

The remarkable life of Gerry Smart 1944-2020



Gerry was born, lived, and died in extraordinary times.

He was born in Coventry in 1944, a city still reeling from the single most concentrated bombing of the second world war, during which over half of the city's housing stock was damaged. As family life adapted to traumas and attempted to regain some kind of stability, Gerry found himself in the Barnardo's children's home in Bathampton at the age of 4.

Eventually adopted into the Smart family of Odd Down Lodge in Bath, he spent the remainder of his childhood happily with his new parents Connie & Denis, and Connie's father, Grandad Reg. Grandad Reg had been a pilot during the first world war, and was a real character to whom Gerry became very close. Together they would concoct all kinds of mischievous pranks & limericks, the likes of which Gerry would become known for amongst his peers later on.

Gerry was an active boy and was uninspired by academia, as his school reports clearly show (!). He would much prefer to be roaming around the countryside helping at local farms, or exploring old mineshafts or the like with his friends. He had a practical mind-set from the earliest age and this was nurtured by his father, a master carpenter, with whom he made many wonderful creations; including go-karts and a small wooden dinghy. His education would progress along vocational lines; through Bath technical college, followed by Cannington College of farming.

Later, he would make contact with his birth Mother Lillian, and older sister Maureen. Discovering that Maureen now lived in Weston-Super-Mare, he enjoyed a lasting relationship with her and her family, and discovered he had a half brother and sister from his Mother's subsequent marriage.

Gerry never stood still. He tried his hand at a number of professions over the years, and could pretty much turn his hand to anything required. He built his own general building business which ran for many years, and many of his erections can still be seen around the area. He also made a significant contribution to the management of stone mines around Bath and Portland. Another major contribution Gerry made to the local area, was to the economic wellbeing of the pub trade. There is literally not a pub for miles around that he hasn't visited, and many more no longer in existence that he could tell you all about.

His passion though, was for life at sea. Joining the Royal Naval Reserve as a young man, Gerry would readily say that the 20 years he spent in service were the happiest of his life. Here he made many life-long friends, who remained loyal to his friendship right until his death. His service record is exemplary, and his reports consistently show how well thought of he was by both his superiors, and the wider crew with whom he sailed. All mention his enthusiasm, leadership qualities, his high standards and example to juniors, his efficient management, and most pervasively, his sense of humour. Since his passing, there has been a literal tsunami of hilarious 'dits' from friends of the numerous organisations to which he belonged.

Upon retiring from the RNR, Gerry continued to run the bar of the Senior Ratings Mess at Flying Fox in Bristol and remained an active member of the Flying Fox Association for many years. Gerry joined the Masonic Lodge of Seafarers in 1998 and became a Master Mason in 1999. He remained an active member of the Lodge until poor health prevented his attendance.

In order to continue going to sea, Gerry joined the Pride of Bristol Trust, providing chartered sea trips for all kinds of organisations, as well as disadvantaged children. He particularly enjoyed the annual visit from the children of Chernobyl, who he said would get so much out of the day. His role on the ship became the cook, and his galley-management was legendary. A stand-off between Gerry & a certain ship's engineer who had presented late for breakfast taught the crew the value of punctuality at mealtimes. He stood strong, despite the kidnapping and prolonged ransoming of his beloved galley mascot –a toy pig. Another saying commonly used by crew was: "When Gerry is in the Galley - we use more cooking oil over the week-end than Lube Oil in the Main Engine!". It wasn't all good though, and one particular low point was when the ship accidentally ran- aground during a trip to France, which resulted in the ship being "impounded by the French" authorities, and a rather derisory local newspaper article. This incensed Gerry to the point of apoplexy, which at least provided entertainment for the detained crew, and a funny story for those at home.

Gerry became the landlord of the Crown Inn in West Harptree in 1998 where, working with his characteristic diligence and determination, he transformed an overgrown former chicken-run to win the South West regional 'best pub garden' competition two years in a row. Between recurrent hip and knee operations, due to the deterioration of his longstanding osteoarthritis, he used his mobility scooter to tend the garden with implements he had adapted in his own ingenious way.

Upon leaving the pub in 2005, Gerry built himself a workshop on the smallholding of a friend, and continued to grow beans and other vegetables, as well as building useful inventions or fixing things for others. He loved being in the heart of the countryside, and he continued there as long as he was able.

As you'd expect, Gerry maintained his independence for as long as possible. Having overcome physical constraints throughout his adult life, he remained determined to ignore the onset of his dementia for as long as he could. His determination (stubbornness), perseverance, loyalty, and strength of spirit never left him, and when he was finally too tired, he quietly fell asleep.