

Colin Glenconner

We are all here to remember Colin. As if any one of us could possibly ever forget him!

Colin, myself and some others here, shared maternal grandparents and, after Colin's parents divorced in 1935 he spent much of his childhood with them, with his mother, Pamela and his younger brother, James. Until the end of his life he liked to tell the story of how our grandmother, Muriel Paget, diverted a train from Siberia to the Crimea during the first world war to save the lives of 70 British governesses. Later, when she was very ill and dying, Colin, aged nine, visited her. She wrote in a letter that 'Colin is a delightful and very clever companion. He bought some sweets for old Mrs Birch yesterday and said 'you see. If I am kind to old people when I am young, young people may be kind to me when I am old.' And indeed - they were. He was always deeply affected by members of his mothers family and believed that his curious attitude to food came through our great grandmother, Edith Winchelsea who ate only nuts and until the age of ninety nine slept in a tent in the garden. . Colin didn't, for instance, believe in kitchens. Thought that people with such amenities were ridiculously spoilt. In St Lucia there was no toaster, no oven, no grill - an electric kettle was just permitted. He ate very little, weirdly, and if possible only out of paper bags. And he disliked the sight of others eating. I experienced this phobia when I stayed with him in St Lucia some three years ago. Fridges were allowed in that climate but they were all empty save for ice and the cranberries that Colin ate for breakfast. I had gone with my sister-in-law, Alice. The

first evening we all met at six on the terrace. By seven there had been no suggestion of refreshment. By eight there was no talk of food and at nine Colin said 'I must go to bed now.'

No breakfast for us as Colin ate the cranberries. I took a water taxi to a local store and bought tomatoes, cheese bananas and a bottle of wine. That evening Colin spotted the salad that Alice had made with the cheese and tomatoes and said 'You're not supposed to eat that. It's being kept.' When Alice told him that I'd bought them myself he said with mischievous glee 'Very well then - but I've hidden the bananas.' After a week of starvation I fainted at Gatwick airport on my return.

But back to the old Colin - handsome, witty, explosive and eccentrically dressy was a thrilling cousin to have and, as children, we waited feverishly for his visits. He was almost impish but even then showed signs of inner turmoil. An elusive character who seemed to search for something rare and unique. The consequences of his erratic behaviour could be shattering but we're not here to talk about that. He was vulnerable and inconsistent but he was kind and affectionate. He loved to play with words and enjoyed quoting odd sentences he had overheard. One of his favourites was 'Post card me as soon as baby can say banana.' Another - having listened to two old ladies on a bus 'I've been to Paris and I've been to Peebles but give me Peebles for pleasure.'

In his schooldays my brother John, his cousin and best friend, remembers him with much fondness. He says

‘I admired him inordinately. He was handsome, he was clever, athletic and artistic. In his narrow room there hung (extraordinary for a school boy) a jumble of unusual paintings. Several Atkinson Grimshaws, whose dark, moonlit urban northern landscapes Colin largely helped to put on the map.’

After school, Colin served for a spell in the Guards and then went to Oxford where - to quote him ‘ I read diplomatic history which was not very helpful.’ When there and on outings to London parties, he, a sparkling figure, gained a reputation for dancing with plain girls. His streak of compassion made him unable to bear the plight of wallflowers. They could always count on at least one prestigious whirl.

He was also renowned for tackling complicated, cryptic cross word puzzles but said it spoilt the fun if he filled in the answers to clues. He kept them all jostling in his head until the last one was solved.

Later, in 1954, he was forced into denying rumours that he was likely to announce his engagement to Princess Margaret but, with gallantry, he said ‘I don’t expect she would have me.’

He did, though, marry Anne. She was his rock and anchor. He described her - publicly - and to me in private - as the person he loved and trusted above all other. He had always been immensely proud of her courage, and her many achievements so when she was appointed to serve St

Lucia as their Ambassador his delight in her was unbounded.

His children, too, and his grandchildren, wove steadily and regularly through his life - visiting him constantly in St Lucia. I knew how fond he was of them all since we would speak to each other at least every ten days - right up until the last. He often insisted that he hated music although I doubt that to be entirely true. Certainly it was never to be heard in his houses other than at parties. I know he would, however, be proud and interested to hear that his grandson, Cody Glenconner, has distinguished himself as a choral singer - singing in the winning team of the BBC Choir of the Year competition.

Much has been written of Colin's restoration of Mustique and later, of the monument there to him of a larger than life size statue - a striking likeness in his white kaftan and wide brimmed hat. There he transformed a mosquito infested outcrop into the worlds most exclusive destination - immediately ordering pensions for all grannies.

Much, too, is recorded of the magical parties he and Anne threw at Glen - the wondrous baronial castle very near to where we now are. Dressing up! Christmasses! Charades, cousins and friends.

A few years back he wrote this for a book I was getting together - and here I quote him.

4.45pm. My seventy eighth birthday as it happens. 'Here, in St Lucia, age is not a topic to dwell on. Like steak, there are categories. 'Rare' 'medium' and 'well done'. Having reached the age of indiscretion I would rate myself 'indigestible' but you can always eat the fries.'

In old age he was dismissive about his life. 'Nothing much happened to me . I don't think about the past. It's like a party. Gone the day after.'

He and Anne suffered many sadness's - the tragic early deaths of two of their much-loved sons, Charles and Henry - but he would say on behalf of them both (himself and Anne) 'We weren't brought up to throw in the towel. We were brought up to bite bullets and to fold towels neatly.'

For the last two years or so of his life Colin's body was invaded with cancer. He was secretive about this and his thinking became so muddled that one never quite knew. But here we want to remember him as he once was. A soft but sometimes cheeky manner, a quicker wit than anyone in the world, extreme vulnerability, a dazzling smile - so would you say, in summing up, that Colin had been a unique and exciting person? If you did - you would be right for that, unique and exciting , is exactly what he was.