

Geoff you were born in October 1947 at the family home on Lowther Avenue here in the town of Morecambe. Your good lady Penny was also born in the town, which makes you both 'Sand Grown Un's' a fact you are both incredibly proud of and rightly so.

You lived for the first six years of your life at Lowther Avenue with your father Bill and mum Mary, along with your elder brother Bill and your sister Barbara who may be known to many here for running the Post Office in Great Ecclestone and the White Walls Restaurant in Hest Bank. Your parents Bill and Mary, unlike yourself, were not Sand Grown Un's as they originated from the Blackburn area.

Your parents moved from Blackburn to Morecambe in the mid 30's to open and run a branch of the family business which was a very successful and well-established wholesale fruit and vegetable merchant known as Walter Bury & Sons. Walter being your grandfather.

You recalled having a very happy childhood and being the youngest of three children, were as a result spoilt rotten, I believe from a reliable source. At the age of two, there was great concern within the family when you contracted the awful disease polio. Thankfully, after loving care at home where you were nursed by mum Mary you made a full and complete recovery.

We do have something in common at the age of 3 years old, you won Morecambe's Bonniest Toddler competition at the Super Swimming Stadium here in the town. The winner receiving a new pedal car. I know you will find this hard to believe brethren, but I too won a Bonniest Toddler competition at Butlins in Skegness, but unfortunately all I won was a free lollipop.

You attended Lancaster Road Infants and Junior School before completing your school education at Balmoral Road Secondary Modern where you met and made many friends, some of whom are here to support you today.

In 1953 your parents decided to have a change in career and they purchase the original Lothersdale Hotel which from this point became the family home.

As a young child you were an avid model railway enthusiast and were delighted to have such a large attic above the hotel which allowed you to have an equally large train set running the entire length and width of the building and you became the envy of all your school mates.

With the purchase of the hotel this now became the new family business and as a consequence the leisure and catering industry now played a huge influence on your future life and career. When you left Balmoral School, you were successful in securing a place at Lancaster and Morecambe College of Further Education being a full-time student on the catering and chef's course which led to qualifications in the ULCI Baking and Cake Design and City & Guilds of the London Institute, this obviously setting you up for the future. When at college, you recalled winning a silver propelling pencil which was presented to you by Hovis for being an exceptional chef and making wonderful tasty bread.

When you left full time education you were successful in securing employment with the Midland Hotel here in the town and one particular event which you were heavily involved in was the inaugural banquet for the Lancaster University held in the Winter Gardens Ballroom in Morecambe in the presence of Princess Alexander with over 500 people dining. You also worked part time in many catering functions around the town, all of which increased your knowledge and experience of the catering industry generally which would become invaluable and vitally important in your future career.

During your education, dad Bill and mum Mary were busy developing the family business and were very successful in turning the hotel in to a local household name with a wonderful reputation and as time went on you became more and more involved as we will hear shortly.

During your school years and as a teenager you were a very keen sportsman and from a very early age you were a very competitive cyclist. Your first ever race was held here on Morecambe Promenade which you won and became the Lakeland Division School Boys Champion, gaining you a qualification to the National Championships at Crystal Palace. In 1966 you attended the first ever training camp for British cyclists in

Majorca and whilst you were there you won several events enhancing your now growing reputation in the sport.

In 1967 you became the Lancaster Cycling Club 25 Mile Champion, finished 10th in the 1968 Tour of the Lakes and 15th in the Tour of Ireland Road Races, where you were representing the Lakeland Division Team. One year while on holiday in Paris, you took Penny to see the end of the Tour De France. After four hours of standing in the blazing sun, the cyclists shot by you both in about 10 seconds. Penny was heard to say 'Huh you have made me stand here all this time for that' and stormed off.

You also played squash in the local leagues around Morecambe and Lancaster and were, I understand, a very accomplished player.

The Morecambe Parish Church played a huge role in your younger years and you attended Sunday School and services on a weekly basis and I am reliably informed that as a youngster you were an angelic choirboy and were also a member of the cubs connected with the Church. You still support the church to date and when time permits attend services whenever possible.

You volunteered to be a School Governor at an Infants and Junior School on Low Lane in the town and eight years at Morecambe High School. For 10 years you were a Committee Member of Morecambe Hotel and Catering Association organising the Catering and Food Traders Exhibition held at various venues around the district, I am sure those organisations thank you for your wonderful support and time given so freely.

