

Welcome all as we come together to pay tribute to but more importantly, celebrate the life of Ben Zaccardelli – a man who faced life's challenges, shaped the next generation of the family and leaves behind a legacy of love, friendship and memories – he loved you all.

A day like today represents more than paying tribute and celebrating Ben's life because we also can't help but be mindful of the losses you've already had to bear but again, to also acknowledge the passing of someone we love represents more than just that physical loss – it seems as though we've lost a piece of our identity – a physical piece of who we are.

Some say it's the energy that a person emanates, there are some people who just make a room seem brighter, or simply more complete by being in it.

If that's the case, then it's worth remembering a scientific fact – energy never dies. Where it goes is open for debate but, it's a fact that the energy that provided life to Ben - still exists.

It also exists in each one of you – Ben's energy and influence is in every occupied seat here today either through family or friendship.

It's been a tough road that's led you all here today resulting in the sadness at the impact of Ben's departure that's made more challenging with the social distancing that we're having to live through, but that doesn't make our time together any less important, which is why we're going to take a walk through some of those amazing memories that you have.

In telling Ben's story, while most of you know all of this already, it just gives you that opportunity to hear Ben or Dad spoken about, his stories are also part of where his family came from but, beyond that, we're recalling the life of a fantastic friend, a character worth celebrating – a family man and unquestionably one of life's good guys.

Let's continue by putting some of the memories you trusted me with in the form of Ben's story and, like any story, let's rewind and take it from the beginning.

Ben was born in Bradford on 7 December 1934 to his proud parents Violet and Benianino where he was one of eight – those growing up years shared with Rene, Leonard, Edith, Lilian, Violet, Josie and Elaine – Ben being a big brother to Violet, Josie and Elaine.

As a young lad he used to go walking across the moors with his pals, camping out overnight, much to the consternation of his poor Mother.

Those growing up years were spent in Bradford where he went to Barkerend School until he was 11 and then to Hanson School to the age of 15.

His early working life saw him at Holmes Mann & Co – a Case Makers in Bradford and then as a Fireman with British Railways at the age of 16.

He did 3 years National Service in the Royal Signals where he served as a wireless operator. Postings included Hong Kong and treks through jungles in Malaya. In fact, Ben was also recognised for his service there with a medal.

Ben joined the RAF in July 1959 as a driver in the Fire Services, his first posting was RAF Valley, in Anglesey, where he was accompanied by his first wife Norma and his children Kim and Martin (who we also keep in our thoughts today along with Catherine).

In 1963 Ben was posted to RAF Wildenrath, in Germany. During that time Corporal Zacc volunteered to take part in the 46<sup>th</sup> Annual International 100-mile march in Holland and won a medal for completing it.

Next Ben was posted to RAAF Butterworth in Penang and Minden Barracks. Then Ben was posted to RAF Coningsby in Lincolnshire, followed by RAF Church Fenton in North Yorkshire.

While serving at RAF Masirah in the Middle East he learnt the self-defence art of Tae Kwon-do and excelled at it. His last posting was at RAF Northolt where he worked with Phil Cawley (a good friend who went off to New Zealand in 74 but always kept in touch).

In 1978 Ben retired from regular service and then joined the Multinational Forces. On the move again he was posted to Egypt then Saudi Arabia as a driver/instructor where he taught teams of Filipinos to drive various Fire vehicles. In his spare time, he opened a bar where his colleagues and friends could relax with a drink and sing-songs. Ben had a lovely tenor voice and knew so many songs. Later Ben retired from Military Service having completed 27 years. His family are incredibly proud of him and know how proud he was to have served.

Ben had five children from his first marriage, the eldest being Kim who also trained in the military and became a nurse.

In his second marriage, he had his youngest child Neri who adored her father and inherited his sense of humour.

After Ben came out of the fire service, he had a variety of jobs before becoming a Night-Porter at the Haycock Hotel in Peterborough where he worked with his friends, Brian Groom and Cyril Greetham.

