

RONALD'S PATHWAY

In the 1950's the pathway for Ronald's social group was predictable and predetermined. You went to school, behaved yourself, dealt with the odd bully, in Ronald's case by learning to box, found a job in one of the major Nottingham factories or went down the coalmine, married, raised a family and if you were lucky managed to secure a modest pension by the time you were 65.

Generations before him had lost their opportunities through two World Wars. As a comedian once said, 'If only Germany had never been invented.' His father and grandfathers were all military men; they served in the Royal Artillery, or as a Royal Marine, or a member of the Glorious Gloucestershire Regiment. Ever since the 1899 Boxer Rebellion in China, through the major battlefields at Mons, Ypres, Dardanelles to the 'D' Day Landings, they were involved in some form or another.

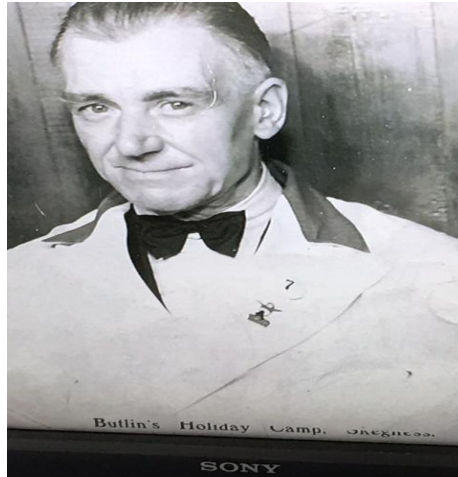
His father was lucky; he joined his brother in Aberporth, Wales developing rocket propelled missiles to be used for aircraft in anticipation of the 'D' Day Landings. Now it is used to develop unmanned vehicles and drones. His grandfather Alfred Charles Lowe was not so lucky, he was always in the thick of it. He witnessed at the age of 13 public executions in China, caught severe cholera in Egypt and nearly died, escaped a shell at the Western Front whilst retrieving ammunition and came away with just bits of shrapnel in his hand, left there for the rest of his life.

Lucky for Ronald he survived or there would be no Ronald and nothing more to say. The families lost only one in all the action, his Uncle James from whom he gained a middle name. He died from a grenade whilst riding a motorbike along the Western Front. Perhaps he was the one who planted the seed for a love of riding powerful motorcycles.

These were his embryonic seeds that were to ground him in the ways of the world backed by a loving and caring mother.



Father – Leslie Kirk



Grandfather – Jack Kirk



Grandfather – Charles Lowe



Great Uncle – James Lowe

The outlook for Ronald may have looked grey and colourless but one could still dream. Grandfather Lowe taught him to play the trombone. Perhaps his escape route to another life but his grandfather, as a leader of the Musician Union, counselled he needed a second string to his bow. Despite being a professional musician capable of playing all the brass instruments 'Charlie' had suffered from 'rest periods' when there was no contract work. Just before one Christmas with nothing coming into the household, he picked up his trombone and went 'busking' around the local pubs to gain money to feed the family for a Christmas dinner.

At the age of 13 Ronald did get to play in the Nottingham Schools Orchestra conducted by Colin Davis.



Nottingham Schools Orchestra

Conditioned by his roots and the mentoring of his grandfather he decided to try his luck at the RAF recruiting office and become a fighter jet pilot. It was discovered he was slightly colour blind on green so that extinguished that idea, although he was offered a chance to be a navigator in the back seat. If he couldn't sit in the front, no deal.



An F15 Pilot

He did eventually learn to fly at the age of 50 and won a European Award for the Best Aviator Navigator and flew all over Europe and the USA. Amongst the trips to places like Prague, Berlin, Chartres, Perpignan, Carcassonne; the Isles of Alderney, Jersey, Scilly and Menorca. He flew from Las Vegas to the Grand Canyon Airport and took flybys of the Golden Gate Bridge and circled the skyscrapers of San Francisco.



The Golden Gate Bridge



San Francisco Skyscrapers

Where was that alternative elusive key to his escape route? His school's maths teacher, a Mr. Brand, suggested the profession of a chartered accountant but he had to go to a Further Education College first to gain his basic educational certificates.