It was back in the mid to late 60's that while out walking one Sunday afternoon with a friend you came across two ladies strolling on Morecambe Central Pier. A discussion took place between you and your friend and eventually you both plucked up the courage to ask the ladies out for a date which was duly accepted. One of the ladies being the love of your life, Penny and the other her friend Lynne. Yes, brethren you have got it right, Geoff ended up inviting Lynne for the date. It wasn't until a few weeks later at a mutual friend's house party that Penny and yourself met again and you quickly realised your mistake and put things right by asking her for a date.

Penny Singleton, which was her maiden name, lived in Heysham with her parents coincidentally she was the eldest of 3 children with you being the youngest of 3. Penny worked for Yorkshire Penny Bank in Penny Lane, Lancaster so therefore it was a foregone conclusion at the interview that she was the right person for the job.

The relationship between you both blossomed and grew and following a suitable courtship you were married on 27 September 1969 at St Pater's Church, Heysham. The first marital home was the top floor of the Lothersdale Hotel before a later move to the basement floor following the arrival of your family. This must've resembled something like the television programme Upstairs, Downstairs.

You were both blessed with 3 sons; Paul born in 1971 who is married to Judy and now runs the family business, Gary born in 1974 who is married to Abbey and now a retired successful businessman and lives in Manchester and Andrew born in 1976 who is married to Karen and lives in Nottingham where he is a Geographical Information Systems Analyst. You have been further blessed with five grandchildren. Gregor who is 17, Genna 15 who are Andrew's children and Leila who is 16, Isaac 14 and Stella who is eight and are Gary's children. All of whom are in full time education. I know how proud you both are of all your family and how much an important part they all play in your family life.

In 1970 you were by now heavily involved in the running of the family business and in 1970 Penny left the bank to assist you in the running of the hotel. In 1972 you were made a partner in the business and in 1975 your parents Bill and Mary retired moving to their new home in Torrisholme leaving you in sole charge of hotel. In 1979 Penny and yourself bought the hotel next door, No 320, and you commenced the expansion of the Lothersdale.

The double floor extension built across the front of all 4 units that make up the hotel was completed in 1982 and the main function room was added in 1989. In that same year you moved out of the hotel to live in Broadway, Morecambe where you reside to this day.

In 1990, Paul your eldest son joined you in running the hotel and he has contributed greatly to the many changes and success which has taken place particularly over the last 20 years. In the year 2002 the business became a chain with you purchasing the Clifton Hill Hotel near Penrith, a 65-bedroom hotel in its own grounds. In 2012, on selling the hotel in Penrith, Penny and yourself decided to retire and step back to leave the running and management of the business to Paul, which continues to be hugely successful to date.

These days Freemasonry is now your main hobby although when free time permits you enjoy an odd round of golf and recently you came 1st in Heysham Golf Club Rabbits Knockout Competition. In 1980 you were a founder member of Lancaster Loyne Rotary Club becoming their President in 1991.

You enjoyed holidays abroad with Stewart and Kath McVernon, Paul and Hazel Broadley and Tony and Maureen Harrison, which included cruising, skiing and on your 70th birthday, you were introduced to scuba diving by Paul which you particularly enjoyed, with you being very lucky seeing and swimming with reef sharks and turtles. While on holiday you particularly enjoy a tippie of your favourite Carlos brandy insisting on having the glass warmed with hot water first. Unfortunately, after 2 glasses of this that's it, you're off to bed and nobody sees you until the next day.

Lunchtime would see you all taking a break from the sun and heading to the nearest beach restaurant, one particular favourite bar had plywood sheets on the sand. One day the restaurant being particularly full and busy Geoff chose a table on the edge of the bar area in the shade not realising that the 2 rear legs of his chair were in the sand and as he sat down the legs sank and he went flying backwards from the table ending up rolling around in the sand, much to the great amusement of the whole restaurant. This was before he had any Carlos brandy.

You developed your business in to a highly successful organisation and it has quite literally become a household name in this area, giving meaningful employment to many local people over many years and has contributed to the success of the local business community and network and you are held in the highest esteem and have gained massive respect from fellow business owners and locals alike.

Geoff, you have over your working and professional career proved to be a highly successful businessman demonstrating great leadership and management skills throughout your outstanding career and are truly an inspiration to us all.

As you were growing up Freemasonry was no stranger to you and your family. Your grandfather, father, two uncles, brother-in-law and father-in-law all being members of the Craft. Interestingly and coincidentally your father was an acting ProvGSD of the Province of West Lancashire and your brother-in-law Derek followed him with the same honour in 1986, both of whom were members of Sandylands Lodge. So, it came as no surprise that you were proposed by your father Bill and seconded by your brother-in-law Derek as a suitable candidate for membership into this fine, old and distinguished Lodge.

