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Christof as husband and dad

*Fearika Heyns, * Willemien Rust** and Adam Heyns****

Fearika Heyns

I am extremely grateful for 35 years of married life to this special man that I loved so much. When Christof and I started dating, almost 40 years ago, my mother advised that I should be cautious of dating a law student – she said I would never win an argument. Of course I did not listen and dated quite a few law students.

I do not like conflict and I am always trying to steer clear of getting into an argument. Initially we had different views on many topics. Fortunately, not without humour. In the middle of an argument, Christof would say: why don't you rather say this ... or that! He would suggest better arguments for my side of the story. In this way we sometimes solved issues with the help of his alternative sense of humour.

Apart from how to win arguments, I learnt so much from Christof. Here are just a few examples:

- There are no easy answers to the big questions in life.
- Do not accept anything without critical consideration.
- Have utmost respect for words – both in writing and in speaking.
- I could be stronger than I thought I was.
- I could be more independent than I wanted to be.
- The state of the world might be a mess but that you can only complain about it if you spend time trying to fix whatever is under your control, big or small.
- If you can relieve suffering, do it.

And on a lighter note:

- If you go on a weekend or a holiday do not over prepare, rather enjoy the ride. It will be an adventure, that means things might turn out well or not so well. That is why it is called an adventure.
- You do not need so many things, have fewer possessions and try to travel light. If anything works out perfectly, it is not only because you worked hard for it, but that it remains, in a way, a miracle!

and ...

- If I needed a handyman, I should call one.

Lastly I want to thank him for opening up the world for us. My best memories are of our family living abroad – in the USA, in Germany, driving to Prague in a City Golf with three kids in car seats in the back – almost always against all odds. Later going to Oxford and Geneva and him always planning how to bring the whole family on the next trip. We used to get messages like: ‘Pack your bags, we’re moving to Oxford!’

My children are the first in our circle of friends to lose a parent and it is a huge adjustment for all of us. We are all lost. The children were Christof’s greatest passion, Willemien, Adam, Renée, our child number four: Arné Rust, Willemien’s husband, and more recently little Isak Hendrik Rust, our first grandchild.

If things were going well with all of them he was as happy as could be and could face any challenge. He believed so much in each of them. He was such a great dad, his expectation was never for the children to be exceptionally successful or educated but just for them to be happy in the choices they make in life.

Our grandson with whom he shares a middle name, brought new joy. He was invested in this little boy with the same admiration and love he had for our own children, he even changed a few diapers during lockdown! Christof always had beautiful dreams of the future and could not wait for Isak to be old enough so that they could walk to the UP experimental farm, gather pine cones and then go home and make a fire with them.

People did not always understand that I could function well when Christof was away for as long as he was. Early on in our relationship I realised that to keep him was to let him go – that I had to grant him space to try to make the world a better place. But we had a strong connection that reached over continents. It was not necessary to call each other every day or to send hundreds of messages. If something would go wrong on this side, he would leave everything to come home. The longer we were married, the more we were in sync with each other and agreed on most issues especially during difficult times.

We were very excited about the future, about the places that we wanted to visit and about the things we planned to do at our home in Stilbaai. The mouth of the Goukou River was his happy place. He spent the best times in this little coastal town, paddling, braaing, reading, walking, cycling and playing music with the family band over the December holidays. This was the only time in the year that he really switched off from work for two or three weeks.

I can think of many more things to thank him for, but I don’t know how. Christof had an uncanny knack for remembering the lyrics to songs, so I think it is fitting that my emotions are best explained by the words of Koos du Plessis, a well-known Afrikaans singer, who died very young:

Jy hoor my nie meer nie, ek sê maar totsiens
Ek sal jou nie steur nie, ek loop ongesiens,
Want jy is in oorde waar drome nog blom,
Ek groet sonder woorde, want hartseer is stom.

I miss him dearly, every day.

Willemien Rust (gebore Heyns)

One would think that a person who achieved so much professionally would have little time or energy left for his personal life... this was certainly not the case with our dad. He was a devoted friend and family man. As his children we always felt valued and loved.

On a personal level, our dad made mundane activities like being dropped off at preschool extraordinary. A memory comes to mind: he would convince us that by eating our peanut butter sandwiches, at the precise moment he would instruct us to, the traffic light we were standing still at, would magically turn green ... later we discovered his trick: he would give us the signal to start eating the sandwich when the opposite traffic light turned orange, and then red. This ensured that our traffic light would turn green at the exact right time of eating the sandwich! Thinking back to a moment like this, I realise that we were very lucky to be in his intimate company our whole lives. As a new mother, I also appreciate how many green lights he helped us children catch over the years.

