

Eulogy for David and Kathleen Miller, written and delivered by David W McCarthy at a Memorial Service in March 2018

First, I must warn you that what follows is a hotch-potch of facts, some elements of reminiscence and possibly even traces of amnesia. And it contains no flash photography.

David and Kathleen Miller lived in the Headmaster's House for nineteen years; and, during those years, Valerie, Jenny and Peter also lived there. You may be surprised to hear that Tosca lived there as well. Tosca, with distinct operatic connections, was the family pet dog, an admirable golden retriever, excellent in all her ways, but an agnostic and, as a consequence, not a regular churchgoer.

In fairness to Tosca, though, it has to be said that, once, she did attend a service and in this very chapel. As headmaster, with all his qualifications as a Methodist local preacher, David regularly preached here, and the theme he had chosen for this particular service was "Obedience". The evening congregation was rather select, and to liven up the proceedings (a temptation he could rarely resist) David had decided to illustrate his topic with the help of an assistant. His chosen assistant was Tosca. So, in the vestry, off-stage, as it were, with the ever-faithful Kathleen, Tosca waited for her cue. At the critical moment, as per script, Kathleen released her into the chapel for the advertised demonstration of Obedience. Tosca seemed not to understand this. Very likely, there'd been no rehearsal. (David was no great believer in rehearsals). And, ignoring all efforts to bring her under control, for some minutes she bounded up and down the aisles, in and out of the pews, until she had sniffed and inspected all she wanted to before retiring to the care of Kathleen. If not the most profound sermon delivered in this chapel, it was certainly one of the most memorable. But what impressed me at the time was David's reaction. Far from being disconcerted by this wreckage of his plan, he actually seemed to have enjoyed it and, with Tosca safely back in the vestry, he announced to us all, in his most benign and unruffled manner, that we had just witnessed a perfect example of how vital obedience is. It was in many respects a revealing episode.

For one thing, we had noted Kathleen's loyalty to David in going along with such an enterprise, her patience in the vestry, her composure during the mayhem in chapel, and her calm efficiency in restoring the status quo – all marks of a serene nature. Kathleen had a wonderful empathy, an instant sensing of a person's needs, and it wasn't a matter of just being aware of someone's problem or even sharing it: she absorbed it and it became her problem.

Kathleen was endlessly kind and, not surprisingly, quick to recognise kindness in others. Too self-effacing to rush into print, she did on one occasion, however, write a piece for the Keighley News, expressing her gratitude for a simple act of kindness, entirely characteristic of herself, and she did venture into public life when she became a magistrate, greatly respected for her fairness, her firmness

and her compassion. She also became a Methodist local preacher and spread her Christian message of faith and hope and love, not only by her words but also by her deep sincerity.

She was too gracious ever to impose herself upon anyone, but where she sensed a need her response was immediate. In addition to her daily responsibilities supporting the headmaster, she fulfilled numerous roles and duties in the life of the school – in the classroom, the san, the examination room, the special needs centre. A typical initiative was to prepare and serve refreshments for parents and supporters after school rugby matches. She delighted in mixing with people, and she had that charming, gentle, at times almost apologetic, sense of humour, that made her company so attractive. She enjoyed singing and was a more than competent flautist (David enlisted her to play in his Wind Band, and we can't all say that). She was a keen and knowledgeable gardener, who never tired of sharing with other gardeners her enthusiasm and expertise. Kathleen was never happier than when she was giving and there are so many who owe much to her generous spirit.

Today we are reflecting upon the lives of two people very special to us. I am fortunate to have had a long association with David as colleague and friend, an association that brought me a wealth of experiences and emotions – admiration, joy, bewilderment, amusement, delight, sadness, gratitude, irritation, affection.

The first experience was none of these: it was more like an electric shock. When he had been confirmed as headmaster, David had the pleasure of meeting individually future colleagues in the headmaster's study. Dr Pritchard, the outgoing head, was present, seated in a very ordinary chair to the side of the fireplace. David occupied the headmaster's throne by the table. We were introduced and I sat somewhere between the two. David opened up with, "Well, Mr McCarthy, how do you feel about being Director of Music under a musical headmaster?" This forthright opening took me by surprise, but I managed to mumble something like, "I shan't mind as long as he realises I didn't ask for the job." And thus began, however inauspiciously, a happy association that would last for the next 46 years.