Your Masonic journey began on 27 March 1975 (50 years ago to this very day) when poor and penniless you were initiated in to Sandylands Lodge No 5702 meeting here at this Masonic Hall. Your father Bill was the lodge DC for the meeting ensuring everything went according to plan for his son's initiation and what a proud evening that must have been for both of you. You were passed to the degree of a fellow craft on 26 June 1975 before being raised to the sublime degree of a master Mason on 27 November that same year.

I would now ask our secretary to read an extract from the minutes of your initiation.

I am sure those names mentioned bring back many happy memories and thus began your long and distinguished journey in Freemasonry. Geoff, following your initiation you progressed through the various offices of Sandylands Lodge before becoming WM for the first time in 1988, all the offices of which you fulfilled with great commitment and dedication. You held the office of ADC for three years before becoming DC for a period of 7 years, again the office of which was fulfilled with great dedication. I have it on good authority that you were an excellent DC, I quote: "Geoff was a bit of a stickler, a real traditionalist, everything had to be just right as we have only come to expect from him, but he was always there to offer help,

guidance, encouragement and support to any brother in need in many respects, not just an outstanding DC but an excellent Mentor to many as well.”

In addition, you also held the office of Secretary of Sandylands Lodge for two years from 2005 to 2007. In total a wonderful 12 years’ service to that lodge.

Prior to amalgamation of Sandylands Lodge, the lodge struggled to maintain natural progression of brethren through the offices. As a consequence, you agreed to fulfil the office of master for a second time in 2004, which greatly assisted the lodge to manage its way through those difficult times, again the office you fulfilled with great enthusiasm gaining you the respect of all the members of your lodge.

Following the amalgamation of Sandylands, Poulton le Sands and Rowley Lodges in 2007, you held the office of secretary of the newly named Poulton le Sands Lodge No 1051 from 2008 to 2012, again fulfilling the role with great commitment and dedication. Geoff in the words of a senior member of your lodge, you are considered a stalwart of Poulton le Sands Lodge and your hard work and dedication over many years has gained you the respect of all your brethren.

On 21 November 1990, you became a founder member of Plantagenet Lodge of Installed Masters, became its WM in 2007 and held the office of charity steward for four years and remain a valued and well-respected member to date.

Your long and distinguished career as a group officer commenced in 2011 when you were appointed group charity steward, the office of which you held for five years to 2016. Your outstanding service to this office being recognised and acknowledged with you receiving the appointment of Regional Charity Steward, the office of which you have held for a magnificent period of eight years to date.

Your service to the charitable function of the group and the Province can only be described as outstanding and on behalf of all the brethren, widows, individuals, charities and worthy causes in our communities who have benefitted from your hard work, dedication and commitment and the charitable funds you have helped generate we thank you most sincerely.

In Provincial Grand Lodge, you were appointed to PPSGD in 1997, promoted to the rank of PPGSuptWks in 2006 before being promoted once again to the very high rank of PPJGW in 2014 which was undoubtedly just reward for all your hard work, commitment and dedication to your lodge, this group and indeed the Province of West Lancashire.

In the Royal Arch, you were exalted into Sandylands Chapter No 5702 on 11 December 1989 before becoming first principal in 1994 and again in 2001. You have held the office of chapter charity steward from 1997 to date, a wonderful further 28 years dedicated service to the charitable function of your chapter. You are a member of the Provincial Grand Stewards’ Chapter of West Lancashire No 8516 and a member of Vale Chapter of Installed Principals No 5256, where you have again held the office of charity steward from 2012 to 2017.

In Provincial Grand Chapter you were appointed to ProvGStwd in 2000, promoted to PPGSoj in 2004, PPGSN in 2010 before promotion once again to the extremely high rank of PPGSE in 2019.

May I say what a delight it is to see so many of your colleagues from the Mark Degree here to support you this evening.

Geoff you have truly had a magnificent and outstanding professional and Masonic career and you can feel justifiably proud of all your lifelong achievements. Your story has demonstrated beyond words your devotion and loyalty to Freemasonry and we owe you a great deal of gratitude for all you have done and it has been a great privilege and pleasure for me to be able to share that story with all the brethren present.

Peter Schofield PSGD
Assistant Provincial Grand Master
27 March 2025