

**John Philip McCormack's
80th birthday**

Many Happy Returns

Born 13th January 1938

John Philip McCormack's 80th birthday

- Dearly beloved, we are gathered here today to celebrate an immense achievement; that of reaching octogenarianhood, or octogenarianism. You may not know this, but currently there are over half a million people aged 90 and over living in the UK, so we'll all get together again in ten years' time.
- The **first hymn** is one which was sung regularly at my alma mater, Kingswood School in Bath: founded by John Wesley for the sons of his itinerant preachers. The last time I sang it was 60-something years ago. Please don't take the words literally! Visualise if you will, a long stark cold Dickensian dormitory with 15 beds on each side radiating out from the walls. A boy who had a birthday, was firstly lashed with wet towels and then further humiliated, as the other boys gathered around his bed and sang:-

The Birthday Song

Why was he born so beautiful?

Why was he born at all?

He's no bloody use to anyone

He's no bloody use at all.

(It has nothing to do with anyone here, it's just that when I was asked to say a few words – I don't do 'a few' – it was further suggested that I sing them. Er, 'No'.)

- For my **sermon**, I take as my text some paraphrased words from the books of the Old Testament of The Bible
 Genesis c25/v25 ‘...and the first came out red. All over like a hairy garment...’
 Genesis c27/v11 ‘And Father said unto them, “What manner of man was he, which came out to meet you?” They answered, “He was an hairy man.”’
 Kings c2/v7&8 ‘And Barbi said to her mother, “Behold John Philip, my brother is an hairy man, and I am a smooth man.”’

- **1938 was not a very good year to remember**

Menacing clouds hung over Europe - the first public air-raid shelter was built beneath Caxton Hall in London - and gas-masks were distributed - the Bren gun was invented in Czechoslovakia - and plastic US infantrymen came onto the market! Incidentally, some of you may be interested to know that the breathalyser was first introduced in 1938.

And just when they thought things couldn't get worse, on this very day 80 years ago, Marian and John McCormack - of Bebington on the north eastern shore of the Wirral peninsular, in Cheshire - delivered a boy-child onto the world stage, named John Philip (JP) - This was both confusing as John was his father's name - and because his horoscope foretold of his eventual marriage to Ann - also a JP.

As I look at little Izzy and at John Philip, I am reminded of the sagacity of the late Peter Sellers, who once famously remarked. ***“You may not know this, but some of our greatest men started life as children.”*** Sadly, in John Philip's case, this was not to be. But he did achieve the stone, the paper, and the scissors. (*Think about it*)

As a Capricorn, so I'm told, JP is tough, self-disciplined, consistent, resourceful, self-reliant, a methodical planner, who makes to sound financial investments, and eschews extravagance. He will make supreme sacrifices on behalf of his family. And even when things are going well, he still keeps his fingers crossed, and prepares for the worst. Pleasure is the satisfaction of knowing that he is doing his duty, and making full use of his practical abilities.

- Philip and I met some 30 years ago, via our wives Ann and Sue, who worked together at The College. Philip had his office in Two Rivers and we would have the occasional pub lunch together. Later that developed into the regular foursomes we came to enjoy.

We stayed with them at Bournemouth many times, in both apartments. The annual May Music Festival at St Stephen's church became a must, fish and chips, and a walk along the pier!

Philip and Ann stayed with us 15 times in Portugal. Sue and Ann spent the time gossiping. I was always ready with a long list of jobs waiting for Philip to tackle - weeding, strimming, logging, painting, varnishing, making flagpoles, and mending that which was broken ...

The four of us have assumed the habit of taking an annual trip away together, visiting the Brecon Beacons, Canterbury, Cumbria, The Lake District, North Wales, the Yorkshire Dales ...

And day-trips, usually following me singing, like Peterborough, Salisbury, Tewksbury, St George's Windsor ...

We just enjoy being together as **friends**. Not **acquaintances** – those you can relax with and be yourselves, say what you like, do what you like - it's not going anywhere.

- And yet Philip and I have nothing in common, but like opposite poles, we attract.

He is 80	I am not
He is hairy	I am not
He is practical	I am cerebral
He likes to be 'doing'	I like lying in the sun – thinking
He likes a project	I prefer 'poddling'
He has infinite patience	I have none

He's an outdoor gardener	I am an indoor gardener
He shops at Waitrose	I shop at Sainsbury's
He likes meat	I like fish
Actually, he likes burning meat (BBQing)	I don't (It is NOT a man thing)
He just likes eating	I can't be bothered
He likes Scotch	I like gin
He reads the lesson in church	I lead the intercessions
He likes cruises	I don't fancy it one bit
... and so it goes on	

So what **do** we have in common? Well ...

We're both male, married, have children and grandchildren
 We're both the same age in the same year
 We both have adoring attractive wives, who are mothers and grandmothers,
 and whom we love dearly
 We like taking them shopping, and eating out, or staying in and 'flopping'
 We both have extended families of children and grandchildren, which we
 adore, and would do anything for
 We're both looking forward to another grandchild in a few months' time
 We both like strong coffee (with grunt!)
 We're both member of the Institute of Advanced Motorists
 We both understand that each day is a special occasion, so celebrate it,
 don't waste it
 We know we're there for each other

- So Philip, 'Thank you' for your continuing friendship. Where shall we go this year, for our annual get-away?? Northumberland??

- I should just like to close, with two quotations.

The first again from The Good Book, Acts c29 v35

“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

So Philip and Ann, you are truly and rightly blessed, as you have given us all this wonderful experience, which we will all remember until we meet again at Philip’s 90th.

And from the Casa da Musica Visitors’ Book, dated October 2003, written by Philip, or maybe it was Ann – no matter

“Your family is delightful, you all deserve each other.”

Philip, on behalf of we hangers-on, I can say without hesitation, the same to you.

“Your family is delightful, you all deserve each other.”

And ***“Thank you”*** for including us in your Big Birthday Bash.

Happy Birthday Dear Friend!

LE MANOIR AUX QUAT'SAISONS
Great Milton, Oxfordshire

Saturday 13th January 2018

