

So Uncle Frank I'll talk to you directly, not least as the unanimous view amongst family, friends, priests, Canons and ... Bishops is that you definitely are listening.

One thing you were very clear on - in your *voluminous* instructions - was that we were to celebrate your life and not mourn your death.

And what a life!

You were of course born 99 and half years ago in London – to Tom and Maud eldest of four.

After school you followed your father into working on the railways in 1937 – “a job for life” you described it.

Prior to your calling to the priesthood, there was the time in your life that gave rise to so many of your war stories – quite literally – your service in the Royal Air Force during World War Two.

You joined in 1941. But as your sister Olive, our mother, told us. The Lord was keeping you safe as he had bigger plans for you.

You trained initially in the relative safety of Canada, before moving to a hotspot – by which I mean the RAF base at Nassau in the Bahamas.

Of course we heard your war stories over the years, but only first hand from you. It was with great delight therefore that amongst your papers last week we found your flying log.

You flew for over 1,000 flying hours. Some not uneventful.

Of particular note was a record of a “Night Navigation Exercise” in Feb 1944. The appraising officer Flight Lieutenant Caron wrote in respect of the whole crew.

“this exercise was done in a highly commendable fashion by all concerned.”

He then went on

“However not all equalled the ingenuity and resourcefulness shown by Sgt O’Sullivan. Some of the work done here was so good that, if I never see better, I shall die happy!”

Your mark was 499/500!

And so you passed as a navigator – something really quite prescient given how much guidance you would give to so many in the years that lay ahead.

It wasn't all sun, seaplanes and sonar though. You saw active service on and after D-Day providing air surveillance support, primarily hunting German U-Boats in the Bay of Biscay.

After VE day you moved east getting as far as Sri Lanka (Ceylon) at the time of VJ day. Again you were being kept safe for greater things.

On your demobilisation in 1946, you went back to your "job for life" on the railway. Not for life of course as you were called to the priesthood in 1948.

Starting in Walworth and then after 6 years at the seminary in Womersley you were ordained. I'm delighted to say that here today at St John the Baptist we have Fr Denis Paul – the last surviving member of your Class of 1956.

And so in 1956 you moved to your first parish of Blackheath and there followed various moves around SE London before settling as the first parish priest of the 1,000 acre "Woolwich Erith Marshes Project" aka Thamesmead.

One of your defining achievements was your success increasing the involvement the laity in the church – as so many watching this will attest to. In Thamesmead you certainly started as you meant to carry on. It was you that (quite literally) built, what was recently described to me as, "the alcohol and gambling centre that was the Abbey wood Social Club". Not only did this bring the laity closer to the church in Thamesmead, but as another of your nephews said to me recently "as a kid it gave me my first inkling of what pub life could be like".

This passion for work with the laity manifested itself in many other ways, two of the most notable being your work with the Catholic Children's Society and with Marriage Encounter

In both roles you helped thousands navigate their lives for the better, indeed you rose to the national leadership of Marriage Encounter.

In the process Marriage Encounter brought you and those couples involved a huge amount of personal satisfaction and enrichment and you rose to a national leadership role. You wrote how one international convention was one of your lifetime high points "the weekend that changed my life" you said – only coincidentally in Los Angeles.

This was but one example of your extensive travels in spreading the word of god – when not jet setting, over smaller distances most memorably in your series of Volkswagen Beetles.

Of course your eclectic choice of car was matched only by your *interesting* driving style. One early childhood memory of this was when you apparently seemed to view having even one hand on the steering wheel as an impediment. It stopped you clapping along the music.

Of course you continued with Marriage Encounter for many years but in 1985, and as if you weren't already busy enough, you took up a new "Full time" role as Parish Priest in New Malden where you spent many happy years.

Indeed you were there for two years past your official retirement age of 75 before then moving here to Purley in 1998.

OF course the term "retirement" in your case was something of a misnomer as you became busier than every with your meetings, your study groups and also as a governor of Laleham Lea.

All that before you "helped out" until very recently with four masses a week here at St John the Baptist as well as another at the John Fisher Chapel

To those of us that know you this was of course no surprise, but to others you were a source of wonderment and admiration. I remember last year several doctors at Croydon University Hospital at least half and in some cases a third of your age commenting that you were busier than they were. They had no idea how you did it.

And then finally to your last home, at Sunrise here in Purley. Again you bowled them over with your energy and enthusiasm despite several of us warning them that "you have no idea about the 98-year-old whirlwind that is about to hit you". It's no exaggeration to say you absolutely loved it there – as they did you.

We are all as sad as you that you didn't quite get your telegram from the Queen – and more than one of your fellow priests has remarked that a certain someone will have been given a talking to on that front.

One of your most notable writings was on Creationism and entitled Beyond the Big bang and so with a minor stretch of the metaphor, I think your only other disappointment today, along with ours, is that we can't toast your life afterwards with some of the food and drink you so enjoyed – to go out with

your own big bang. You will fear not still be able to tick this off your list of instructions as we will be arranging a further celebration when times allow. You asked me to print 350 orders of service for today and I think we may even need more.

Over the years you been the recipient of any number of well-deserved compliments and epithets. Energetic, visionary, inspirational, “a Legend”, never mind 499, you’re 500/500. However just last month in St Helier Hospital I heard a new one from the hospital chaplain Fr Philip. He described how he had heard of you long before he first met you because you were a “celebrity”. So Uncle Frank it’s time to get you out of here and let you navigate your own way on the very short trip to Heaven.

Although small in stature, you are big in heart and HUGE in impact, when you’ve finished giving him your ticking off over that hundredth birthday matter, everyone here will join me in saying, God Bless you Uncle Frank.