

Remembering Roy - a man who was generous, laid-back and great fun with a wicked sense of humour

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Roy Goldsmith. 'He loved sitting down listening to music with his paper, glass of wine, and his fat Havana cigars, before he had his stroke. He gave those up, and cut down on wine' Picture: Carol Whitmore

Roy Goldsmith came to Suffolk, adored it and found love. Here his partner Carol Whitmore looks back at his time at the helm of The Froize at Chillesford, his role as steward of the GRE/AXA social club and their disastrous first date.



'He made me laugh. He was bright very intelligent. We just really got on' Picture: Carol Whitmore

First dates are funny old times: a mixture of excitement, anticipation and (usually) a frisson of nerves. We yearn for them to go perfectly. Sometimes they don't. Roy and Carol's didn't quite run smoothly.

It was December 7, 1991 and they were going to eat at the Shepherd & Dog restaurant at Nacton, outside Ipswich. Roy picked up Carol in "his rusty old Mazda".

She remembers: "He had an old springer spaniel at the time: Sian. He'd rescued her when she was two years old. When I met him, she must have been about 14 or 15.

"I got in this rusty old car. It stank of dog – I didn't have dogs at the time, so to me it smelled really bad. It broke down and we had to get a taxi. It was a catalogue of disasters, really!"



'He introduced me to classical music. We used to both enjoy eating out. We seemed to like the same things' Picture: Carol Whitmore

There was something else. Roy obviously wanted to look the bee's knees. So he donned his "best" – a suit worn when he worked in the insurance broking business. But being a fair bit older than the lady he aimed to impress, those days were quite some way off, and his trousers were noticeably and unfashionably flared.

But the best thing was, none of this mattered. Carol knew Roy was the man for her. She already knew him well. "He made me laugh. He was bright – very intelligent. We just really got on. He introduced me to classical music. We used to both enjoy eating out. We seemed to like the same things."

And they'd spend over a quarter of a century together.

Early life



Roy Goldsmith and Carol loved their holidays - especially Greece Picture: Carol Whitmore

Roy Goldsmith was a war baby – born in Dartford in March, 1940. (One of his grandmothers and an aunt were among the civilian casualties of the conflict.)

He developed scarlet fever as a youngster, and parents Ron and Vicky had to put him in quarantine. Fortunately, it wasn't long before he was home again – playing with brother Brian and scrumping.

Roy went to Chislehurst and Sidcup Grammar School, where he got three A-levels. “He was way bright enough to go to university but his family weren't very well off,” says Carol. Roy went into the insurance broking industry, working his way up.

It was during this time that he met Tony Armes, who became a friend for life.

Life in Suffolk

In 1982 Roy decided to move to rural Suffolk, though he continued to work in London for several years, commuting. Pal Tony had bought a place at Occold, near Eye, and loved the Suffolk life, explains Carol.

Roy chose a pretty timber-framed cottage with thatched roof, close to a stream at Wetheringsett, off the A140 near Mendlesham.

The precise details of how he came to Suffolk permanently are lost in the mists of time. Whatever happened, he had grown weary of the rat race after about 25 years and it would be Suffolk's gain.

Roy turned publican, buying The Froize at Chillesford, a few miles from Orford. He was mine host for a few years. Following the Great Storm in October, 1987, which caused widespread damage in that part of rural Suffolk, he offered a welcome and a roof to workers clearing downed trees in and around Rendlesham Forest.

These were, generally, times of hard graft. Carol says running the rural pub called for stamina. She doesn't think there was much spare money to employ lots of staff, so at times Roy also found himself doing the cooking.

Whispers of lock-ins appear to be true. "The farmworkers used to be paid weekly. He said they'd come in on a Friday and literally used to spend their wages. He said he couldn't turn the business away."

Talk of him sometimes ushering out the last customer at 6am, and then starting to make breakfast for his B&B guests, is also correct, Carol confirms. "It was very, very hard work, and I think he absolutely wore himself out.

"There was one time he fell over the banister, from the landing, right down onto the floor below. They took him to hospital and, because he couldn't afford staff, I think he was there for minimal treatment. They basically strapped him up and he came back and carried on."

Meeting Carol at the Guardian Royal Exchange sports and social club

It certainly wasn't an easy time to make a go of a country inn. When Roy called it a day, he went to stay with friends at Orford, and then in the summer of 1990 became deputy steward at the Guardian Royal Exchange sports and social club on the edge of Ipswich. He later became steward.

