

Recollections of Colin's life

Colin was born as Colin Downs at Saltburn on the coast of North Yorkshire. His father's family worked in the ironstone mines and steel industry of East Cleveland.

When he was aged 4 he was adopted, in difficult circumstances, by his aunt. She had married Fred Grainger and so he became Colin Grainger. His natural parents and his two younger sisters moved away.

Colin was one of two children from the village school who passed the 11 plus and he began attending Guisbrough Grammar School. Through a feat of intense memorisation and to the school's surprise, he achieved 5 O Levels. His adoptive parents, however, could not support him in the sixth form. He wanted to work for the Forestry Commission and discovered it was a civil service post. There were no openings nearby so he accepted a place in The Ministry of Pensions and National Insurance in London. Aged 16, he travelled from Middlesbrough railway station to live in a civil service hostel and work at offices in Kilburn. Work in other offices followed, in both London and Middlesbrough.

Aged around 19, he worked for five months as a London Transport bus conductor and found he was happiest being in command of his own small world. He was defeated by the difficulties of getting enough sleep and rising for an early shift when sharing a one room bed sit with two other young men.

In September 1967 he met Christine when they both worked at the student grant offices next to Hungerford Railway Bridge over the Thames. They married in 1969. He worked for two terms as an unqualified teacher in East London and passed two A Levels with the help of a correspondence college. He successfully applied to join Roehampton College in the expansion of teacher training in the late 60s. He spent three years exploring optical and conceptual art, and running the college bookshop so that it turned a profit for the first time.

Torn between an offer to work for the bookshop supplier who owned a firm in south-west London and his success in his teaching practices, he chose the latter. He applied to Northumbria and Middlesbrough for a teaching post. Middlesbrough offered him a job first and he returned to the North-East – taking a Redcar council house that was offered with the job, with Christine, and their daughter who was aged one.

In 1982, before he got to know his natural parents, he decided that he was neither a Downs or a Grainger, but the first Downes-Grainger, adding an 'e' to Downs, as he preferred the spelling on his paternal grandmother's headstone. Two boys completed the family.

Colin was an energetic and innovative primary school teacher. He began to feel stress at work and without realising their effects, took more and more of the tranquillisers and anti-depressants prescribed by the doctor, retiring sick from teaching in the mid 80s. In the year 2000, alerted to his high intake of tablets by Christine contacting a new insurance company, the DVLA asked for the return of his Driving Licence. This totally unexpected blow pierced right through the layers of drug-induced fog to his sense of personal freedom. His former determination now supported him through three years as he endured baffling symptoms and the incomprehension of the doctor to become totally drug free and rational again.

Horrified by his 30 lost years, he worked hard to analyse and describe what had happened. He wrote letters, pamphlets and ultimately a book. He read widely and researched. He created pictures and cartoons to emphasise the key elements of the situation that affects prescription victims. Along this path, he met many fellow sufferers and gave them support. He wanted significant changes, so that no one else would suffer in the way he and his family had.

Although plagued by intense after-symptoms in his remaining six years, he was able to enjoy the give and take of family life, doing DIY jobs for and with the children, improving their gardens, exchanging gifts and banter, going on walks and holidays with them, mingling and photographing at the various family gatherings. He created a productive allotment from a wilderness.

He was delighted to have the company of four grandchildren. He was proud of what his children kept achieving in spite of the difficulties.

Colin had a huge store of knowledge, wide ranging interests and an un-prejudiced mind. He always possessed a strong sense that it is fairness and natural justice that should prevail in human life.

Christine Downes-Grainger
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My Dad – Colin

by his daughter

In my early years my dad was not an easy person to have a relationship with. A lot of his time was spent sitting in his bedroom and it was difficult to feel comfortable talking to him. However those memories are in the distant past. The dad in my mind is the one that sprang into life about seven years ago. Initially I heard about the changes in dad at long distance and then five years ago he and mum moved to London. They moved near to me and so I began to have many opportunities to be with my dad. In this last five years I discovered a brand new dad - a man full of warmth, kindness, love, compassion and humour.

In this last five years it was easy to be with my dad. It also became so much easier for him to do things that he would have previously found too stressful. When I got married four years ago it was my dad who took all our wedding photographs. He had always been a good photographer and he rose to the occasion. He dealt with all the guests and got them all in the right places at the right times. He took many lovely photos and he spent many hours editing them all afterwards. The final product is a wedding album I cherish knowing that my dad produced everything inside it.

When I was on maternity leave three years ago I had a very good time hanging out with him. Mum was at work and so it was just me, dad and Daisy. It was a difficult year for me and dad gave me a lot of support. We visited numerous DIY stores and garden centres. He helped me with all sorts of little DIY projects, he made me many cups of tea and when the weather was nice we sat in the garden amongst the beautiful flowers he had grown.

There were still times when dad found it hard to participate in family things. But now it was because of physical ailments and not because he didn't feel emotionally able to. When I saw dad he never really talked about his ailments although I know that he often had continuous headaches. When I had a headache he was always sympathetic which I always thought took a lot of love. He became a great

