Kalispera se olous. Good afternoon everyone.

In the days since our father's death we have been reflecting on the many stories we remember, the many stories he told, and the many more that have been shared by his friends and former pupils. It prompted me to try something I'd been asking him to do for many years, which was to write down some of his stories.

My mother asked me to read it today, and we chatted to Bruce earlier this week.

His wise advice was that as long as it did not just start 'he was born in the year 1939 and then was chronologically crammed with biographical facts' then this would be great.

Unfortunately, that was exactly what I had written.

So instead I'd like to share just five things.

Firstly Food and Wine

Only last week, our father was recalling his time just after the second world war when he was at boarding school. Rationing was still in place across the country and often supper was a single small sausage. He and his friends evolved a ritual of slowly eating these meagre sausages. Firstly, peeling off the crispy skin and eating that, and then slowly eating the small morsel of meat inside. For the rest of his life, he retained a love of sausages, and indeed all good foods.

Good wine was also a constant in our family. When he was in his early 20s, my father had an elderly widowed neighbour in March whose husband had been a wine collector. She had little interest or taste for all his wine, and allowed Chris to explore and help himself to the wine collection which included vintages that went back into the nineteenth century. His love of fine wine was locked in.

His love of a good port was legendary. One abiding memory of his was one invite to High Table when at Trinity College in Cambridge. Seated to the left of the Master, he was very careful to follow the correct etiquette and formality through the dinner and not show up any lack of manners. At the end of the dinner the college's decanters of port and madeira were brought out. These started with the Master and passed to the left. He filled his own glass with port and the decanters then went on their way around the fellows and dinner guests. He eagerly watched their progress as they came around the table a second time, and duly refilled his glass. As they made their third journey around the table he recollected that was somewhat more tipsy than he had started the dinner, but to his frustration the two decanters then seemed to sit in front of the Master for an inordinate amount of time. To speed up the process, he reached across to take the port. A firm hand came down on his wrist. 'Mr Potter, at Trinity the port only goes around three times.'

In the 1980s the seven of us had a lovely family holiday to the Loire. Most importantly for my father, it is home to many great vineyards. Numerous tours of vineyards and long discussion in their shops resulted in our gite being crammed full of carefully selected cases of wine, and my father kept a careful inventory ready for the inevitable customs tax inspection at the port of Dover. All went well on our return through Dover will wine crammed in every corner of the car, under seats and on laps. The not inconsiderable tax was paid to bemused customs officers, who, clearly not relishing the idea of decanting the car, took his inventory on trust. Four hours later we arrive home to a message on the answer phone from the gite owner; the cupboard under the stairs had been left filled with half of the cases of wine.

The fact that my parents retired to the town of Ludlow, the home of the Ludlow Food Festival and the famous annual Sausage trail is not a complete coincidence. Family dinners and the annual Potter Thanksgiving meals were epic affairs. Whilst our mother concocted culinary masterpieces, our father

would bury himself away in the dining room to take it on himself to curate the expansive set up of cutlery, napkin rings, place settings and dining paraphernalia that gave these dinners part of their esoteric charm.

Inevitably, one of his loves of his life in Crete was exploring the tavernas and long lunches or dinners with family, friends, and a caraf (or two) of good local Cretan wine. ‘Miso litro kokkino crasi’ was a well-used phrase.

Secondly; The Past and all that comes with it.

Our father had a complete love of the past. This was expressed in many ways. At school and university he developed a love of ancient Greek and Latin, and the stories of mythology. With his brother Tim, he started to explore the fields of Cambridgeshire as a teenager, uncovering Roman remains as the farmers on the Fens first started to deep plough their fields in the 1950s and 1960s. Together they discovered a whole Romano-British settlement at Grandford.

After Cambridge University, he was appointed to Ardingly College in 1961 to teach Latin and Greek. Here the outgoing head was keen on taking boys out to see the great country houses of England, and our father saw this as the Trojan Horse to also sneak in visits to archaeological sites. In 1963 two boys approached him as they'd heard there was a new A-Level available in archaeology and wanted to know if he could teach it. He was aware of it as at that very time his brother Tim was doing it with a private tutor, and with what he admitted was the impetuosity of youth, he pushed ahead. Despite many hurdles, Ardingly became the first school in the country to offer archaeology on the syllabus and by 1974 our father had become Chief Examiner for Archaeology for the London Board. He went on to introduce and teach archaeology at Old Swinford, and one old boy commented that 'Chris Potter is probably second only to Harrison Ford for the number of people he has inspired to become professional archaeologists.'