On leaving Player Academy, as he euphemistically called it, the visiting careers officer on his annual routine, interviewed all the fifteen year old pupils and asked the same standard question, 'What job did they intend to apply for when leaving school?' The standard replies were, down the pit, bricklayer, carpenter, factory worker or for the more aspirational an electrician or draughtsman. Never a scientist, entrepreneur, politician or even a university lecturer. Then it was Ronald's turn; a chartered accountant came the reply. The career officer nearly fell off his chair laughing thinking he had misheard him. He stopped laughing when Mr. Brand stepped in and said he was serious and laid out his future steps to achieve it.

Before entering articles and whilst at college Ronald did join a group of mixed students for a six-week trip driving down the length of France in a self-renovated 1930 Midland Bus Coach, kayaks tied on top, some

canoeing the length of the River Rhone, whilst others camped out along the river bank. He learned to change a fuel pump and bus tyre.

His eyes were opened to another world. No more grey factories, dirty rivers and canals but vast open countryside, clean rivers and lakes you could swim in, carpets of lavender, fireflies in the hedgerows, 12-year olds buzzing around on motorised cycles carrying baguettes under their arms and purchasing farm food in the village markets. The chance to freely mix with his fellow girl students and the French variety. Mixing with them to organise the mass meals or drink strong black coffee in the cafés. The first sight of the blue Mediterranean and strolling down the Champs Elysée at midnight blew his mind.

This was to be Ronald's version of a gap year before the really hard grind commenced.

Five years were spent relentlessly studying through correspondences courses in the evening after the family dinner. After a full day's work in an accounting practice, stuck in his council house bedroom for 4 hours each night and 6 days a week, he eventually made it. On the 20th July 1969, the day Neil Armstrong landed on the moon, he received the papers to become a chartered accountant after qualifying as a chartered tax advisor six months before. It was worth all the effort just to witness his Mum say to neighbours when asked what Ronnie was doing these days to be told he was now a chartered accountant. Of course they didn't believe her but that didn't matter, it was true.

Then the most seismic decisions of all, marriage and emigration to South Africa to join the Anglo American Group. Working in a small accountancy practice rather than one of the Big-5 Accountancy Firms prevented him getting the level of career work he needed. Based on the advice of his father he was to try another country that would give him the opportunities he sort.

If he had a guardian angel, this is where all the time he had planned for Ronald to be, in the right place at the right time. It turned out to be an avalanche of experiences, exposure to gifted and supportive people,

and the discovery of his own character and qualities. Here was an international group conglomerate steeped in the latest management theories, operating modern sophisticated computerised financial systems and controls. Staffed by MBA's and graduates from the likes of the Sorbonne University in Paris, or a son of an Egyptian diplomat. You couldn't be such an idiot not to at least learn something. No matter who you were everybody supported each other even to the Brigg's family becoming a surrogate family for Ronald, his wife and eventually two children.

You were being mentored from being an articled clerk preparing accounts and tax computations for pig farmers, shops and garages to consolidating group financial reports for the whole of Southern Africa.

Within months Ronald thrown into the deep-end managing as the intern company secretary for a newly acquired valve manufacturer employing 250 people. Not because of his professional skills but because he happened to be the only one around to hold the fort until the cavalry arrived. Half the accounting staff had left with the previous incumbent, and he was left on his own to manage. Not only that but when he enquired about the internal security controls for the delivery of the cash for the weekly wages he was offered a '45-automatic' and spare ammunition clips. This was for his self-protection. He was instructed to practice at 50 paces trying to hit a coca cola can at the back of the foundry, the safest place! The objectives to learn how to fire accurately a handgun but also to warn off anyone with any thoughts of robbery that they would be met with lethal force. Not something you are expected to learn situated in an office located equal distance between the Trent Bridge cricket ground and the Nottingham Forest football stadium.

To get to the foundry meant travelling 50 miles across country on dirt roads passing villages of mud huts. At journey's end met by a welcoming teaboy with a silver tray on which there were a teapot, sugar bowl, milk jug and china cup, saucer and teaspoon. His teaboy's name was Jesus. An anecdote he used many times amongst a church congregation. Did Jesus ever serve you morning tea!

Ronald was learning fast that not only could he manage challenging environments but could quickly spot problems and fix them without a drama. He was also learning he was tougher than he thought and black Africans became colourless to the point he enjoyed their company having some empathy to their social situation. They were brothers from the same cooking pot.

