

Tributes to Graham Reynolds

Before the funeral, Khalil Lawry gathered all but one of these tributes from OSOBS members and sent them to Graham's daughter, Anita. The last one, from Wallace Garland, was received by Anita after the funeral.

Message from Khalil to Anita on behalf of OSOBS

Dearest Anita,

All the boys from the '60s group of students have been communicating about the parting of Graham, your father.

Without exception all are agreed he was a man, our teacher, and to some a good mate – he was respected and admired and fondly remembered as a person who gave of himself.

To have a happy life one really has to be the kind of person who makes a real difference for a better life for others around them. Our teacher, Graham Reynolds, was that kind of person: he made a real difference to all he had contact with in the school.

We have shared all that we have thought of Graham – our memories and in that we have already been celebrating him!

Attached are all our postings – and all are copied into this open communication to you.

We all certainly wish you the best for the funeral and the memorial service that may exalt and celebrate all that he meant to so very many young men – and we, collectively, celebrate our chapters with him in our lives.

Bless you all –

The Ottershaw '60s Old Boys

Tribute from Khalil Lawry

I was sad to hear the news of your Dad's death. It was poignant for me as we, the '60s boys, were again gathered at the Castle Pub in Ottershaw, where your father joined us a few years ago. He was mentioned often and we all had our own particular memories of him. On that day many asked each other: "Any news of Graham anyone?" We knew he was ill and he shared with many of us his ongoing struggles and at the same time he was again full of really good cheer, joking with us all and speaking of sport – showing interest in all our lives as individuals. Our dear friend Josh Lovegrove drove him to Ottershaw and returned him home so it was reported to us all how much he had enjoyed our time together. So heartening, and now his suffering is over and life carries on – the world is still spinning!

My first gym lesson I was spellbound at the age of 13! I was told then that his nickname was 'Pea Brain' – I wasn't sure what to expect??!! We assembled outside the gym having changed rapidly as we were told he was strict – he called the roll by number and we entered the gym one by one – once the roll call was done he bounced in – he shouted " ROUND HERE COME!" We ran into a circle around him then he signalled 'SQUAT!' We sat attentively. He was young – in good shape and had wonderful dark skin! He somehow made us smile even in our nervousness – and he had a technique in teaching skills – that I as a teacher emulated in later years.

He set high standards and knew that each of us pushed ourselves as far as we could – and he respected that in us. The gym lessons were always wonderful for me – the vaulting, the trampoline, the bars, the ropes. He taught us how to support one another – 'twas, for me brilliant! I had to cover for a PE lesson at a comprehensive in Lewisham – I agreed and asked may I take them in the gym? The HOD said yes. I did and got the boys and girls around me – explained we would do vaulting – I organised the horse – the spring board and in a few goes had the kids in lines eagerly awaiting their turn. The HOD saw the lesson in action and came quickly to stop the activity, as these are not allowed due to 'health and safety'. I conclude I went to school at the right time and had the right teacher for me too! The kids were really upset we had to change activity...ahhh!

He taught me geography and I always received good marks: Effort - 5; Achievement - 5 and Attainment - 5, these were the top marks on a monthly report card we had to have to record how we were doing in lessons. I also got fair to good marks from class and homework. I enjoyed his lessons – his humour, too.

In everything he was enthusiastic – he even listened to us enthusiastically.

I found out I was a natural runner when at Ottershaw and your Dad was always so encouraging and understood the dynamics of competition that I have never enjoyed – running became just something where I wanted to better myself continuously and he gave me so many pointers in setting personal goals. I tried so hard to get the Duke of Edinburg Gold award but just could not throw things very far – javelin, shot, even a cricket ball. I left with Silver thanks to your Dad.

I was selected to run in the schools county cross country championships and your Dad organised everything for me and transport to and from the school to Colchester, and also stayed in touch with my parents to ensure all would meet at the venue. It was a hard run! I finished in the top 30 and when I reported back to school having been collected by Michael Oettinger in his Dad's Humber Hawk, your Dad was so full of praise I almost burst!!! Heehee! He used the word 'phenomenal' – once dismissed I went to the library to look the word up and I beamed! That alone is a very personal and tender memory.