As a young child I sometimes felt anxious about inviting a new friend over to my house because I really wanted the friend to have a good time ... Luckily, I knew that I could always count on my dad to tell funny jokes at the dinner table, should my own efforts to ensure a memorable experience fail! My dad just had a superpower of being able to connect with people, regardless of their age, ability, or background.

In the same way that my dad knew how to tell a good joke, he also knew how to give a good lecture. Although his lecturing skills are celebrated on a great many international campuses, those given at home are remembered with a little less enthusiasm! Although I found this alternative form of discipline a bit annoying as an adolescent, most things he said during that time has stuck. When tackling an issue, he zoomed out, he explored the grey areas, he exhibited the bigger picture.

Furthermore, our father was passionate about his country of birth. He loved being home in Pretoria, surrounded by his family and best friends. I have wonderful memories of my childhood spent in Lynnwood with my parents and siblings – our parents were busy but

supportive, loving but firm, amongst many other things. My parents were each other's soundboards and pillars of strength. They enjoyed the same films, shows, wine, landscapes and company. And most heart-warmingly, they always laughed together.

Some of my fondest memories with him were the times spent in Stilbaai in the Western Cape. This was perhaps the only place where my dad could really relax! We did many things together in Stilbaai – we paddled, we peddled, we braaied, we went for walks, we made music together ...

At the same time, he was very passionate about international travel and we were part of his plans whenever the logistics allowed. Staying in Heidelberg, Germany, broadened my perspective on life and communities in general. I became more open-minded and appreciative of different cultures over the years, as I saw how my dad's trips to Europe and other parts of Africa and the world impacted him on a personal level. He would come back with stories about the wonderful places he visited and the dynamic people he met. He would almost always come back with a strong desire to move to his most recent 'foreign find', and he would always want to take us along.

On a professional level, he inspired me to choose a career that I am passionate about. We shared the same love for teaching, for music, for writing, for performing, for collaborating ... I only realise now how far-reaching his mentorship has been. Over the years he exposed us to good music, to thought provoking books, films, and interesting people.

My dad's last lecture and body of work was entitled: 'Peaceful (and not so peaceful) protests'. Perhaps we could try to think of his life in the same manner: it was a short (and not so short) time on earth. Everyone that knew him would have wanted him to be around for many more years. We all miss him terribly. Then again, his time spent was so intense and so meaningful, that it feels like he must have been here for more than 60 years to have achieved so much. He enriched the lives of so many 'small and big' people. His life is a reminder that it is possible to live a purposeful life, whether it be in the intimate company of family and friends, or within the international work context.

Thinking of him could go further than inspire those who knew him, it could go as far as to make us feel responsible, to pay, if only a fraction, of his generosity of mind and heart forward.

Adam Heyns

When I was younger I wrote stories with my dad. One of them was about a guy fishing salmon in the Alps. At the end of their life-cycles,

salmon swim upstream from the ocean. They navigate up the rivers to exactly the same place where they hatched, and there they re-spawn before they die.

One day the fisherman saw a frail old man in a heavy coat outside an apartment block, leaning against a car. The following day he hears that the old man passed away – he drove up from the coast to the town where he was born to visit one of his last living friends.

My father's death echoes this short story – except his wasn't as sad, it was mythical.

My dad was born along the coast. As a child he loved walking in the mountains of Stellenbosch, often with his brothers. His family moved when he went to high school. They ventured north, inland, and settled in Pretoria. There he matured, established himself, started a family and built a career that took him all over the world.

This year, at the age of 62 he returned to these same mountains of his youth. But that morning it was to breathe his last breath. This is agreeable symmetry. I remember when he edited my stories, that was always what he insisted on: the ending must mirror the beginning.

There is no doubt, his passing was unexpected and perhaps decades too soon. But he died in almost ideal circumstances. The area is literally called 'Paradise kloof'. He was surrounded by nature and accompanied by his brother. He was still at the height of his career. He lived to see his first grandson – if only for a year.

It was not in a dreadful hospital room. There was fresh air. It was not in some horrific car crash. There was some poise. He did not have to endure any prolonged suffering, it was swift.

It sucks for us, *the ones who are left behind. But I am going to try and convince myself that he was one of the lucky ones: his death was almost as epic as his life.*

* Christof's wife.

** Christof's elder daughter.

*** Christof's only son

1 You hear me no longer, I have to say 'so long', I will not trouble you, unseen I tread along, Since you dwell in places where dreams still bloom, I greet without words, since sadness is mute (editor's translation).