

01. Introduction : Where to Start and Why?

The list on the right represents the original starting point for this autobiography or memoir.

I have always created lists and diaries throughout my life, and I have never knowingly thrown away a list or record. So I had, in one form or another, an endless collection of largely useless information, and if I didn't want my executors to discard them as being of no interest (a perfectly natural reaction), then I needed to apply some order and method.

I had also noted that I had never been to a funeral where I hadn't learned something about the deceased that I didn't know before. I found this to be a normal and widely-held experience, and this seemed to me to be an awful waste. The one time that you want to ask somebody to explain something about themselves that you didn't know before, they are dead, and can't answer. So why not provide all the information in advance, so that friends and family can have all the information before it is too late, and satisfy curiosity from the one person who has all the facts?

This, of course, assumes that there is someone somewhere who is actually interested in, or curious about, my own journey through life, which is where a degree of vanity comes in. I am well aware that I have led a privileged existence, and I am told that no one will therefore be interested in my story. Robert Harris's eponymous hero in *The Ghost* advises:

List for Memoirs

- * Failed O-Level Greek. Four degrees.
- * Both sisters lost an adult child.
- * Check teenage diaries for social life, girlfriends, masturbation stats for confession.
- * Twenty years as an M.D. in four different companies
- * UoY. Lay member with three Vice-Chancellors. Pro-Chancellor.
- * Include hall seat, school diarrhoea, trolley-bus rabbit, fat bike boy, old ladies and TMO, the 5 priests, the 4 collapses, anorexia, spiders.
- * Jobless and frightened.
- * Trainspotting, Ricky and Rail Rovers, Hornby, Meccano, practical electricity.
- * No amateurs at death and funeral.
- * Car accidents, train crash, near-death experience, blood in the sugar, flight terrors, mutually-exclusive fears.
- * Greatest influence.
- * When did the girls make me cry?
- * Family history (very abridged).
- * Holiday diaries. Routes, lorry wheels, French *départements*.
- * Oxford. Punting, terrifying afternoon v big black bloke, climbing in, exam nightmares, bridge, Chartreuse, LSD.
- * Skiing. Who cried when. Black Lisa. '*Don't leave me on the f***ing mountain!*'
- * Tennis; APLA; Leonard Cheshire; Conservatoire; Parish Council.
- * Cambridge property crash.
- * Keep everything true & verifiable.

And remember

- * I prefer the company of women to that of men.
- * I love organising things.
- * I love numbers.
- * I have no interest in fashion.
- * I have a British 'stiff upper lip', so you won't find outpourings of feelings.

'Nothing sells a memoir quite as well as a good dose of misery. Childhood sexual abuse, grinding poverty, quadriplegia...these are money in the bank.'

But I have experienced none of these nor anything remotely close. And I have lived in the same house for thirty-two years, and been married to the same wife for nearly forty-four years. So, where is the interest in this? Well, that is for you to judge; I have the information and the lists, and here I am, writing them down in an excess of vanity but, at the same time, trying very hard to avoid becoming '*...one of the self-regarding, self-referential [people] to whom every aspect of their youth is worthy of a coming-of-age novel.*'¹

Clare Balding has said: '*People want to know about the depths of your despair and fear. But the truth is, I don't have it. It's just not there. And, anyway, what's wrong with the sun shining most days? It's the way I was raised and the way I am built – and I'm really very thankful for it.*'

I will echo this sentiment. I went to a Catholic boarding school and to Oxford; I have spent twenty years as the Managing Director of high-tech companies; I have gained, somehow or other, four degrees; I have made money; I have had a lot of luck in my upbringing, my career and my life, but I still think I have a story to tell. And I have a lot of lists!

I have included some favourite jokes, some favourite quotations, some advice, and, tucked away where only the most assiduous reader will find them, a couple of saucy limericks. There are epitaphs, stories from history, and even a few conundrums. And there are also useful statistics that may be of interest to the social historian. The price of cider and crisps in the early 1960s, the sexual mores at Roman Catholic boarding schools, the age when boys took their O-Levels, the sort of Oxford Finals questions in 1968, pre-Beeching branch lines, the normality of hitch-hiking, the salary progression of successful executives, house price increases, Yugoslavian road conditions, the economics of cars, drinking and driving, and much, much more.

A Man of Different Parts?

'Modesty from a brilliant man, who has shown continuing interest and enthusiasm coupled with hard work behind the scenes, which is to be truly admired.' The mother-in-law of my daughter Julia.

'Robert doesn't expect sympathy and doesn't give it.' My sister, Wendy.

'We find you most interesting.'
A fan in Alne.

'A member of the arrogant elite.'
A cross villager.

'I do love you very much, you know.'
My daughter Sarah.

'With Robert, what you see is what you get.'
The Chair of the University Council.

¹ Caroline Masters in Richard North Patterson's *The Final Judgement*.

Punctuation is so important

'Don't stop', pleaded Peggy. Her lover obeyed;
So now the young lady's no longer a maid.

It is surely a fact that this sad situation
Need not have been so with correct punctuation.

'Don't! Stop!' cried young Emma. Her lover obeyed;
So lovely young Emma remains a young maid.

Why do I have all these lists and records? From the days when I collected train numbers, I have always loved lists and numbers. I even enjoy doing tax returns. This is me. In my study of Latin and Greek in the early schooldays, I always liked gerunds and gerundives, and the correct use of subjunctives had me in ecstasy. This rolled over into being picky about the correct use of English. Today, I keep next to the lavatory both a copy of Fowler's Modern English Usage (the older 2nd edition) and a copy of Hart's Rules; and I read a page a day.

My mother taught me: '*If a thing is worth doing, it's worth doing properly.*' This, too, is me. People are sometimes surprised when I say that I want to die in hospital, surrounded by professionals – the thought of dying in my home bed is anathema². And, at my funeral, I do not want amateur grandchildren trying to carry my coffin – I expect to be transported to my last rest by people who know what they are doing. Maybe the keeping of proper lists and records is an important part of being professional; maybe this is why they were done; maybe this is why they still exist.

Lots of different people grace these pages and a list of the main characters is given at the end for easy reference. I would make a special mention, at this stage, of my novelist sister, Wendy Perriam, who has not only been an enthusiastic supporter of the project, but has been a tireless editor throughout.

Points to Ponder : Listless

A dictionary definition is:
'Lacking energy or disinclined to exert effort; lethargic.'

But perhaps it is the absence of lists which causes these symptoms, and why I am never listless.

² Recent reports of how people can be treated in hospitals these days indicate that whereas this might have been a wise choice a while ago, it might need re-thinking in today's environment!