Three years back your Dad attended our meeting and when we met I just wanted to embrace him, not shake his hand, and he embraced me warmly. At once he gave me full attention asking me about my life, my family, how it was when I came out as gay and, too, the reasons for changing my name. He listened and asked for clarification and he demonstrated a compassion and understanding that he too has lived life, known the ups and downs and before me was my teacher and now a friend. Wow!

He certainly was cheerful – fair and at times a bit of a very loveable ‘Pea Brain’ – he had character and I am very sure I am not alone amongst the boys to have very treasured memories of Graham.

At that same meeting, once the banter was happening and all were cheerily reminiscing and finding out things from the teacher’s perspective, all in good humour I challenged your Dad – “Hey! Graham! Can you tell me why I got such amazing marks in Geography and failed miserably?” He looked and said with the straightest of expressions – “You were a fine runner!!” All roared with laughter; he knew – and I knew he knew – that I knew that answer already.

I am proud to have known him and had a contact via all and again with him three years ago. There are so many ‘cameos’ that come to mind when I ponder directly on his memory and all are good.

When a person gives of himself he gives much! Your Dad did that for me and I am also so pleased that I had the opportunity to share that with him directly.

I wish you all so well. This is the life we know – it comes to an end and it is done, quite simply true.

I delight to have shared a chapter of my life in the company of him and his example.

Bless you guys and may his memorial be as splendid as it deserves

Hugs xx

Khalil

Tribute from Peter Mackey

One of my memories of Graham, alias “The Body”, was how he ordered coffee. He asked for “black, with milk”, and this was well before Starbucks! He was a good teacher.

Tribute from John Burrow

Anita,

Very sad to hear of the death of your father.

I first met Graham when I was 7 or 8 when he became Asst Housemaster at West House, when my father Harry Burrow became Housemaster. He lived in the flat above our house at West House, and he was in and out of the house with great regularity. Always very friendly to me and my younger brother Graham, and always trying to get us and the other teachers' children involved in athletic activities in the holidays.

When I joined the school in North House in 1962, I experienced first-hand his enthusiasm for athletics, and sport in general. I was never the most athletic but, regardless of how good or bad you were, you were always included and he made sure you enjoyed it and benefited from his guidance.

Then as a Geography teacher, with his famous red teacher's book on how to get through O level Geography. It worked. Graham basically told us if you learned the book parrot-fashion you would pass, and 50 years later I still know and can draw where all the coalfields in the USA are, and not forgetting I got one of my highest grades at O level in Geography.

My parents Harry and Doreen Burrow, now both sadly passed away, had a lot of time for Graham and they became very close over the years – to such an extent that at my father's funeral Graham gave a very moving speech.

And in Graham's later years, even though not that well, he came to our reunion for the '60s Old Boys at The Castle pub in Ottershaw, complete of course with his famous red Geography book.

I know I speak for the majority of the boys taught by Graham in saying we will really miss him, and it bought a tear to our eyes when we heard the news.

Best Wishes to you all and sincere condolences on the terrible loss,
John Burrow

Tribute from Peter White (OT 658)

He described me in my first PE report as the most improved pupil in the school. Very tactful, as I was the worst he'd seen! Second term report said: "White has great difficulty in the inverted position" – and I went downhill from there! A very encouraging teacher.

Tribute from Jonathan Lovegrove

Hi Anita,

I was so saddened to learn that Graham had passed away last week. To me he was one of the great teachers at Ottershaw in the 1960s and one who was universally admired and respected.

Your dad took me on my first ever ski trip abroad to Kandersteg, and with the help of your mum kept about 16 small boys safe and happy. He was my PE and Geography teacher and will forever be remembered for his little red book called "A Sketch Book Geography", a copy of which he brought to a meeting of Old Boys just a few years ago.