In 1990 our father spent a sabbatical at Christ College, Oxford, studying Tudor Muster rolls and retirement was a chance for him to spend more time on his great passions of local history and genealogy. On visits to Ludlow it was quite normal to see piles of documents alongside microfilm and microfiche readers out on tables. He became involved with Ludlow Historical Society and also St Laurences Church. One former pupil of his, Ian Hislop, was in Ludlow during production of his series for Radio 4 on Middle England. He thought he was meeting a local historian and churchwarden to discuss St Laurence's church, and was somewhat shocked as he recognised that it was his old housemaster approaching him. 'Naturally I got a history lesson' he reflected.

Thirdly; Schools.

Our father's life and professional achievements are entwined with the story of two schools.

The son and grandson of headmasters, he followed in their footsteps and spent a total of 17 years at Ardingly. In 1978 we moved from Sussex to the West Midlands when he took on the headship of Old Swinford Hospital in Stourbridge, one of the handful of state boarding schools in the country. He quickly realised the 311-year-old school was in terrible peril, and in the first week the Local Education Authority wrote to him questioning the viability of the school and their continued funding. 'The previous head,' he later recounted, 'had been there too long, and he was no recruiter. It was empty. I knew how to recruit, which was look Mum in the eye, make sure you ask the little boy questions, and talk to Dad about the fees.'

He led a financial and academic transformation of Old Swinford Hospital. In 1983, the school celebrated its first admission to Cambridge in its history; many more were to follow. He also initiated major investment in facilities and boarding accommodation and steered Old Swinford Hospital to top of the national league tables for GCSEs in 1991 as a pioneering Grant Maintained school which received direct devolved funding.

Former pupils recall his firm but fair approach and reflect in hindsight on the long term good that visits to the Oak Room - his office at Old Swinford - did them. In the late 1980s, one braver group of sixth formers took a bold approach on their visit after being discovered in an out of bounds pub the night before. They allegedly answered that their suggestion to the problem would be if "someone very responsible and experienced, such as yourself Sir, could go with us in future to teach us how to drink properly in a fitting Old Swinford manner, this would be very much appreciated." It is reported they did not get a gating or detention, but told to leave the Oak Room forthwith,

and then much laughter could be heard inside the office from our father and his Deputy Dennis Glover.

He was a firm believer in keeping up high standards of appearance and dress. Despite our mothers ask for us to be informal today, saying that our father spent long enough wearing ties, my brother is today wearing an Old Swinford tie in order to avoid getting hundreds of letters from the old pupils watching online who were regularly berated by our father to do up their top buttons.

A full academic gown was frequently worn by our father. This led to one unintended consequence when he was leading a service in the school. In the middle of the service, one of the boys raised his hand to get his attention. The boy waited for our father to ask him what he had on his mind, and replied: 'Excuse me Sir, your hood is on fire.' The hood of his flowing gown had ignited from one of the candles.

Our father retired in 2001, shortly after receiving his OBE for Services to Education. At that time Chris Woodhead, the late Head of OFSTED, the UKs national office for standards in education, wrote that 'Old Swinford is no bog-standard comprehensive. Academic standards are exceptionally high. The facilities are superb. A sensible Government…would appoint Potter to the National College of School Leadership so that his commonsense wisdom might benefit the next generation of head teachers.' After his death last week, another former pupil wrote that he 'was one of the most successful headmasters of his time. He pulled Old Swinford Hospital up from the doldrums to the top of the premier league. He should have been knighted but his true reward was the gratitude of the many pupils he set on the path to success.'

Our father's successor wrote to us telling us how our father described the typical OSH pupil; 'We do not turn out entitled young men. They are

confident. They will look you in the eye and they will get on with anyone.' As many of you may recognise, he could have been describing himself.

