

My father had a special sense of humour. Very special. So special in fact was it, and sometimes so acerbic, that he could possibly have been construed as being jaw-droppingly rude. But those of us who knew him understood, albeit sometimes wincingly, that it came from a place of utter kindness and affection. It would never have occurred to Michael that people would take him seriously, or that his friends and family would not realise that the sharp wit came with an equal or greater measure of love and friendship.

As Michael's children, we loved his sense of fun without any thought of social constraints. When my sister was making her school project 'My family and my home', aged 8, she wrote "I love my Daddy because sometimes he picks me up and holds me upside down out of my bedroom window and says he's going to drop me". She meant it as a clear demonstration of his wondrousness, although I'm sure a few eyebrows were raised in the staff room. These days social services would probably have been called.

He was always great fun, a little outrageous, and very enterprising. At a friend's 12th birthday party, when he arrived to find that there was an enormous surplus of chocolate cake, he had the birthday girl and friends set up a table in the street in front of the house and sell slices to bemused passers-by, who were unable to refuse to purchase 'because it was Becky's special day'.

Michael liked to come out on top and took great pleasure even in small triumphs. When his second wife cornered him into going for a long overdue Dental appointment by sneakily booking him in with me and getting him to take me along, he exacted his revenge by convincing the dentist to let him reupholster the dentist's chair, and to my embarrassment we left with most of the chair under his arm. I still have no idea how he was able to conduct his sales pitch whilst someone was poking around inside his mouth but nonetheless: he departed with a big smile on his face and the knowledge he had once again come out ahead.

His enterprisingness then, was matched with a charm he frequently employed to get people to do the most unlikely things. I, and no doubt many of you, have often found myself in the most random situations; up a ladder, on the other end of some unfeasibly heavy object, going on some ludicrous errand and thinking, HOW has he managed to make me do this? Like the time we were driving to a supplier and he got me to ring them up for directions even though I don't speak Spanish and he knew they didn't speak English. What followed

was excruciating for me, hilarious for him; and somehow we did miraculously find our way there.

When used on somebody else I had endless admiration for his powers of persuasion. On my graduation day I arranged to meet him at the restaurant in Soho where I was a jobbing waitress only to arrive to find him sitting alone at the best table in the house, having convinced my famously tight fisted boss to comp. him a fine lunch (with wine of course). Once arrived at the ceremony someone sitting next to me pointed out 'the loon in the gallery waving a bottle of champagne'. It was, of course, Michael, proudly brandishing the bottle of Moet he had also managed to prise out of my restaurateur boss. I might have cringed slightly at that moment, but I was proud of the way he clapped as loud and as long as he could for all the graduates who, for whatever reason, didn't have family and friends to cheer them on their big day. His final triumphant act on that day came when, having missed his bus from London back to Somerset, he decided to hitchhike and found a cheery lorry driver who took him almost all the way home, beating the bus by 15 minutes.

But what my father enjoyed most was to make an improvement. There was no activity that could not be made more efficient or smoother running with the addition of a little Michael Magic, and his brain was constantly a-whirr with new ideas and schemes. He was endlessly inventive and hated to be idle. Dandelions in your lawn? Here comes a dandelion remover. Windows that open inwards? Have some hinged curtain pelmets. Pedal bin broken? A shower head glued to the lid will render it functional again. Many of his improvements depended heavily on chipboard, foam rubber, and corks, which he always strangely seemed to have a ready supply of, combined with creative flair for recycling whatever was lying around. Your entries are welcome for the catalogue of Michael's unpatented inventions that I am now compiling. The end result, and one that I am sure is keeping him smiling now, is that wherever Michael has been, he has left little reminders, woven into the fabric of our lives, making every day, however unorthodoxly, a little bit better.