like. "Well I think I'm going to jump jobs", and then he'd ground me and say, "Look, you know, it's not always the right thing to do. What you've got here is a good thing". He would rationalise it for me. I could go to him with problems and speak about them without any judgment. And if I needed to be told what for, then I got told what for. And that was from both my grandparents. And I'm grateful for that because sometimes you need that. When you are wrong, you need to be told you're wrong so you can correct it. And I always had that with my granddad. He was a man of few words sometimes. But if I ever had an issue, like if I was off work or anything, he'd always reiterate to me, "You don't need to ever stress about things like that. Your health is everything and it is the most important thing."

Sometimes I go to my granddad's and he'd chat the head off you, and then another day, we'd just sit there in comfortable silence and you'd watch the snooker or you'd watch Sharp or whatever was on. I didn't mind that because that was him. And sometimes I didn't want to go around and have a conversation. Sometimes I wanted to go and sit there in silence and gather my thoughts and maybe just watch the snooker with him.



When I became an adult there were some things he said that perhaps I didn't agree with, but it is what it is. I never would say anything, as that was just him. It would be daft to go in and think that I'm going to change an 85-year-old man's ways. Out of respect for him, I'd just keep my mouth shut because I didn't want to get into an argument. It's a generational thing and he was brought up differently. Sometimes I'd be moaning about things that he could only have dreamt of having or doing as a kid. Things are so much better now, you're given a lot more now than you would have been back then without having to put as much effort in. There's a better support framework for people now than there was back then.

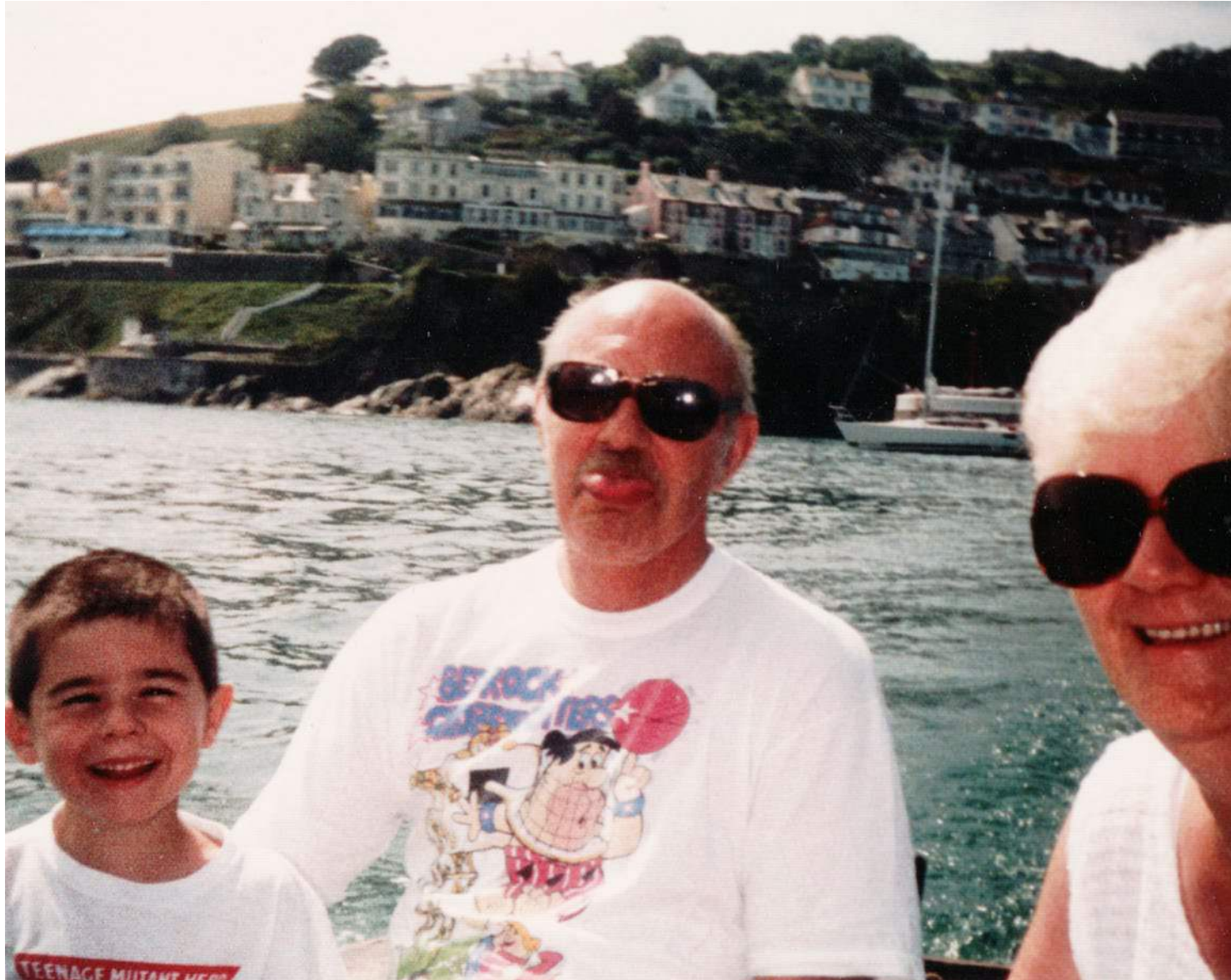
My granddad was a loving man. A kind man. Opinionated. A joker as well. And he was stubborn! I look at it as if there is a hierarchy. And there are points where you know when to shut up and when to be spoken to. And then when it comes to your parents and grandparents, you can have disagreements as you get older. But with my granddad, I never wanted to get into anything that would disturb our relationship.