On 17th July 2014, I had the pleasure and honour of visiting him and your mum at their home in Kent, where I was treated to a delicious but entirely unexpected brunch. For an hour or so we all reminisced about the old days, and of course your mum was part of that due to the trips to Switzerland. I then took him to Ottershaw, where he joined the 1960s Old Boys' Group for the rest of the day. He said he enjoyed immensely meeting and chatting with many of his former pupils, and he was certainly the "star attraction" that day. It was then quite late before we returned to Hyde. Although the trip to Ottershaw took over three hours due to heavy traffic we enjoyed chatting, and of course on the way home had another two hours to remember so many things. He told me about his life after Ottershaw and how he enjoyed golf and many other things. He also talked about his illness but I got the impression that, although he knew it would eventually be terminal, he was determined to do everything he could and enjoy life for as long as he was able.

On the day your dad died there was also a meeting of the 1960s group at Ottershaw, during which we visited the grounds of the old school. Several of us, whilst looking at the building which had been the gym, began talking about Graham and remembering his mannerisms and how he used to teach us. We talked about the way he once took over the organisation at a county sports meeting in Woking because of the shambolic way it was being run. He did so by taking his little blue megaphone from his bag, than simply using it to tell everyone where to go and when – and in the course of 20 minutes or so had the event running like clockwork! One Old Boy then mentioned his way of calling pupils to him by shouting out "Boys – round here – come!" – a phrase I and many others had not heard since our school days but was then instantly recognisable. We all smiled and continued talking about him. Later, when we learned of his death, we somehow felt it was apt it had been on that particular day – somehow we had all been together for a while.

There will, of course, be a piece about Graham in the next edition of the Old Boys' magazine and I am sure many others will wish to remember him. Of course, my deepest sympathy to your mum, who I always will remember for her kindness when acting as a temporary guardian to all those boys in Switzerland but also as that generous and welcoming person I met when I came to Hyde to collect Graham a few years ago. Also, my condolences to you and all the rest of his family.

Graham will be remembered and missed by a great many people.

*All the very best to you all
Jonathan Lovegrove*

Tribute from Jim Pennington

Roy and I have many memories from Ottershaw, some clear and others but dim. Those of Graham Reynolds rank amongst the clearest. He had a particular way of encouraging you. He certainly helped me improve on the track and field – I'm not sure how but, for certain, his introduction of weight training had a dramatic effect as well as his encouraging me (more by a look he gave than a command) to use a lot more of what he called "effort". My brother Roy agrees and, reading through back copies of the Ottershaw Weekly News, I found this paragraph from Roy's end-of-year Report on the 1965-66 School Athletics Team's season: *"Finally, our thanks go to Mr Reynolds. When he commented after the wins at Motspur Park that the day was second only to his marriage day in happiness, the team realised that without him they could never have fully achieved the results they did."*

Tribute from Kevin (Kipper/Boris) Harris

Graham Reynolds was not just another master; he was something special, with a tremendous presence and energy. He liked to get us to try something new, whether it was new moves in the gym or playing softball!. I remember him being given the nickname "Black Body"; apparently he liked to sunbathe! This soon got contracted to just "Body", which was much more appropriate for his muscled physique.

One memory of Graham that remains vivid for me is a practice of his when taking a meal at the high table in West House. We used thick white cups, and occasionally one would develop a crack. When Graham came across one of these he would nonchalantly crush it between his hands to ensure that it could not be used again with possible germs in the crack; pretty cool!

I was keen on athletics (throws and sprints), and Graham made me even keener as he spent time teaching me technique and encouraging me; with his support I had quite a bit of success and derived great satisfaction from competing. Graham took his duties seriously and worked hard to get athletics equipment for the school; I remember him getting starting blocks for sprints, and he even managed to add fibreglass pole-vaulting poles to our initial aluminium ones. Through his hard work he achieved great results in athletics, both in terms of helping individual boys to progress, and in terms of achievements of the school team.

