

Graham Jones
An appreciation offered at his funeral

In Graham's end-of-school reference his headmaster wrote, "*He is a boy whose intelligence and personal qualities will take him a very long way*", but not even the prescient Dr. Saffell could have foreseen how far, in terms of achievement or mileage, his "*lad of most attractive disposition*," would go. I hope that what I am about to share with you will do him justice.

When confronted with the task I am now undertaking, a certain degree of doubt creeps into your mind. Did I know him all that well? Am I really the right one to be offering this appreciation? Surely, there are others who could tell us far more than I.

So at the outset let me confess that I have been given help in the form of information and encouragement from a number of people, whose names I will mention as I go along. John (Tucker) Thomas commented that Graham must be the first man ever to have had a eulogy composed by a committee, because five of us sat together and shared our thoughts about our friend. Then, of course, Graham himself provided valuable material in a cleverly-written autobiographical note for the Grammar School website. All this, and so much more has contributed to what I have to offer.

Graham and I were pupils at Ebbw Vale County School (the word 'Grammar' was added during our time there) from 1946 to 1952, though we only became friends in the Sixth Form, and after those two years we went our separate ways, with meetings becoming increasingly infrequent until the last twenty-odd years when reunions brought us together on a regular basis. In spite of the long breaks I believe that our relationship exemplified that description of a true friend as, "someone you may not see for long periods of time, but when you do, you carry on where you left off". My outstanding school memory is the time when Graham (Head Boy) and I (his deputy) starred in the Christmas pantomime as, (what else?) the ugly sisters. We shared the same sense of humour, for better or worse!

In addition to academic prowess, Graham was a fine sportsman, he played rugby and cricket for the school and had the distinction of winning the Mile race in the annual school sports twice. He played cricket into his sixties and maintained a keen interest in club and international rugby to the last.

He was born to Irene and Oswald Jones in Victoria Ebbw Vale on March 4th 1934. Cousin Jean Hosking remembers his birth and the thrill of Saturday mornings when she and her friend Veronica were allowed to take him out in his 'pram'. Jean and Graham have remained close over the years, she described him as, "more like a brother than a cousin", and we know how deeply she must feel the loss of a dear and constant friend.

Times were hard in these parts in the 1930s, and the family moved to London where Oswald found employment, but the opening of the new steelworks in Ebbw Vale (known to the locals as RTBs) offered the opportunity to return

home, and in 1940 they settled into what was to be the family home in Tothill Street. There Graham grew up, making friends with fellow pupils at Willoughton School, and playing games of cricket in the street; with his beloved dog Sandy doing the fielding.

Like the rest of his generation Graham grew up during the Second World War and, looking back, he remembered with gratitude that we were protected from many of the harsh realities of those years despite the hardships of life in Ebbw Vale.

In 1946 he entered EVCS, not only coming First on the list for that school but actually topping five hundred '11+' candidates in the whole of Monmouthshire. He described the next six years as, "the happiest of my life", little wonder then that so many of the friends he made in that time are here today, as one put it, "Graham had friends, not ex-friends".

We really got to know each other in the two years of A Level studies, and there the bonds of friendship were firmly forged, we played together for the school and against each other in House matches. Graham was a fast, powerful, and very determined centre-three-quarter; I managed to stop him once, me a trundling hooker. What a pity there was so little grass on French's field!

After A levels we went our separate ways; Graham to University College Swansea to study Maths, Physics and Chemistry, graduating with a degree in Chemistry. After university, on National Service, he began his travels and saw some tough action in Cyprus at the time of the EOKA troubles. He said that he spent the time repairing radios and hiding from the terrorists; I suspect that was a slight understatement.

In 1959 Graham invited me to be his Best Man, and I accepted willingly. Chris and Adrian, I therefore share some (indirect) responsibility for your being here at all!

His working life was spent in the new and expanding world of electronics where he specialized in the development of transistors, micro-chips and semi-conductors, first for Marconi, and later for General Electric. We would meet briefly, from time to time, usually through our shared involvement with Methodism and, as I said, would carry on where we left off.