Ben was popular with colleagues and guests alike and it was here that he met and chatted with Pierce Brosnan during the filming of Goldeneye. He had asked Ben "could you please tell me where the bar is?" Ben replied "no" stumping Mr Brosnan. Ben carried on by saying "not unless you give me your autograph for my daughter".

This action meant he'd made a friend through their stay and was a prime example of his wicked sense of humour and likeable nature.

After several years' service, he left the Haycock and moved to the Crown Hotel in Stamford to be their night porter, before retiring at 70 years old, when his health told him it was time to stop.

Ben had a fantastic work ethic, doing whatever he could to support his family financially and make sure they didn't go without.

He made friends with strangers singing Irish and Country songs whenever possible and would have worked until the very end if he could.

As a proud man, being good at his job was incredibly important and he always felt pride when his children achieved what they wanted to do.

Some lovely memories so far and plenty more to come but let's take a moment of reflection now and listen to the next of the songs chosen with Johnny Mathis singing 'The Twelfth of Never'.

### **MUSIC: TWELFTH OF NEVER – JOHNNY MATHIS**

So many memories spanning across the course of Ben's life that I was trusted with – memories that are far more tangible than you might think and, by way of an experiment, there's a way you can prove that.

The next time you get a clear night, glance up and admire the stars and, while you do, pick out the two either side of Orion's belt.

Those two stars are, in fact, just lights – if you followed them all the way back across the vastness of space, you'd find that the

actual stars themselves ceased to exist millions of years ago – and yet, those lights still shine through as a constant.

Lights that burned so brightly that you can still see them – they are visible representations of what memories are and what they mean – that indefinable afterglow of love and influence that remains when you have to say goodbye to someone you love.

That afterglow lives on in the future of the family.

There were other lights of memories that I was trusted with – let me continue with those.

Ben and Pauline got together in 2004 via the internet and they kept in touch with numerous telephone calls. They didn't actually meet up until 2005, and spent a long time getting to know one another, going for long walks and falling deeply in love. Ben moved to Hornchurch to live with her in November 2005, when Neri had gone off to university.

Ben had a stroke and tests found he had an aneurism in his aorta, he had surgery on the 7th February 2006 to repair it with a Teflon tube. The night before his operation he proposed saying "if I get through this, will you marry me?" and Pauline said "yes." The next day he went to the theatre singing 'On The Road Again' as he didn't know if he'd make it with his heart problems. Thankfully, he did and they got married on 26<sup>th</sup> May 2006 at Langtons Registry Office in Hornchurch. Pauline's daughter Nicki and her husband Colin were with them on the day and Nicki took the wedding photos.

Pauline and Ben's travels took them to North Yorkshire, staying with Ben's sister Lilian and going for walks across the moors around Grassington, Nr. Skipton and visiting Ben's sisters Violet and Josie.

Sundays were often spent driving to Dover and boarding the ferry to Calais for on board shopping. They called them their "Booze Cruises".

In September 2007 they had a lovely holiday with their friends Alan & Pat Wood in their beautiful apartment in Majorca.

The Royal Air Force and Defence Fire Services Association annual reunion was at Bracklesham Bay in October that same year. They enjoyed the reunions which were held at various locations each year such as Coventry, Wolverhampton and Peterborough. They enjoyed meeting up with friends and colleagues, sharing stories, having a meal, a few drinks and having a good laugh. Ben always looked so smart and he and Pauline loved to dance together.

In September 2009 they went on their first cruise together. They boarded the P&O Ventura for a 17 day cruise around the Mediterranean which they both thoroughly enjoyed.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2010 Ben had an ICD implant fitted at St. Bartholomew's Hospital in London.

In January 2011 Pauline and Ben escaped the winter and went to Malta for 10 days in the sun. Then in May that year they went to Portugal for a week.

Nicki and Colin would always go round to see them after they got back home to hear all about their holidays and would often stay for dinner. Ben was a very good cook, a passion he shared with Pauline. Nicki remembers the delicious apple pies they made together, especially the apple and cherry pie they made for Nicki and Colin which Ben adorned with a smiley face made from pastry.

