

Stephen Windsor Leslie was born on the 21<sup>st</sup> of April, nineteen hundred and fourty seven, at 61, The Drive, Hove, to Lou and Celia Leslie. In the late 1800s, Stephen's forbears had come to this country from Lomza, now in Poland. The family name had been Shevitzta but Leslie was chosen I suspect because it sounded more English.

But where did Windsor come from? I often teased Stephen about it. Was it perhaps I wondered by way of future homage to Windsor Davies, the moustachio'd star of "Confessions of a Driving Instructor" and "It aint arf hot mum"? Or a nod towards Barbara Windsor who was yet to star in so many Carry On films? Or even to the Mountbatten Windsors themselves? He never gave me a definitive answer.

Stephen was Lou and Celia's only child and evidently the apple of their eyes. You can tell that from a photograph of Stephen, aged 3 or 4, standing with his father at the front of their jewellery shop in the Lanes in Brighton. Proud father. Shy son. Well, for a while.

Stephen went to school at Brighton College where he ran for the County and boxed as a Featherweight, unbeaten in 79 bouts. His home was not an especially religious one. Faith had been dented by the holocaust but Stephen had a very grand Bar Mitzvah by

the standards of the day. He received religious education from a man who came down from London who Stephen said read out articles from the Jewish Chronicle before submitting his fee note.

After leaving school, Stephen travelled round America on a Greyhound bus for 3 months before embarking on a law degree at King's College, London. He worked as a bus conductor in Brighton and London to help make ends meet. After Bar exams, he was called to the Bar by Lincoln's Inn in 1971, 55 years ago to this very day, and was the recipient of a Thomas More Bursary.

I am grateful to the archivist at Lincoln's Inn who confirmed that Stephen was pupil first to John Bolland at the chambers in Temple Gardens of Edward Cussen, Senior Treasury Counsel and a prosecutor at Nuremberg, and then to Freddie Beezley in Stephen Brown's chambers. Both Stephen's pupil masters went on to become Circuit Judges. I do just remember them from when I started out.

After completing pupillage, Stephen joined James Rant's chambers in Temple Gardens – one above John Coffey on the door but the signwriter's paint can hardly have dried before Stephen moved to the chambers of Leonard Lewis QC at 4 King's Bench Walk. Then to the chambers of Billy Rees-Davies QC at 5 Paper Buildings.

Those chambers removed as it used to be put to 1 Crown Office Row where Dick Ferguson was to become head of chambers and it was there that Stephen really made his name.

I first encountered Stephen - you didn't meet Stephen, you encountered or experienced him- towards the end of 1981. He had been a barrister for ten years and I had not long been called. He was enormously kind to me then and that was inevitably his way for the next 44 years until his death.

Stephen was defending a man called Eddie Blundell, one of a number of defendants charged with various offences arising out of what the press called "the Ice cream wars", a series of battles fought to secure the most lucrative pitches for ice cream vans outside London's museums. The trial was at the Old Bailey and I was there as a pupil, tacked on to the far end of the prosecution team which was led by Neil Denison QC.

During the course of the trial, there was a transport strike of some kind and I found myself standing in a long queue in Fleet Street in the hope that a bus would come, but with no chance of getting on it if it ever did. I do not think that I had exchanged a word with Stephen thus far but as he drove along Fleet Street, he saw my predicament and blubbed his horn. That does not quite do it justice.

Being Stephen, he lent on his horn continuously from about 100 yards out. And then being Stephen, he went out of his way to take me wherever I needed to go and we became friends for ever after.

In court, Stephen was an exponent of what Sir Adrian Fulford described as an eccentric form of advocacy which is very rarely seen nowadays. There was a highly performative element to it. The effect upon judges and prosecutors was akin to the effect that Clouseau in the Pink Panther films had upon Chief Inspector Dreyfus. Ordinarily calm and relaxed individuals would develop nervous tics and neurological disorders. Matron was sent for on a regular basis. Even Neil Denison, famously unflappable, was not immune.

Stephen presented as a mixture of Mr Toad, the White Rabbit from Alice, and Serjeant Buzzfuz from the Pickwick Papers. With his junior's gown down by the middle of his back, his wig pointing anywhere but due North, and taking a large number of small but extremely rapid steps, he ran on nervous energy. And he consumed a lot of it. The White Rabbit appears at the very start of Alice, wearing a waistcoat of course, and muttering, 'Oh dear, oh dear, I shall be late.' Stephen was not in the habit of being late but he was only on time because he was always in such a hurry.

He was quite literally in a state of perpetual motion. And that was not the only scientific theory that he embodied.

For many years, Stephen operated his very own version of chaos theory – you know the phenomenon by which it is said that the flutter of a butterfly's wings in one location can cause a tornado somewhere else. Stephen would drop his papers everywhere in Court number 1 at the Old Bailey, knock over a jug of water in the process, and a few days later his client would be acquitted: on the face of it, entirely unconnected events. In fact, the trick was to create the impression that a case was somehow suffused from top to bottom with a kind of benign chaos which could then run away with itself and contribute to an acquittal for his client in the resulting fog and confusion. Stephen was one of life's natural defenders and he would profess himself bewildered and completely unable to comprehend the allegations made against his clients. That impression was of course entirely contrived. He understood everything and a bit more besides.