The club was between Northgate High School and Tuddenham Road, and is nowadays a venue and restaurant called Greshams.

It was at the GRE club that Roy met Carol, a claims handler with the insurance company that in 1999 would become AXA. "When he first came to the club I had a boyfriend, but was unceremoniously dumped," she laughs. "But, then, how lucky in the end!"

After they became an item, Carol would go to the club most nights to see him. They'd do the crossword. "He was always better at it than I was."

The couple bought a house about a year after they started seeing each other, but didn't live there straightaway because Roy's job required him to live in the on-site bungalow for security reasons. They'd go to their house at weekends and when he had time off.

Mind you, the hours could be long. A GRE staff magazine from 1994 talks of being on duty six days a week – getting to work at 3.30pm to prepare and finishing after midnight.

(The publication also described Roy as a Des Lynam lookalike. “You can see that he was!” says Carol. “He did laugh at that.”)

She would help at the club at busy times. She remembers New Year’s Eves and getting to bed at 3am, worn out.

Music, food, travel and sport - a man with many interests

Away from work, Roy had a passion for classical music. Music in general, in fact – and mainly from the 1950s. He loved people such as Tony Bennett, Matt Monro and Aretha Franklin – singers with nice voices – and modern bands such as Eurythmics.

One of the first things they bought between them was a Sony stereo stack system, with a turntable to play his vinyl records and a CD player. Roy would over time amass a huge collection of CDs.

“He did like being active and using his brain,” says Carol. “He was never without his Telegraph, every day. He’d had it from when he was quite young, and since I’d known him he’d ordered it and had gone to collect it from the village shop.”

Gourmet food was a love, too. There’s a story from the time Roy, Carol and pal Tony would in turn cook for each other. Tony’s speciality was Italian, Roy served a mean mixed grill, and Carol had a penchant for Asian dishes.

Once, she discovered the sherry needed for an oriental recipe had gone missing. When she asked the two men what had become of it, they giggled away like naughty schoolboys.

Sport was dear to Roy. He’d played football before Carol met him. As a fan, he supported Arsenal and England. With rugby, Harlequins was his team. He also liked cricket. “Oh, and his motor racing. If there was a grand prix on early, he’d always get up to watch Lewis (Hamilton). He used to follow him avidly.”

Early on, before having dogs meant it wasn’t easy to go abroad, the couple adored going on holiday to Greece – picking a different island each time.

Life after work

Roy worked at the GRE/AXA social club until he retired. He and Carol moved permanently to their home near Lavenham in 2004.

He hadn’t long been retired when in the summer of 2006 he suffered a transient ischemic attack (when blood-flow to part of the brain stops temporarily). This was followed by a full-on stroke that autumn which affected his speech badly.

Carol says it made him frustrated because he couldn’t get out the words he wanted to say. “But he really fought back. He still used to walk the dogs twice a day. He’d manage somehow, albeit slowly. He was a complete fighter.”

Dogs had been a passion since Roy was a boy. In adulthood he had Sian. He and Carol later got springer spaniel Joey. (The name came from the TV show Friends. Roy liked the character Joey Tribbiani.)

After Joey died they had springer Willow and chocolate-brown Labrador Tara. (Carol still has Tara.)

“He loved getting outside in the air for a walk a couple of times a day – even though his feet might hurt and he was breathless because of lung disease. I was still working, and the dogs were such company for him at home.”

Carol laughs about how they designated Roy’s vehicle “the dog car”. The dogs would clamber around in it; and, because they lived in a rural area, it was invariably covered in mud.

Roy did enjoy life, though he was never one for crowds. “He loved sitting down listening to music – with his paper, glass of wine, and his fat Havana cigars before he had his stroke. He gave those up, and cut down on wine.”

For many years Carol would bring Roy into Ipswich on a Saturday. He could have a little outing and drink with friend Tony at The Greyhound – one of his favourite pubs – and Carol would take her mum shopping.

She says her partner was well liked, because he was a very genial person, and a gentle man who didn’t judge people.

There’s a story about a friend once coming close to losing his house because he didn’t have enough money to make the payments. Roy gave him what he needed, saying simply: Pay me back when you can.

“He was a generous, laid-back, unassuming man. Great fun. Wicked sense of humour,” says Carol. “Even when he was ill, we could still make each other laugh.”

Roy died on January 23, leaving partner Carol and his beloved labrador Tara.