

MIST ON NORTH BARRULE

I have had a good morning in our new refurbished office until My Dad's Estate rings
I think he will tell me of some complexity in the house exchange but instead he tells me straight out
"your Father died this morning in his sleep"

The hammer blow of pain, the relief of grief and numbness cutting in like morphine to soothe the
shock

The frantic phone calls to siblings and airlines, and the pilgrimage home

After the stupor of a brandy fuelled night, the visit to the Mortuary awaits

The Coroner says brightly "your Dads looking great, like he's asleep": I think he looks dead

I stroke his hair and kiss his forehead, nearly a forbidden act when he was alive

And feel surprised by the coldness of his skin; my children's heads are warm and alive

The siblings meeting to plan the funeral and beyond is emotionally fraught by the potholes and
crevices of swirling childhood dynamics

Which hymns, what order, what readings, who will be pall bearers?

Could art create the delicious dilemma of whether our Mum comes to the funeral, long into the
regression and fading passion of Dementia?

Like some post war Conference, we create a compromise of a smaller service at the Care Home,
trying to stretch and gel generations and values to do right by our Father

The funeral comes a week after his death, at the austere red brick church in town, where my Dad in
civic support counted collection money after the Sunday service

As we read our parts, we look out over an ocean of people, who have taken the dark funeral clothes
from their wardrobe that morning

We celebrate the many parts of a life; son, father, Head Teacher, musician, writer, but most of all,
husband

A sea of people passes to the wake, many with euphemisms of passing away peacefully in sleep, a
few with deeper layers of memories

I am reminded of how scared people are of death: I too am

What do we call the next day gathering at our Mothers Care Home? A get together, a gathering: in
the end we settle for "a goodbye to Pa"

25 people, a cocktail of family and close friends speak their stories of Henley

My Mum smiles and cries through the recollections of steadfastness, shock at others misbehaviour
and his core unique ability to make others feel special

In her a pervading meekness where once there was energy and anger

Finally, to the sentinel mountain of North Barrule, where he wanted his ashes spread

It stands proudly over the Northern plain of the Isle of Man, one side looking down on his boyhood
school, another on the village school of his first headship

It gazes impassively out to the beyond of the salt estranging, unperturbed sea

I know this mountain well as sunny and clear, but today it hides its thoughts in mist

As we climb the flank and near the summit, a lone seagull floats by overhead before wheeling away
into the ethereal Mannanin's mist

The pyrotechnics of the ashes as they form shapes in the wind are in their own way pleasing to the
eye; in the trilogy of events we did him well

We leave to make our journeys home, closer to the longer journeys of our own individual grief and
rocky road to acceptance of loss

We know what death looks like already from our brother's jagged shocking departure, but this time
we must emerge as adults with the loss of the Father, we are the next generation

And I already know that this sometimes fearful man, who took many years to feel comfort in his own
skin

Means more to me than I knew when he was alive

I know for sure, even in the morning of grief, that I really loved him