He also learnt what racism really was, not simply an anthropological defence mechanism held deep in mankind's DNA, akin to the sense of a stranger in the room. Often people make the basic error of defining it by differences rather than what it actually is. Ronald's definition was it is present when a person is abused, exploited or disrespected simply because of their ethnic background. Until he got his head around that one he couldn't understand why the South African black population in general didn't hate their white colonials, they directed their hatred more to other tribes.

There were the challenges to be conquered after promotion to the biggest engineering division serving the agriculture, mines, petrochemicals, defence and construction industries. He brought to the attention of the Welsh Production Manager that there was a minor error in the standard costings that gave unintended small, inflated material usage gains. That ended amicably as the manager, puffing calmly on his pipe agreed, and as long as both recognised it sleeping dogs were left to lie. His Scottish replacement, however, wasn't so easy. When confronted with evidence of material over-recording of production by his workers he threatened Ronnie that if he didn't back off he would personally throw him out of his office. Ronnie had learnt with school bullies don't back off and suggest weakness, Ronnie just pointed out that he didn't think that was a particularly good idea and left. As it turned out, after the six monthly physical stocktake, there was a massive stock loss and a major panic erupted around the production board meeting. Ronnie using his Broxtowe Estate street guile let them sweat knowing their jobs were on the line. When asked who was to report it to Head Office Ronnie chirped up and said, 'No need,' I have provided for it; we haven't over reported our profits. The Production manager from then on Ronald became a close working trusted

colleague, but Ronald was disciplined for not reporting his large stock provisions to the Group Financial Controller, he had forgotten his functional duty. Another lesson learnt.

Leaving South Africa was the hardest decision of his life, but with two small children it was difficult to accept bringing them up in the Apartheid System. Every day it got in the way of leading a normal life. Life friendships were formed never to be forgotten.

The roller coaster was not to stop. Returning to the UK he joined the Courtauld's Group. He thought the management and financial standards would be replicated as for South Africa. It wasn't, there were firefighting problems everywhere, but the skills and experiences learned in South Africa enabled him to rapidly rise at a very early age to be the youngest finance director of one of their major divisions and personal assistant to the Deputy Chairman. The only difference this time were the problems proved bizarre and extreme.

Some brief examples were the time he was sent to Mobile, Alabama and a visit to Northern Ireland in the middle of the 'Troubles.'

The Mobile plant was losing hundreds of thousands of dollars in unexplained chemical losses. A day was spent checking the chemical usage calculations and the basis of the information on which they were drawn. The next morning Ronald went into the chief accountant's office and asked if he had a machete. When questioned why, he replied because I am going to walk the mile through that rough bush from the plant to the supply railhead and find where the leak is. But there are lots of poisonous snakes in there. No problem, clearing the way with the machete will frighten them off. Two thirds of the way in, there it was, a fountain of caustic soda spouting into the air. The real problem became how to report to Head Office as jobs were at stake if he gave the unvarnished truth. As far as Head Office was concerned the response would be the calculations were rechecked and found to be sound, but it was agreed there must be a leak from the railhead supply point and the plant and that is exactly where they found it. It's fixed. Some very happy bunnies at the plant having approached it as a joint solution. For a

reward a tour of the Mardi Gras Floats ready for the next weekend and a nice dinner at one of the best restaurants in Mobile.

The poultry division in Northern Ireland had lost some months before 80,000 chickens. Ronald was in Keady, near Crossmaglen, a notorious hotspot for the IRA. He thought the phone call was a wind up as the call was made on the morning of 1st April. No, it was true, but on investigation he discovered a greater problem. The processing volumes were set within in months to increase from 75,000 to 325,000 a week on the commissioning of a new modern plant. Most of it destined for the UK market in 40 foot specialised refrigerated lorries. As all the hauliers were Protestant there weren't enough lorries to go around. There was no alternative but to talk to the Catholic hauliers and offer fixed two year service contracts. Because he was regarded as neutral he was the one to execute the change.

Meeting a haulier in the middle of bandit country Ronald made the clumsy mistake on framing his opening question which was, 'What makes you think you are good enough to work for me.' Silence, just the offended man getting out of his chair and having a swing. Ronald, using his boxing training ducked and put up both hands and said, 'Whoa, I am on your side.' They came onboard and grew to be one of the biggest hauliers in Ireland! It didn't stop there; he also discovered organised crime had corrupted the commercial division and over £1m was being laundered through the company. That needed a bit more of his Broxtowe Boy guile, but he fixed them in the end too.