Out of court, insights would be shared with juniors and instructing solicitors as and when they occurred to him, usually late at night. In court, whatever was in Stephen's head would be shared with the jury in a stream of consciousness worthy of James Joyce or

Virginia Woolf at their finest. In his obituary in the Times, it was said that one particular cross examination of Stephen's was lauded for its sensitivity and technical acumen. It did not say who had made that assessment and I did wonder if it was perhaps Stephen's mother or even Stephen himself. I was not present for that particular cross examination and I think I would have remembered it if I had been. But I was present for many others. He would explain that he was going to pass over several pages of his notes, telling the jury that he could not read what he had written. If he did not think that a particular line of cross-examination was going well, he would share that assessment with the jury and explain that he would now try something else. I remember how in one charities fraud, he would regularly pause whilst he engaged in a spirited and largely audible dispute with his junior, Oscar del Fabbro, about Stephen's decision to pursue particular lines of cross examination. So far as I could see from what ensued, Oscar was invariably right.

His telephone would go off more than most people's in court. I remember an occasion when it went off at the Old Bailey. Being Stephen, the phone did not just go ring ring. The ring tone was the opening bars of Beethoven's fifth symphony on repeat. If that were

not drama enough, the added element was that the phone was in a recently purchased briefcase with a combination lock and Stephen could not remember the numbers. Neil Denison, by this time the Common Serjeant of London, contented himself with saying “Mr Leslie, if you are going to take that call, please would you leave the courtroom to do so.” Thus neatly conveying to the jury the possibility that but for his intervention, Stephen might well have conducted the call from Counsel’s row.

Clients were not unaffected. Oliver Blunt tells how on one occasion, the category A staff at a London prison uncovered correspondence from a prisoner who Stephen had briefly represented at a preliminary hearing. Perhaps not long enough for the prisoner to recall his name accurately but long enough it would seem for Stephen to have had an effect. The prisoner was looking to put out a contract on someone who he thought was called Leslie Stephens.

In truth, Stephen was extremely shrewd and immensely hard-working. No-one in court was ever better prepared than him or more acutely conscious of exactly the impression he was creating. Jurors eagerly awaited his turn. He developed a very substantial junior practice. He was in the Playland cases in the 1970s which

arose out of the abuse of young boys in and around arcades at Piccadilly Circus. He defended John Goodwin in 1982 in a case which became part of the Operation Countryman investigation into police corruption. There was a famous recording of alleged misconduct which had been made from a bug planted in a Christmas tree and which Stephen was able to deploy.

He took Silk in 1993. He had put his toe into the water of Bar politics by this time and had earned the support of Robert Seabrook QC, Leader of the South Eastern circuit, and David Cocks QC who had been chair of the Criminal Bar Association.

Away from work, he had married Bridget in 1973 and they had 2 daughters, Lara and Ophelia. He married Amrit in 1989 and along came Theodore. Stephen was a regular attender at Ascot, an enthusiastic member of the Carlton Club, the MCC , the Feltmakers Livery Company and his dining club, the Thunderers. He was extremely generous and entertained often at these institutions, and at his house in Spain where he would disappear with his juniors to undertake eyewatering amounts of case preparation. He continued his involvement in Bar politics and was elected as Leader of the South Eastern Circuit in 2009 where he

did a very good job indeed. He was a very active Bencher of this Inn after his election in 2001.

But something changed in recent years which I put down amongst other things to the influence of his beloved Melissa who had a calming effect. He joined the Catholic church in 2017 and they married in the same year after 12 years or so together. And the barrister's perpetual anxiety about where the next case might come from diminished when he joined the Public Defender Service in 2014. He was so happy there and turned out to have a real talent for looking after his team as so many of his colleagues there have said.

But there was a change in him and after Stephen's death, Melissa showed me the introduction Stephen had written to what might have been his memoirs if he had lived long enough and which she is going to read from later on. Like all of us, he had knocked over a few glasses of water in his time, literally and metaphorically, and most advocates will divide their audience on occasions. Stephen knew that, and in the introduction a very reflective Stephen is thankful for the time to look back on his life and for the opportunity to right wrongs, and to make up for times when the

right thing had not always happened. I found it intensely moving to read, full of insight that only the passage of time can provide.

So an ever so slightly less frenetic Stephen perhaps in recent years but what remained?

He was always the most fun to be with, the best of companions, quick to laugh, an immensely loyal friend, he loved his family, he was the proudest husband, father and grandfather, so proud of his children, and he loved his many friends and was loved by us in return. He embraced the Leslie tartan and Melissa arranged his seventy fifth birthday celebration at Leslie Castle, the seat of Clan Leslie in Aberdeenshire. Of course, so colourful a character had his critics but anyone who did not get Stephen was well advised to loosen up a little. He was a very remarkable person who I am proud to call my friend.

We did not of course get the chance to say everything to him that we might have wished. But another consequence of the way things turned out in Mauritius is that we will never see Stephen in our mind's eye diminished by the years or limited by ill health and I am glad for that. We will always think of him unbowed by time, clear of mind, resolute in purpose, even unto that point when, as the prayer has it, the shadows lengthen and the evening comes

and our busy world is hushed, the fever of life is over and our work is done.

And what then? At Stephen's funeral, Theodore invited us to picture the scene at the Pearly Gates. There is no doubt a queue as names are checked and everyone waits patiently. Well, nearly everyone. Suddenly, there is a commotion as a figure goes straight to the front of the queue, waving some papers to get St Peter's attention. Do you know who I am says the figure? I'm Stephen Leslie, one of His Majesty's Counsel.

Stephen's arrival up there will of course have been eagerly awaited by those who knew him and those who have heard tell of him. In my own mind's eye, another figure steps forward. He has white hair and is stroking a cat. It is Ernst Stavro Blofeld, now in heaven after many years in purgatory. He offers his trademark greeting. "Ah, Mr Leslie" he says, "We have been expecting you."

He was truly a wonderful man. I am so grateful for this opportunity to say so. He brightened all our days. May he rest in peace and light perpetual shine upon him.

Nicholas Hilliard. February 9, 2026.