Today his former pupils include members of parliament, businessmen, academics, actors, technology entrepreneurs, international sportsmen, journalists, scientists, doctors, community leaders; indeed, most walks of life of modern life. To his last day, he retained a phenomenal ability to recognise and remember these former pupils, what they did, and who their parents were.

In the last few days, the outpouring of memories and gratitude from generations of his former pupils and staff has been so heart warming to all of my family. Another old pupil wrote to us that 'Christopher had given each of us much needed confidence: he made us think that each of us could achieve things which we had been told, or come to think, were beyond us.' Many others simply said with a deep sincerity that he changed their lives.

The rhythms of school calendars shaped much of his life. Born at the start of the new school year in September 1939, school calendars dictated that our parents' marriage also took place at the same point in the year in 1971, and when he retired in 2001 he likewise did so before the start of the new school year. In some ways, with his death as schools prepared to return for the new academic year, this was the entirely natural season for him to mark another change.

Fourth, Crete & Greece

Our father first visited Greece in 1959 on the Cambridge University Classics Expedition. Four of them drove out across Europe in a repurposed World War Two ambulance to visit sites across Greece and Turkey. All went well, apart from a major crash in Athens, and later, trying to reach one ancient destination which had had its access repurposed as a site of military

importance. The initial guards waved through what they thought was a military vehicle, but the Cambridge undergraduates were eventually rewarded with a military arrest and interrogation as to what on earth they were up to.

We think he first visited Crete in the mid-1960s, and our parents then both visited in 1973 as part of the Ardingly School summer cruise (yes, British Public Schools do things in a special way…). Our mother remembers commenting how much the climate, colours and scenery of Crete reminded her of California, but it was not until around 1995 that they returned for another holiday, this time with Marcus, Kate and Sophie.

Now, all through our childhood our parents had this thing whereby at the end of every enjoyable holiday they seemed to develop ideas of buying a house or moving to that said place; whether it was California, Wales, France. Even the island of Orkney off the north coast of Scotland. So we should not have been

too surprised as siblings when in 2003 they announced they were going to build a house in Crete. We thought though that they'd gone completely mad.

However, what became so clear over the last two decades is how special Crete, and the friends they have made here, has been for both our father and mother. He threw himself into learning modern Greek, and currently there will be analytics engineer for DuoLingo trying to understand how on earth their usage figures in Greece could have plummeted so suddenly. The day before he died I was with him whilst he chatted away in Greek in his typical fashion to a young Cretan waitress. Only afterwards did he tell me that he had absolutely no idea what she was saying back to him as she was speaking to his more deaf ear.

Slight deafness though he could handle. Perhaps his biggest fear had come from enduring the trying time of seeing our grandfather decline with the

effects of Alzheimers and he was always fearful of that. The fact he retained his intellect, wit and memory to his last day is something he always wanted.

Our parents spent increasing time here over the last decade, and a day before Covid restrictions hit in the UK they decided to make a frantic dash to ensure they could be here. Airspace was closed to Greece whilst they were in the air from Gatwick, but nonetheless they got to Crete to wait out Covid in Villa Keramika in Kokkino Chorio.

As my mother says, Crete was my father's 'happy place.'

And finally, family

Our parents married in 1971 and what followed was perhaps our father's most remarkable achievement. This was the fact that somehow he was able to restrain our mother and the peak number of cats that were adopted into the

menagerie of our household only ever reached the maximum number of eight at any one time.

Despite the amount of time it inevitably took to look after all these cats, and all the dogs that later followed into the Potter menagerie, our parents found the time to bring Charmian, Marcus, Sophie, Kate and myself into the world and raise us.

Our father loved any family gatherings of our nuclear or extended family of Potters, Westons, the Rendall clan and our American Mansergh family. We are all hugely saddened that our sister Charmian cannot be with us today, and our love and thoughts go out to her, Jake, Gwen and Freya. He was so happy too to have become a grandfather for the sixth time earlier this year when Alldous, joined his cousins Cara, Walter and Fergus alongside Freya and Gwen.

Whether by nature or nuture, so much of what our father stood for, and what he was passionate about, I see in my siblings and I. We are still the sausage eaters, the historians, the classicists, the educators, the travellers, the bibliophiles, and the story tellers. And we all love a glass of good wine.

