

BERNIE NICHOLS
1944 - 2016



BERNIE

A memorial, by “My mate Moley”

Bernie Pregitzer, who let us call him by his stage name Nichols (his great grandfather had also endured a name change as an immigrant at Ellis Island,) had known comradeship under fire in Cyprus, and therefore understood the value of friendship. Consequently his conviviality was his predominant characteristic. If only I had listened more attentively to the tales of his past, in Canada and elsewhere. I remember his moving description of his Grandpappy, in rocking chair on the verandah, growling, “I’ve run out of coffee and I’ve still got some cookies left,” followed after a short interval by, “I’ve run out of cookies and I’ve still got some coffee left.” A beautiful vignette that I intend to make use of many times.

One evening, ex-Groundcrew Bernie, who had spent ten years at RAF Wittering working on the V bomber fleet, told Dave Leeding and me of having to crawl through the narrow apertures of the wing of a Vulcan, dragging a light, an air tube and tools behind him, to service the composite rubber fuel tank from the inside, a task that very few colleagues were willing to undertake. (Must have been slimmer then.)

I knew little of his professional musical career with Ellie, (and we never heard his famed Kenny Rogers impersonation) but once on the way to Old Warden he regaled me for an hour and a quarter with infectious enthusiasm on the rhythms of John Lennon and his predecessors, and then, on the return journey, after I had played a movement from a Mahler symphony, provided a highly revealing critique of what he had just heard. That was the day (of the Masefield) when he had stood alone, in wind and rain on a desolate field in full waterproof gear, in case any competitor wanted a timekeeper. At other times, when seated in my conservatory there was no subject beyond the scope of conversation, and only the beating wings of time curtailed those discussions...that and his eagerness to consume the hot pies with which I had lured him. After a visit from Bernie, one was left exhausted by his sheer presence and enthusiasm. Although his passing is a loss to PMFC, and particularly to Ellie with whom we sincerely commiserate, it was more than anything a loss to Bernie himself. He has been deprived of the leisurely days of reminiscence and companionship which were his due; with a plentiful supply of coffee and cookies, of course.

He knew for the last dozen years, after a major operation, that his days were numbered, and when with PMFC he lived each day to the full. As Chairman, Bernie took a proprietorial interest in “his” club, often leading the way with new initiatives, always involved, ever-present, wanting to try anything new. He embodied all that was good about our club. As a most entertaining auctioneer, he would go home with more purchases than his audience, but he would generously give away much more than he took. In competition he would offer assistance even to his closest rivals. Brave enough to go “the other side of the fence” at the F/F Scale Nationals, he was also a stalwart of the Bowden, an inexhaustible prop flicker and pitman in Team Race (however much blood flowed from his guitar playing fingers) and a model builder of great knowledge and skill.

Latterly, Bernie returned to his watercolour landscapes, with a productive weekend away in Norfolk which gave him great satisfaction. But free flight was his great love. One late Summer day on Barkston when, each with a diesel model and a can of fuel, we flicked, launched and walked, launched and walked until we could walk no more. As we lay exhausted on our backs in the long grass, looking up at a Lincolnshire sky, he said as he was to say on many subsequent occasions on flying fields: “*It just doesn’t get any better than this.*”

.....It is with those words that I would like to remember him.