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This & That
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Ranulph Fiennes – Sounding the Alarm Bell

Backdrop

Since 2024 Ranulph Fiennes continues to live a strange and disquieting existence. Power of attorney was given to his wife, Louise Millington-Cotes that year, after his diagnosis with Parkinson's Disease five years earlier. Friends are unable to visit, nor his stepson, a great admirer. All contact is barred. Ranulph is a recluse, reluctantly or by choice. Whilst police deem him to be safe, deprivation of liberty is a thorny and unsettling issue. So is lack of quality of life that is manifestly evident.

A Brief Biography

The exploration and endurance record of Ranulph Fiennes is phenomenal. Leader of over 20 major expeditions, the Guiness Book of Records contends he is "the world's greatest living explorer." That takes some doing.

The Transglobe Expedition, 1979 to 1982 , was the first successful circumnavigation in traversing both Poles using only surface transportation. In 1993 he spent 93 days crossing the Antarctica ice wilderness – without GPS, sat phone or satnav. There are many more highlights in an extraordinary life that reads like an adventure story

In 2003 Ranulph completed seven marathons in seven days on seven continents. The next year, when Ranulph was 60, tragedy struck. He lost his childhood sweetheart, wife of 34 years, explorer and base leader "Ginny" to cancer. One year later in 2005 he remarried. His wife, a horse trainer and equestrian, is 23 years younger.

On 20 May 2009 in raising funds for Marie Curie, Ranulph reached the summit of Mount Everest, the oldest British person to do so. An author of 26 books, titles include *The Feather Men* (1991) which became a film and a biography of Captain Robert Falcon Scott, detailed in *My Heroes* (2011).

He was born in the UK, months after his father, a Lieutenant Colonel, died in 1943 when he trod on a German anti-personnel mine at Monte Cassino. He inherited his father's Baronetcy and was raised in South Africa. Ranulph returned to England and was educated at Sandroyd Prep School, Tollard Royal in Wiltshire, and Eton College.

After failing A Levels, Ranulph joined the Royal Scots Greys, a tank division, during the Cold War and later the Special Air Service (1965/66), becoming the youngest Captain in the British Army.

He has received several honorary degrees and numerous awards, among them the Sultans Bravery Medal from HM the Queen, and Officer of the Order of the British Empire (1993). He received the Polar Medal (1986) for outstanding service to British Polar exploration and

research and, in 1994, was awarded a second clasp, the only person to receive this great honour. He received a Founder's Medal from the Royal Geographical Society and has Honorary Doctorates from several universities.

By any measure, his achievements are remarkable testimony to his attributes of resilience, pursuit of arduous activities, being unflinching in facing adversity, a belief in the seemingly impossible and not least his modesty.

Rather than Sir, he wished to be called "Ran." Looming ahead was the biggest challenge of his entire life – retirement. Ranulph planned "to put it off as long as possible."

In 2019, he was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease. A long career of leading expeditions, writing and public speaking engagements abruptly ended in October 2024 when Ranulph retreated from public life. This was the same year that his wife was given power of attorney for not only his personal finances but health and well-being.

Nagging away is the build-up to this, his mental state in losing his first wife in distressing circumstances and physical disabilities in contracting Parkinson's Disease, a debilitating and progressive condition. At stake is quality of life since, cocooned at home in Shropshire and out of contact with friends and family.

For such an outgoing, engaging and active man is this really what he wanted and wants today? Only an investigation by authorities can uncover the truth. Time is not on his side as the saga drags on. Answers are needed and quickly – and action.

Questions to be Answered

Most disturbing is that Ranulph has been placed in different care homes, on each occasion under an assumed name. A rigid non-disclosure order has been imposed by his wife.

His wife has also brought in 'unverified medical equipment' and 'unorthodox medications.' What on earth is going on and why? A member of staff in one care home said, "whenever I sat with him he talked about his first wife."

The Telegraph newspaper revealed that desperate friends and his family have contacted authorities on at least 29 occasions. The Office of Public Guardian, the legal official watchdog, has dismissed or refused to investigate their case nine times, citing a lack of jurisdiction or strict confidentiality policies.

A detached observer may form the view that he continues to be grief-stricken at the loss of Ginny and powerless to lead a semblance of his former life, such as giving presentations of his exploits. Before retreating from public view, he spoke about his condition and that he suffered from sudden and severe spells of dizziness.

Family and friends have made numerous attempts to contact Ranulph, without success. Care Inspectorate Wales concluded that he was being "unlawfully deprived of his liberty," not least the unlawful imposition of non-disclosure orders and a ban on visitors. Close friends and even King Charles have had attempts to communicate thwarted and their cards returned to them.

Ranulph's sister-in-law managed to track him down and sneak into a home. "The relief on his face was very obvious" when she told him friends were looking for him. Ranulph told her he was "longing to see them."

At his secluded farmhouse in Shropshire, The Times reported seeing footage of his moving around the property using a walking frame. Two modular units have been installed on the driveway, one apparently for Ranulph and the other for his carer.

Assessing Quality of Life

Whilst police have stepped back from any criminal intervention, an intense civil battle is underway to retrieve and restore his quality of life, human rights and dignity. His stepson, Alex Millington-Cotes, has split from his mother and launched a public crowdfunding campaign to bring a case to the Court of Protection.

The legal aim is to strip his wife of her powers of attorney and place it in the hands of independent trustees and family members who have his best interests at heart. They argue that quality of life for a man with advanced Parkinsons' Disease cannot exist whilst he is blocked at every turn from seeing loved ones. The intention is to use the courts to end his total isolation.

Motives for Isolation

It seems extraordinary that Ranulph was moved from care home to care home under an alias so nobody would know his identity and for his wife to impose her own non-disclosure conditions. Add to that bringing in 'unorthodox medical equipment' and unverified medications without oversight of registered local GPs.

The impression is a desire by his wife to control his Parkinson's Disease personally as if mistrusting the medical profession. Nudging this up the scale of deeper motives, might there be a pathological and obsessive almost siege mentality by convincing herself that outside family, old friends and even the King are a threat in some way?

A third crucial element is erasing the past. Care staff revealed that Ranulph talked almost exclusively about his first wife, Ginny. For his second wife to witness an ailing husband slip back to the past is likely to trigger intense psychological friction. This might explain the attempt to sever all connections as if to erase the past totally.

In Conclusion

The jury is out in trying to determine whether Ranulph Fiennes is being deprived of his liberty, unable to exert any control over his own life. Powers of attorney for his finances and health & well-being and measures taken by his wife to bar any contact have led to intense speculation. Only the Court of Protection, assisted by lawyers, can determine the facts and whether there is a case to answer.

Concerns from friends and family are sufficient to sound the alarm. It remains to be seen whether we have a partial rather than full picture that relies on glimpses and snippets. We can only speculate how Ranulph spends each day, mostly devoid of company, apart from contact with carers. The debilitating effects of Parkinson's Disease are one thing. Virtual isolation is quite another. Residents in care settings can quickly become institutionalised. Whilst Police deem Ranulph to be safe, quality of life appears minimal.

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