



THE BUSINESS OF FAMILY

WORKING WITH FAMILY ISN'T ALWAYS EASY, BUT IT IS WORTH IT.

WORDS BY **LOWRI LLEWELYN**

The Peninsula boasts some of the world's most arresting views, so it stands to reason you'd need the best windows from which to admire them. It was here that Barrie Grayson, founder of Peninsula Windows, decided to raise his family. But he wasn't always a window man. Moving over from Rochdale in 1969, Barrie came to Wales with his wife Joan to manage Abersoch Boatyard.

Having bought shares in the Boatyard together, Joan joined him as office manager. His daughter Jan explains it evolved into a bit of a family enterprise - for better or worse!

'Grandad was a bit of a character who pretty much always wore a bow tie when he wasn't wearing overalls, and sometimes when he was. In the early days, he used to work in the workshop at the Boatyard to keep him out of mischief, but I think he drove Dad to distraction. He was such a perfectionist and had to do things his own way - I think more often than not he would cost the Boatyard money, so Dad was quite glad to sideline him to school runs when my brother Ken and I started going to "play school" and then school in Llanbedrog.'

'My Dad has always been a hard worker,' she says of Barrie. 'As



PHOTO: BARRIE - 3 PEAKS YACHT RACE JUNE 1981



PHOTO: THE ANGLESEY SHOWROOM

young children, Ken and I didn't see much of him. He worked long hours, and then stayed on late at the Boatyard building his own boat, which was eventually named "Midnight", as he'd worked on it most nights until then! We had many family holidays on that boat, despite the fact that Ken suffered quite badly from sea sickness and Mum wasn't (and still isn't!) a keen sailor.'

'It was always a treat going to school in the back of Dad's bumpy Boatyard Land Rover, sat on hard benches in the back with Fred the dog,' Jan recalls. 'Fred was well known around Abersoch and spent many hours fishing in the river. He had been known to wander to and from Mynytho when he got bored, to visit my grandparents, Basil and Nell Grayson. It wasn't unheard of for him to hitch a ride with a friendly bus driver who knew his route!'

In time, the Graysons joined forces with Barrie & Sue McGill to further expand the retail side of the business, opening a second shop called 'Warm & Dry' on the high street in Pwllheli.

The children had been instilled with a strong work ethic, and as they grew older were trusted to help with the business during holidays. 'At the age of 13, I was paid 50p an hour and thought that I was earning a fortune!' It was a role Jan took very seriously indeed. 'I apprehended my first shoplifter aged 14 or 15. I had been keen to make sure that there was one of every size of every item on display, and I knew that a man had taken two pairs of swimming shorts to try on - but only put one pair back. I rushed over to Barrie McGill to get him to stop him before he left the shop. The man denied it, so I grabbed the label and swimming shorts peeping out of the back of his jeans! Barrie made him go and take them off and I was really disappointed not to get the police involved.'

Jan's brother Ken also had a stint of working at the family business, but 'I don't recall it being very successful,' says Jan. 'Dad has always been critical of Ken; he soon jumped ship and found work at the "Twnti" in Rhyd y Clafdy, and was much

happier behind a bar than under the watchful eye of Dad.'

Although Barrie was a passionate sailor and loved the marine industry, the seasonality of the business made it a challenge to support both the Grayson and McGill families. Having received a flyer from a uPVC manufacturer looking for someone to sell and manufacture windows in the North Wales area, Barrie rented a factory unit behind what is now Pwllheli marina and in 1984 founded Peninsula Windows.

As the business established an enviable reputation for the quality of its products and craftsmanship, it outgrew the small unit and they expanded to Anglesey, where for logistical reasons the showroom is now based.

By the time Ken and Jan went off to university, Peninsula was a thriving business and their parents had earned a well deserved break. Taking two years to sail all over the world, including crossing the Atlantic, 'All Mum was responsible for was zipping and unzipping the boom cover and preparing sundowners,' says Jan. 'Even after all the years she's spent on the water, she hasn't got a clue how to sail. She still maintains that the best bits are stopping in beautiful spots and drinking G&Ts in the sunshine.'

Despite the success of the business, the family seemed to have gone their separate ways. 'I don't think Ken ever really expected to work for the family business as he and Dad had never particularly seen eye to eye.' However, a change of heart regarding career choice prompted Ken to return to Wales, joining the business in 1999.

LOCAL PROFILE



PHOTO: A STUNNING INSTALLATION IN ABERSOCH OVERLOOKING THE BAY



PHOTO: KEN AND BARRIE GRAYSON AT THE RECENT LAUNCH OF "THE ATRIVWM" AT FRON GOCH GARDEN CENTRE NEAR CAERNARFON

'He literally started from the bottom, digging conservatory foundations. Knowing dad, I'm sure Ken had to work twice as hard as anyone else to prove himself.' Slowly, he progressed to the fitting team and then learnt how to design and specify conservatories.

Ken, however, had ideas of his own for the business. Convinced that shows such as Grand Designs had broadened clients' imaginations, he was keen to expand - which didn't go down well. 'Dad is a very dominant character and likes to do things his own way; he was reluctant to move the business into new areas, so there have been a few battles along the way.'

'I felt a bit protective of Ken, even though he's my older brother,' she continues. 'I used to try my best to keep him from getting into trouble - he was a bit of a rascal in his teenage years, so that's probably where it all started.'

Barrie himself admits that he could be difficult to work with. 'I knew it was time to step aside when I felt like I was constantly criticising him,' says Barrie. 'It wasn't good for our relationship, or the business.'

He relinquished the reins to his son, and with the same self belief Barrie displayed when expanding the Boatyard all those years earlier, Ken took Peninsula Windows to new heights. Today, they offer homeowners the latest products and cutting-edge ideas for extensions, conservatories and home improvements. 'Ken's vision for exploring new products along with dad's background in running a successful business proved to be a good combination,' says Jan.

It looked like Jan herself, however, would never return to Wales. It was her brother who persuaded her otherwise. 'Ken asked if I would be interested in becoming involved in Peninsula, and since tentatively joining the business back in January, I've loved

every minute of it.' Taking the role of finance director, Jan has picked up many of the areas her father was previously responsible for. Realising very early on that she and Ken complemented each other from a work perspective, she says, 'It's brought us a lot closer together.'

In fact, the whole family is very close. 'We all get on like a house on fire - we always have, really. Mum just wanted us to be happy, whatever we did, but with Dad being more driven himself, he expected more from us. He's definitely proud of Ken and the direction he's taken Peninsula in.'

So, what does the future hold for the family business? Will another generation be joining the team? 'Ken now has three sons. It will be interesting to see if they pick up the mantle.'

For now, though, brother and sister have things running ship shape - though they still laugh about Jan being able to do no wrong and Ken being able to do no right. 'If the company does well from now on, I'm sure I'll get all the credit!'

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