



Brian Hills

October 17, 1924 - May 8, 2020

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Brian Hills passed away at 3:05 am in the morning on Friday, May 8, very peacefully, at home, holding the hand of his wife Margaret. This was just the way he'd always hoped to make his exit. He was 95 and, because everyone wonders, we should note that he did not die of Covid19.

Brian was born in London in 1924. It's hard to imagine how long ago that is. World War I had been over for only six years. George V was on the throne. The Great Depression was five years off in the future. He was an only child and his mother Edith--a tiny, outgoing woman--contracted tuberculosis when Brian was just a toddler and died when he was four. He had no memory of her, but he talked about her throughout his life. After a few years, his father Frederick, a mathematics teacher, remarried. Brian was a quiet, academic child but he loved movies and dreamed of becoming an actor or a film director.

Brian was fourteen when World War II broke out and he finished school by sixteen. He was encouraged (or perhaps he had no choice) to enroll in an engineering program at Imperial College and had to finish it as fast as possible so that he could work as an engineer in support of the war effort. He remained an engineer and inventor throughout his life, and he proved to be a brilliant one. He lived in London through the Blitz and was once sitting at breakfast when a bomb dropped on a block of flats just two buildings away from theirs.

In 1947, Brian's father and stepmother Kathleen owned a television set--a very rare luxury at the time. Kathleen worked as the bursar at the Royal Ballet School and, when a ballet was to be shown on television, she decided to invite a young dancer and teacher at the school to come to their flat to watch. That dancer, Margaret, was amazed at the television and delighted by the ballet, but she was mostly struck by Kathleen's stepson, Brian, who was visiting. She wrote to her mother that day to tell her that she had met the man she would marry. Which (four years later) she did. He proposed in a long letter when she was

in Ankara helping to found the Turkish National Ballet and he was in Canada working in telecommunications. She replied by telegram and then went out and bought herself an engagement ring.

Brian and Margaret had a long (68 year) and happy marriage. They moved to the village of Knockholt in Kent and had three children: Sarah, Amanda, and Julian. Brian founded his own firm, Saltire, making home electrical appliances, but a massive flood that damaged the factory brought an end to that enterprise. On a whim he applied for a job with Mattel Toys in the U.S., and was hired. The family moved to Los Angeles for a year to see how things went, and then a year became two, and then three, and they never did move back to the UK. Brian, as a designer, loved to find solutions to mechanical and technical problems, but he also loved architecture, history and design. Coincidentally (or not) his children became an architect (Sarah), an ancient historian (Amanda), and a creative director of entertainment advertising (Julian).

Brian had been involved in community theater since college, and he continued to act and direct for many years in California. When one of his grandsons became a professional actor, they would talk together about the stage, and Brian's face lit up as he described the productions he had worked on.

He did much more besides over the course of his long life. He made a television from scratch in 1948. He designed a space heater that was in use all over England in the 60s. He wrote a novel (sadly unpublished) that predicted the internet. He made films. He developed and printed photographs, and taught Julian to do the same when he was ten. He could machine anything on his lathe. He would make you a scotch and soda at 11:00 a.m. whether you wanted one or not. He came up with the name "Tangled" for a certain Disney movie about Rapunzel that Julian was trying to re-title. He cleaned his own swimming pool until two years ago, despite not being able to swim. He loved typography. He could discuss cinema more engagingly than any director's commentary. He would roll around on the floor with any kids that happened to be around. He brought out the best in everyone he met. And all this is just scratching the surface. You should have known him.

He is survived by his wife Margaret, their children Sarah Susanka, Amanda Hills Podany, and Julian Hills, grandchildren Emily and Nicholas Podany, Grey Babcock, Simone, Fiona, and Sebastian Hills, and a great-granddaughter.

Family and friends of Brian are invited to share their favorite photos, video memories and heart felt messages on his Tribute page on the Green Hills Mortuary Website.