

John Crocker 1925 – 2015: eulogy given at John's funeral by his daughter Jen Crocker

Good morning.

We are here today to celebrate the life of my Dad, John Valentine Crocker; given that name by his parents so that he could always go by the stage name of John Valentine should he so wish ! From his birth he was steeped in the theatre, passionate about the world of theatre and all it can bring to those who experience it, whether as a practitioner or as a member of the audience.

My childhood memories are steeped in that world too but even more particularly in the world of the pantomimes Dad created. My earliest memory is being carried out of the theatre as I was terrified by Typhoo the Panda in Dad's production of Aladdin. Christmas holidays were filled with trips around the UK to see the professional pantomimes and the season would begin on Christmas Eve with the production in Leatherhead. Ben, my brother, has continued this tradition and he jokes that wherever you may be in the UK at Christmas you will be within 10 miles of a Ben Crocker Pantomime !

Dad wrote all his pantomimes at home. He wrote them first by hand and he would then read us scenes to see if they worked. I always loved this, a sneak preview of the latest script. It also provided us with a constant reminder of just how difficult his handwriting was as he would struggle to read his own writing. When I was small he used to write on a big artists board that would sit on his lap and he took over the sitting room for the purpose. This put the room out of bounds throughout the writing season. Not only that – when companies were asking for his scripts he typed them out on carbon copies and then the collation would begin. The entire sitting room was covered in piles of each page which he and Mum would then have to put together in order. Imagine our delight when eventually his study was created at the top of the house, and then when all his pantomimes were published by Evans Brothers.

Mum and Dad each had a wonderful sense of humour – any difficult situation was met with humour and our first love break-ups are remembered by me as times of laughter through tears. Without fail they would make tough times easier by making me laugh. Dad had a huge capacity for laughter. As his niece Ginny said, 'He was always cheerful, always upbeat and always saw the funny side of things.'

Both Dad and Mum were delighted when they became grandparents. Dad was a very proud grandfather. Just last week Father Andrew Downes said it had been clear that all four grandchildren held very special places in his heart. Catherine, Tom, Joe and Jessie were all mentioned frequently with pride and love in his conversations.

Mum had a stroke in 2007 and from the moment that she was first taken to hospital he made sure that she always knew how much he loved her and how much we, her family, loved her too. Although he was left bereft by her death, he knew too that he was beloved. At this point the entire St Nicholas community drew him into their arms and Mum's memory was kept alive by him coming here. Both my brother and I are deeply moved that all of you brought him into the St Nick's family. He loved this church and all of you in it.

Dad met the news that his lung cancer had returned with stoicism. He said to me, 'I am not frightened of the cancer itself; I have dealt with it once and I can deal with it again. I am a bit worried about the treatment.' He was pleased to know that it would be only one blast of radiotherapy. It was in November and he felt that he would be able to enjoy Christmas therefore with all of his family around him. On the day of the radio therapy he had intended to go out for a meal afterwards with Mike and Catherine but he developed a temperature and so the nursing home had to ring the emergency phone line. Surprising questions were raised such as, 'Has he been to Africa? Has he been mountaineering recently?' and they culminated with 'And is he fully *compos mentis*?' But Dad heard this and from across the room his annoyed voice rang out, 'Of course I am bloody *compos mentis*!'

I have to say something about his voice – he understood projection. He taught me, he taught Ben, he taught Tom about the importance of voice. At the school where I teach I am known for many things that come from him – for my theatrical teaching style, for my big voice. When he was discussing his funeral with Father Simon, Dad asked that we do a reprise of Mum's funeral. Well, we are doing many things the same but for the Gospel we have chosen St John Chapter 1. As Father Simon said to me – every year for the 9 Lessons and Carols Service, John read the final reading, the words of St John, without microphone. Even from his wheelchair every word could be heard; every word made sense. John was known for John !

Dad wanted to live in St Mary's Nursing Home so it was an enormous joy to him that he did make it there. When talking to the matron and myself he described St Mary's as his haven just two days before he died. He told Catherine that it was the nicest thing that had happened to him since Mum had died. He may not have had very long there but he loved it. Each time I phoned he would start the conversation with, 'It just couldn't be better.' He may only have been there for three and a half weeks but I understand he has left a legacy: every Sunday Lunch the residents are now served with a glass of wine. Now that is a legacy he would entirely approve of.

Dad loved St Nicholas – the St Nicholas family had absolutely drawn him in. I am so grateful for that.