Along with his sharp, questioning mind and astute judgement, David arrived with a wide knowledge of music (He knew a bit about chemistry as well) and naturally hoped, among other things, to raise the level of music in the school. (Also, as it happens, one of my hopes.) To this end he soon asked me to organise a party of seniors (all boys, bear in mind) to see a matinee performance of Tchaikovsky's ballet Swan Lake at Bradford Alhambra. Great as David's understanding of music may have been, I was not sure about his understanding of the Grove. The idea might just have worked at Epsom College, his previous school, but what chance here, a school dedicated to rugby, with line-outs and scrums and mud! However, we went – 33 of us, and I the only member of staff (no Health and Safety nonsense in those days). As it turned out, and as you might have expected, I was

wrong; the headmaster was right. Swan Lake had so impressed the lads that on the way back to school I was asked to arrange a repeat visit, but, sadly, it couldn't be done. All performances were booked up – presumably by local rugby clubs. David Miller 1, David McCarthy nil.

Soon afterwards, to get a taste of the authentic Bradford, David suggested we go to see a football match at Valley Parade. I wasn't sure that was the best way to do it, but nonetheless we went, joined the stream of fans through the turn-stiles and witnessed Bradford City versus Carlisle United. Not exactly Premier League stuff, but the best we could do. On our way to the match he had confessed to me, without the slightest embarrassment, that his favourite football team was Tranmere Rovers and, of course, I expressed my sympathy.

I forget whether he enjoyed the match. Probably so, because, with his perpetual exuberance, he seemed to enjoy everything he did - music, walking, reading, climbing, railways, giving careers guidance, serving on Keighley town council, local preaching, and teaching chemistry, of course. After his retirement he enjoyed, being part, and a very active part, of a real-life community in East Morton, where Kathleen and he made their home - Tan-y-Bryn (David's choice of name. He never forgot his Welsh upbringing.)

In his retirement he could, with justification, look back on a career that had made immense differences to the advancement of this school. A rapidly changing political, social and educational climate had required an alert mind and a lively inventiveness to ensure its future. He showed exceptional shrewdness in his many conversions (not in the religious sense, though there may have been some of those). Adapting, acquiring, extending, remodelling, he created an Art Department from a former Sunday School, a music block out of a science lab, a staff block and library from an old schoolroom, a special needs unit from what had been a gardener's cottage. The list seems endless, but so were David's restless energy and desire to improve matters. Under him the school became independent and coeducational. He changed dramatically the fortunes of the Grove but never faltered in his determination to honour its Christian heritage and preserve the family atmosphere that endures today.

David, charitable, good-natured, was entirely comfortable with that. There were times when he could be – had to be – serious, but even the most solemn occasions were infused with traces of humour. He had the genial cast of face that lightened most situations whatever the weather. His apparently confident manner was of a surprisingly fragile nature and he welcomed approval and support, which he would accept gratefully and with a genuine warmth. In return he showed unstinting kindness and a heart easily moved by an unsuspected tenderness.

This tenderness and caring nature came out clearly and affectingly in the final stages of his life when he and Kathleen moved into the nearby nursing home.

There, between the two, could be sensed a deeply loving union. Not the easiest of places or circumstances in which to extend hospitality with any enthusiasm, but David remained the cheerful, well-mannered host, always concerned for the comfort of the visitor. He tolerated and apologised for the unremitting TV. There was no comment, no complaining: indeed, David was affable as ever, pleased to see people, courteous as always.

A sign that David's powers were declining was when he stopped his daily walk to the local papershop to collect his copy of The Times. He had lost the will to do the crossword; but the will to care for Kathleen remained. The love they shared was palpable. David had become the protector, the supporter, with such tenderness and gentleness. When at last Kathleen was taken from him it was as if David was left to do the tidying up, to put the lights out, to draw the curtains, to lock the doors – before he was finally called to join her.

David and Kathleen. We who've known them, respected, admired and loved them, are privileged people. Today we celebrate them: bone et fidelis - good and faithful both. We live in their debt, they live in our memories and in our hearts. And to God be the glory.