In September 2012 they flew to Gran Canaria for a week and liked it so much they went back to the same hotel the following year.

Their last cruise was to Norway in June 2014. Ben was very tired and didn't sleep well. They both enjoyed the cruise until they got home when Ben had a heart attack. They later found out that he'd had five VT attacks while on board. St Barts

phoned asking what he'd been up to once they had downloaded the ICD monitor.

In January 2017 Ben's ICD was wearing out and the battery was running low, so he had a new one fitted.

The next three years, when they both had health issues, were spent mostly at home and in the garden.

A slower pace of life which was mostly fun, singing, dancing and happy together.

Pauline and Ben had fifteen wonderful years together and Pauline will greatly miss her amazing, handsome and lovable gentleman.

Stepdaughter Nicki and Colin loved and thought the world of Ben. Friends and neighbours all liked Ben and he will be sorely missed.

We'll take another few minutes to sit with thoughts and feelings now, a chance to draw breath and to drift back in the direction of happier times which we'll do with another of the songs chosen for today – Pat Boone and the aptly titled 'Friendly Persuasion' a song that Ben would sing to Pauline every night.

### **MUSIC: FRIENDLY PERSUASION – PAT BOONE**

We've only scratched the surface – conversation starters for what I'm sure that you'll be expanding on and, in doing so, you'll keep Ben's light shining brightly in your hearts and minds.

Already, in the short time that we've spent together, we've walked through the life of a wonderful man who will always mean the world to you.

I thought it was lovely how Ben even found the origins of his name from that little village in the mountains to the south of Rome where the Zaccardelli's started out from and then went to have adventures and leave that name across the world – it was

somewhere that while he didn't get to visit, he did get to appreciate the pictures of.

Ben tried to learn Italian via CD although he often fell asleep while listening. He did learn a few words, which he often used, including salute, arrivederci and ciao.

You're bound to raise a glass in Ben's memory at some stage later on and I'm told that he did enjoy a glass of whisky at night, so perhaps the next time you get that clear night, raise a glass to the skies and let him know that you're thinking of him.

In all the ways that you'll remember him from a family member and friends' perspective, we also have to acknowledge the bravery he showed in his line of work and, to that end, I'll share with you what's known as the RAF&DFSA Firefighters Eulogy – it reads as follows:

*Fire-fighter's who serve and have served the crown.  
Have sat in hostile foreign places,  
with tired, lined, black sooty faces,  
often wet with tears or sweat,  
reeling from the violent forces they have met.  
With flame and smoke they are greeted,  
with courage and determination it has been defeated.  
No guns required for the 'Shout',  
just hose and water for the rout*

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*For gain or glory is not their story  
and they have often suffered loss.  
For some have carried injured on their back  
and stood over the graves of those not coming back*

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*Lead us from death to Life, from falsehood to Truth.  
Lead us from despair to Hope, from fear to Trust.  
Lead us from hate to Love, from war to Peace.  
Let Peace fill our hearts, our world, our universe.*

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*So bury or burn our bones  
Inscribe some words upon our stones.*

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*Maybe utter a little sigh  
But do not grieve for us when we die.*

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*For we have done our earthly fight  
So release us on our heavenly flight.*

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*So may God, what ever we conceive him to be  
Look after ours souls, friends and family.*

The first steps away from that initial sting of loss, with this tribute along with the conversations you'll have after, I hope that you've begun those steps today with our walk-through excerpts of Ben's life.

It's been my honour to work with you on providing a fitting tribute to Ben or Dad.

We'll leave with a final piece of music, a favourite of Ben's – this is one that Ben would happily sing along too – one of those country classics he loved – this is 'Willie Nelson with 'On The Road Again' and, while that plays, remain in your seats, we'll listen to it all the way through and then you'll be invited by Natasha to make your way outside to proceed with Ben to his final resting place surrounded by the beautiful countryside here in Herongate.