He was a role model to me in the way that he loved his family and how he looked after them all. They came first for him. And that's why I respected him and loved him. I saw that's what being a man is, to put your family first.



My granddad lost my grandmother 5 years ago. It had a massive effect on me, and you could see how it affected my granddad. But he wouldn't speak about it because of I think the generational thing. And perhaps being the head of the family he didn't want to show any weakness to us. We were all upset. We were there with him the night my nan passed. Her name was Patricia. They managed to get to their 60th wedding anniversary and she died two hours after.

The day after my nan was diagnosed with cancer, we went out with them for a meal. And I remember her saying to me, "When I'm gone you look after your granddad." And I stand by those words because I loved them. After Nan died I went up to see Granddad every week. I had my dinner with him on a Sunday every week until COVID hit. But even then I'd go up there, see him, you know, speak to him, have my dinner with him. If he needed anything I'd do it. I'd help him. I felt I owed him and my nan that. I think you go full circle. So I think that's my duty, because I owe them that. They gave me so much that that's the least I could do for them.



Fishing was his main thing. We didn't do that together much because we'd disturb the fish. So fishing was his little sanctuary. He was in a fishing club and he often won trophies for his fishing. They'd do a club weight of what they caught and then throw them back in.

We all used go out a lot. We'd go to the park or go out on day trips. My nan and grandad used to arrange day trips out to Wales and we'd all go. Sometimes it would be Torquay or Skegness. We used to set off early - early mornings and late nights. We had a lot of good times doing that. We did a lot of travelling with them. Me and my brother also used to go to Shirley a lot with them. We'd all go on the bus down and have a wander around the shops, knowing that we were going to get a pound to go get something out. A happy cone of chips or something like that. It's those small things like that, there were good times.

He died on the 5th of June 2023. It was such a big shock because we saw him the day before. We saw him on the Sunday and on the Monday his neighbour, Lynn, found him dead. I was in bed and we had a phone call and I just remember my mother coming in and saying, "Grandad's dead." It was a massive shock. You don't get to pick and choose these things in life. I'm grateful because I got to see him the day before, and I'm really glad I hugged him that day.







We had him cremated at Lodge Hill. It was a lovely service. My brother Declan gave the eulogy. We scattered his ashes in the Garden of Remembrance, with his wife. I go up there every week if I can.

I want to say to my grandad, "Thank you for everything. For the unconditional love and advice. I'll never forget it. And I hope I did right by you."



Losing my grandad has had a huge effect on me mentally. I've got to deal with all of the emotion and everything else. But the outcome of it is that it makes me stronger. I can honestly say, that after losing my grandad it was the lowest I've ever felt. I don't want to feel like that again. It affected my motivation, my outlook and everything. It crippled me. And I'm starting to work through that. It's hard to put into words. When my grandad died I thought I was coming out of it quite quickly. And then when I started getting back into normal life I realised that I wasn't ready at all. You start to understand how much pressure it puts on you. It changed me completely. It made me bitter at times. It made me angry because I felt that this injustice was out of my control.

I said to myself, "Well, what would he be saying to you now? He wouldn't want this for you." He would say, "Don't be stressing over things you can't change. It's life." I think you honour the people before you and you listen to what they've said so it wasn't in vain.

I do believe in God, but I don't like to question these things. Because you can't question God for what he has planned for you. Who am I to question him? I do thank you God for giving me such wonderful grandparents. And for giving me the opportunity to say goodbye.