But we are also five amongst a cohort that is legion. Some of you will recall the film Goodbye Mr Chips. It came out in the year our father was born, and tells the story of the life of a young classics master who in turn become a headmaster at a British boys boarding school. Like the character of Chips, our father's spirit and achievements lives on in the lives of the many thousands of pupils who have been directly inspired, shaped and influenced by him over the last sixty years.

As Chips says in the film, 'haec olim meminisse iuvabit.' 'One day we will all look back on this and smile.'

To have lived your life to the full to the very last day, whilst inspiring a generation to be all that they can be, is a life that we should rightly cherish and celebrate.

2 Sept 2023

Luke Potter

Remembering loved ones

Enthusiastic headmaster who taught archaeology

Christopher Potter, 83

When Christopher Potter arrived at Old Swinford Hospital in Stourbridge in 1978, the boarding school was not in the best of shape. "Empty" is how the newly appointed head bluntly described it. To rescue the 300-year-old state-funded school, where numbers of pupils had dwindled to about 100, Christopher initially concentrated on recruiting pupils and staff. In later years, the school would rely on word of mouth to increase its numbers but in the late 1970s it was largely down to advertising and Christopher's particular form of persuasion. You have to "look Mum in the eye", he wrote honestly, "make sure you ask the little boy questions and talk to Dad about the fees".

In 1989 the school was among the first in the country to be grant-maintained, which meant that Christopher's vision for Old Swinford was unconstrained by the resourcing decisions of the local education authority. In many ways the school led the way as an example of direct funding and was used as a case study as the country moved towards the academies of today. Yet Christopher was never one to allow financial complacency to creep in, and before a visit by Kenneth Clarke in the early 1990s, he ensured such details as the careful placing on the desk of the education secretary's favourite cigar and whisky.

While the school catered for day pupils, it was Christopher's priority to increase the number of boarders. Many of the school's pupils came from the Black Country, across Worcestershire and the Midlands, the forces and the diplomatic services, but Christopher strove to include those from more deprived communities. As the former head of Ofsted, Chris Woodhead, wrote in the Telegraph in 2001, "Potter accepts that boarding and the Old Swinford ethos are not for everyone but he knows that boys who were languishing in ordinary comprehensives have flourished in this more structured environment."

With carefully placed funding and staffing, the school's academic standards went from strength to strength. In 1983 it celebrated its first admission to Cambridge; and by the end of Christopher's tenure in 2001 it had topped the league tables for non-selective schools more than once; there were 16 applications for every place; the number of boarders had risen fourfold and four new boarding houses were built. Christopher became the chairman of the Boarding Schools Association and in 2000 was appointed OBE.



Christopher Potter was born in 1939 in Worcester, the eldest of three children. He descended from a line of headmasters: his grandfather had recently retired as the head of the John Roan School in Blackheath, southeast London, and his father Cedric Potter would become head of March Grammar School, Cambridgeshire. His mother Phyllis (née Rendall) was the daughter of one of the founding managers of the Eagle Oil and Shipping Company.

Christopher went to March Grammar School and, like his father and grandfather before him, on to Cambridge, where he won a place to read classics at Trinity. "I didn't expect to be a classicist," he wrote, "until my father called me into his study and said, 'Christopher, in the sixth form you will study classics.' 'Yes, father,' I said, and went out."

An interest in Roman history had in any case begun to form and at weekends he and his younger brother Tim would follow the farmers over the ploughed fields in the Fens looking for Samian ware. In 1954 they were in the field when a Roman site at Flaggrass was discovered and they went on local radio to talk about it.

While Tim Potter went on to become the keeper of pre-historic and Romano-British Antiquities at the British Museum, Christopher pursued his passion for archaeology. His first teaching post after Cambridge was as a classics teacher at Ardingly College, West Sussex. There he was one of the first in the country to put archaeology A-level on the timetable. "I knew virtually nothing about archaeology," he wrote. "I'd done some digging but I didn't even know what the syllabus was. I was learning like mad." By 1974 he was chief examiner in archaeology for the London Examinations Board and his class was flourishing. As one former pupil commented, "Chris Potter is probably second only to Harrison Ford [of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*] for the number of people he has inspired to become professional archaeologists."