Dr. Saffell was right about Graham 'going far' both in terms of career achievement and in his travels, the list of which reads like the index of an atlas, global indeed, but worthy of special mention was his association with Nepal and Malaysia and their people, especially the children. He adopted a school (or was it the other way round?), visited it often and worked hard to provide supplies of much-needed books and stationery for the pupils, who called him 'Daddy'. Travel was not just about 'going to places' but meeting people, and he made many friends. The lands with mountains drew him with a spiritual force; his experiences in the Himalayas and Kenya were truly inspirational. He described seeing the peak of Mount Everest suddenly

appearing as awesome, the guide led him upwards but told him to keep looking at the track ahead, then signalled him to look up, and there it was. He also told me of an experience in which his long-dead father appeared to him as he lay in a tent near Base Camp below Everest. The mountains reached deep into Graham's soul.

Quite recently we were discussing Graham's visit to Kilimanjaro and we were not sure if he had reached its summit. Adrian told me the full story: on a trek to the summit, which apparently has a saddle with the true summit higher than its partner, one of the party became very ill with altitude sickness, the guide wanted to leave him on the lower summit and take the rest of the party onwards but Graham insisted that he would help his stricken companion to return to lower ground. Having gone all the way to Africa, all the way up the mountain, Graham sacrificed that possibly once-in-a-lifetime chance to help someone. That was the measure of the man.

With his love of the high peaks it came as no surprise to us when, on retirement in 1995, he went to live in North Wales, to be near Snowdonia, where he walked (much to our consternation) well into his 70s, yes even on a Christmas Day) on Tryfan and Cwm Idwal. Margaret Hancock told me that as recently as last spring, Graham has retraced some of the route followed by Derek Brockway (Weather man Walking) on the upper slopes of the Rhondda Valley, a less demanding ascent than Snowdon, but an achievement in his state of health nonetheless.

Graham was a devoted son; he supported and cared for his mother until her death in 2007, making long round-trips between Anglesey and Ebbw Vale to make sure that all her needs were provided for. With her he enjoyed the company of her sister Olive (who is still alive at 102) and her daughter Mary, and with them, in the company of Cousin Jean and her friend Veronica, enjoyed several 'Turkey and Tinsel' holidays at South Coast resorts, acting as escort and chauffeur to his female companions with great charm and good humour.

In 1992, the year of the Garden Festival in Ebbw Vale, Graham had a bright idea, since lots of people would be visiting the town, why not have a Grammar School Reunion at the school, which by that time had become Glan-yr-Afon Junior Comprehensive School? That first reunion was an outstanding success, and the first of many. In 1997 we celebrated the centenary of EVCGS with a canteen lunch of sausages, mash, and baked beans, with sponge pudding and custard for 'afters' (the additional table wine was something we had not enjoyed in our youth). The closure of the building in 1999 was marked with another get-together, subsequent reunions were held at the Comprehensive School, but somehow they lacked 'atmosphere' of the old school. Of more recent years annual reunion lunches have been held at The Bear Hotel in Crickhowell, and it was there in July of this year that some of us saw Graham for the last time.

In fairness it should be stated that if Graham was the inspiration behind the reunions, Anne Morgan put in the spadework.

This occasion must not be allowed to pass without paying tribute to the devotion and care of Margaret Hancock who has been a friend in need and a great source of comfort to Graham. Margaret and Anne visited in North Wales during the two periods of his treatment, the first for coronary surgery, and then for the oesophageal cancer which was eventually to prove fatal. In the last few weeks at the Shire Hall Nursing Home in Cardiff Anne and Margaret, with many other friends, have helped him through a difficult time.

In whatever capacity we have known him, none were as close to him as his two sons, Christopher and Adrian, of whom he was justifiably proud; his daughter-in law Tracey, who had a special place in his affection, and his four grand-children, Nicholas, Anthony, Rhian, and Gareth. Theirs is the greatest loss and our love and sympathy goes out to you at this time, but when the sorrow subsides you will remember him and smile, and even laugh, and be proud to have had such a man to call Dad and Grampy (or Grumpy as I believe he was sometimes known).

He faced the last months of his life fully aware of what lay ahead, and throughout that mercifully short time he was courageous, patient, considerate, uncomplaining and, perhaps above all, grateful for the smallest service.

In his life Graham scaled many mountains, not like our mountains, real peaks with splendid views at the summit; but in latter days he has walked in the darker places, with pain and suffering as companions. Now the Valley of the Shadow lies behind him and he has made his last great ascent, and from that summit he has seen a sight that surpasses everything in this wonderful and beautiful world.

May he rest in Peace.

Eric Smith,
St. James Methodist Church,
Ebbw Vale.
November 18th 2013.