The challenges continued but no chance of promotion to the Main Board, he didn't tick all the boxes including the one of a university degree. He had to move on.

Next stop a public regional brewery company acting as their finance director. Ronald spent nine years there, but it came close to five weeks. He thought he had made the worse decision of his life. During his six week induction he discovered a financial existential threat. At his first board meeting he threatened to resign if the company didn't fix it immediately as he had proposed. All the executives including the

company secretary thought he was barking mad. Fortunately the non-executive director and biggest shareholder was listening whereas no one else did. He spent nine happy years there instead of the intended four. The business grew from strength to strength aided by major acquisitions and disposals.

There were hilarious moments like the arrest of the property director and the internment of a free trade salesman ashes over the skies of Sheffield. On a visit with Chris, the new company secretary, to a Swiss Brewery bringing generous goodwill gesture for the termination of a poor supply contract, he met an intransigent, belligerent brewer. Ronald was forced to again bring out his Broxtowe Boy diplomacy skills and say what Hull customers were saying about their lager. The man attempted to get round the long board table but was stopped midway by the Chairman. On the way back to the airport Chris asked what would have happened if he had made it all the way. Simple, I would have put his lights out. Ronald abhors violence but sometimes in the absence of an escape route the school bully syndrome comes into play.

There were episodes rescuing a tour guide stuck up a Canadian mountain on his snowcat and climbing up Dunn's River Falls Jamaica with his wife as featured in the first James Bond Film Dr. No.

For the first time he came to meet King Charles III and Tony Blair the PM. He interviewed the ex-First Secretary to the Treasury to be chairmen of a public/private partnership and helped for the first time a teacher to become a knight of the realm.

For the only second time in his career since South Africa, Ronald had to gather himself on his home driveway on the day he left the brewery. Not for the executives but the people who worked there, they were a special breed.

All the closed gateways were opening and now the last career move to become an entrepreneur!

The roller coaster of experiences became ever greater and very bizarre. There were the conventional major corporate deals and acquisition of businesses, some he was to personal own. Ronald didn't in the process avoid the bizarre interludes. He discovered three major frauds on a national scale, dealt with organised crime, became aware of sensitive national strategic issues in telecoms, banking, automotive industries and missiles. He worked for a time close to the security services and some of their operators. He discovered foreign infiltration agents at an engineering company and surveillance teams at railway stations. He can say he was involved in saving twelve Chinese lives from certain execution and directly the life of a young boy in Eire. All the notions of certainty and predictable lifestyles had gone out of the window infilled with unimaginable events.

Life wasn't always career led, forced to use a motorbike to commute in London, Ronald acquired the taste for powerful motorbikes and adventurous trips. He travelled all over Europe and at one stage encountered the Croatian army at a border post and re-enacted the 'Great Escape' in the film on his BMW K1100.



BMW K1100 That Crossed the Croation Border

Persuading his wife to become a pillion passenger there were memorable trips across California and Nevada and to Bellagio.



Crossing the Golden Gate Bridge



Northern California



On the Way to Virginia City



There's a Moose Loose



Nevada Plains

During semi-retirement for fifteen years he mentored French college students in international business and instilled the confidence they could do more than they believed and proved it to them.

Very late in life Ronald was encouraged to write some of this stuff down in his semi-retired to France.

He always tried to do the right thing, never consciously harmed innocent people and tried his best to safeguard the weak or the vulnerable. At times that approach can come at a great cost.

When watching the film Pulp Fiction he was reminded of a passage from the Old Testament Ezekiel 25:17.

'The path of the righteous man is beset on all sides by the inequities of the selfish and the tyranny of evil men. Blessed is he, who in the name of charity and goodwill, shepherds the weak through the valley of darkness, for he is truly his brother's keeper and the finder of lost children.'

There is a second part that resides with a much higher authority and pay grade than him, it reads:

'And I will strike down upon thee with great vengeance and furious anger those who attempt to poison and destroy my brothers. And you will know my name is the Lord when I lay vengeance upon thee.'

The time has come to take writing seriously and help others in the belief anything is possible, but you can never plan exactly what it will be.

It is the journey you take; the destination is secondary.