On the subject of the school team, my other vivid memory of Graham was the day we won the Surrey Schools Open athletics competition in 1967. As a small school of 240 boys, we were expected to compete in some lesser category than the Open competition, but amazingly we won the Open. We boys were pretty excited about our victory, but I think Graham better understood its significance, and he was over the moon! I think this was not so much for his personal success as for the success he was able to let the boys and the school enjoy. The specific memory I have was when he stopped the minibus on the way back to school, got out and returned with a bottle of sherry, which he poured into the cup we had just won before passing it around

for all to share, and telling us that it was the greatest day of his life after his wedding day.

Tribute from Roger Neill (OT 790)

I recall that while Graham was an all-round athlete, he was not really a high jump specialist. He watched us struggling to get higher than 4'6" using the straddle jump. He then tried to describe the 'new' jump that a chap in the US had done already in various championships. [This was Fosbury, who in the summer of 1968 won the Olympic gold medal with his 'flop'!] GR explained it, then gave us a demo. He attempted it without any cushioning, landed backwards on his shoulder, and absolutely creased himself! Though our hero, this was too much for the rest of us who fell about laughing...

Following on from Jim's comment about the importance of using weights to improve athletic performance....

GR (start of autumn term on returning from the summer holidays): "Right lads, did you do weights over the holidays?"

Boys (in unison): "Yes, Sir."

Boy at back (quietly): "Yes, Sir. Players Weights."

GR: "Speak up, boy!"

Boy at back: "20 a day, Sir!"

GR: "Well done, good example to the rest!"

All the boys: "Ha ha ha!"

The second may not have been absolutely true, but it was the joke doing the rounds at the time!

Tribute from Pip Mossdrop

Hi, Khalil.

I am sorry that I could not join you all at the recent get-together at the Castle.

Thank you for taking so much trouble to collect together all the memories about Graham.

My principal contact with him related to sport, for which I am very grateful. In my first year at Ottershaw, I played rugby somewhere in the backs (the wing seemed to be the safest position!); I was slow, scared and pretty useless!

Graham made an inspired decision to move me to be a prop. Although I was hardly the right build, this transformed my perception of the game which, for the first time, I enjoyed! Although my performance was more about effort and

foolhardiness than skill, I was later captain of the seconds and eventually played in that position in the first team and, in due course, for my university thirds! So I continue to be very grateful, as so many are, for Graham's contribution to my life!

I am unable to be at the funeral but will be making a donation.

With best wishes

Pip Mossdrop

Tribute from Wallace Garland

Dear Anita,

I don't think we will have met but I was lucky enough to be at Ottershaw School from 1959 to 1964 and so knew your father very well.

I have lived in Africa for the last 25 years and am writing this from Nairobi, where I am now retired.

I have just listened to the webcast of your father's funeral earlier today and I am only sorry that I am not in the UK so that I could have been with you all.

It was a wonderful celebration and a very moving tribute to Graham – or 'Body', as I seem to remember we called him. The picture on the front of the order of service is exactly how I remember him.

Of course I didn't know so much of Graham's life that I have just heard about but what comes across so strongly is what a wonderful, caring and loving family man he was. All three of you spoke so warmly and with such realness.

I had no idea that he was a keen gardener or so good at planning family holidays.

My memories of him were his infectious enthusiasm and encouragement for us all to try something that we probably didn't think we could do. He was very much admired and respected as a teacher. Of course, we remember his great body shape and skin colour that as puny teenagers we all envied. I am sure that we teased him about how he looked and he would take it in such good spirit. We couldn't do that with many teachers. He was good fun.

I also remember that he had the biggest and widest smile. I played quite a lot of cricket with him and was amused to hear Danny's story about the fathers vs teachers match at his school.

You have all been very lucky to have such a great and caring gentleman as your father, remarkable as the lady leading the service described him, and it sounds as though he lived his life to the full right up to very near the end, which is great.

I am sure that you will all miss him terribly.

Please pass my very best wishes to your mother, who I also remember fondly.

With my deepest sympathy and very best wishes,

Wallace Garland