Christopher Potter in 2001. Below, entertaining Kenneth Clarke, the education secretary, in the early 1990s

In 1971 Christopher married Charlotte Millis, a Californian and friend of his sister's when they were both at Edinburgh University. They raised five children: Charmian and Sophia, who are classics teachers; Luke, who runs a world heritage site in Saudi Arabia; Marcus, the manager of a travel company; and Kate, a former site manager at Beeston Castle in Cheshire. In retirement Charlotte and Christopher split their time between Ludlow and Crete, where they had a property overlooking Souda Bay.

As much as Christopher thrived as a headmaster — he knew the names of every boy, even those who had left years earlier — he also enjoyed family life, presiding over Sunday lunches and taking his children on holiday to historic sites around Britain, such as the ancient burial mounds in the Orkneys. In 1990 he spent a sabbatical at Christ Church College, Oxford, studying Tudor muster rolls. He liked to keep one foot in the past while staying interested in the future. So while at school Christopher insisted on wearing an academic gown and mortarboard, he was also one of the first heads to install computers in classrooms. In 2001 he even built his own.

If you would like to commemorate the life of a relative, friend or colleague, call 020 7782 5583 to discuss the content and cost, or email: readerslives@thetimes.co.uk.
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High Court judge whose intellectual flair matched her dress sense

Dame Sonia Proudman, 73

When Sonia Proudman arrived at her chambers in New Square in the early 1970s she found herself the only woman among a cohort of male barristers. She may have been one of the first women to have left Oxford with the Eldon Law Scholarship, the prestigious award given to the university's most promising law student, but the chambers' clerks initially cast doubt on her receiving much in the way of work.

It soon became clear that the elegance and clarity that Sonia brought to bear on her chancery cases was first rate, and she developed a reputation for her mastery of the subject and acute tactical judgment in matters of trust and private client law. In 1994 Sonia took silk and followed it by becoming head of chambers. She stayed with 11 New Square to become a founder member of the new Radcliffe Chambers when it merged with 11 Old Square and in 2001 was made a deputy High Court judge. It led to her appointment as a full-time judge to the Chancery Division, only the second woman to be appointed. Many felt, had health permitted, she could have gone even further.



Sonia Proudman focused on chancery

It remained important to Sonia that the Bar reflected the diversity of modern life, particularly given her own early struggles as a woman in the profession. When she sat on the committee that dealt with applications for silk she helped to update the criteria to make the system fairer for all. Unrelenting and courageous in her views, which could differ widely from those of her friends, she was a staunch Brexiteer, voting Leave in 1975 and 2016.

Sonia Proudman was born in Hammersmith, west London, in 1949 and brought up in Chelsea and Fulham. At heart she remained an urbanite who enjoyed the buzz of the city. She was the only child of Sati (née Hekimian), an Armenian whose family had fled the genocide in the First World War to reach Alexandria, Egypt, and Kenneth Proudman, who had senior roles at ICI and Esso. Her parents met in Alexandria where Kenneth was serving with the Eighth Army during the Second World War.

Sonia went to St Paul's Girls School and was offered full scholarships from there to Cambridge and Oxford. She settled on Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, to read law and graduated with a top first, having claimed, without exaggeration, that she "had hardly done any work".

There followed a period of pupillage during which she lectured at the London School of Economics and she remained on friendly terms with one of her star students, Cherie Booth.

In 1987 Sonia married Crispian Cartwright, a criminal barrister. They shared a love of the theatre and literature and had a daughter, Grace, who is a counsellor. Yet while Sonia could display an encyclopedic knowledge of the arts, she wore her learning lightly. She was as happy to stay in and watch *Strictly Come Dancing* on the BBC as she was going to the opera, and when asked to invite a guest of honour to a Lincoln's Inn dinner she brought Terry Wogan.

A sartorial exuberance matched her intellectual flamboyance, and her interest in fashion, including Hermès scarves and brightly coloured jackets in striking designs, remained undimmed. When asked what she would have done had she not gone into the law, she would reply, in all seriousness, "I would have liked to have been the lipstick correspondent for Vogue."

A memorial service will be held at Lincoln's Inn Chapel, WC2, on October 11, 2023, at 5pm