

Thanks to Graham's wife, Janet, and eldest daughter, Anita, for sharing a lovely few hours with me in Graham's beloved garden recently whilst the sun shone down on us. We laughed a lot and they shared a lot: memories and reflections of Graham's life which are included in the following 'Memories of Graham'. Thanks also to Stephen Turner from the Ottershaw Gazette for the lovely article he wrote about Graham in 2014. Much of what he wrote has been incorporated - as suggested by Janet and Anita!

Franky Henley
Funeral Celebrant
11.08.18

(edited & adapted by Anita Carney)

MEMORIES OF GRAHAM

Graham Ernest Reynolds was born in Ramsgate on 12th February 1936, first child to mother Joyce and father Cecil. He was born prematurely at five months – amazing when you consider his latter physique and strength. He has two younger sisters, Pam and Penny.

When he was a young boy the family moved to Surrey. Graham started Ottershaw School as part of the first intake in 1948 when he was 12. He was one of the two smallest pupils and was hence given the nickname Dormouse. His memories of school were entirely positive. After leaving he spent two enjoyable years doing National Service, serving in the Air Traffic Control section at RAF Oakington near Cambridge.

Having been encouraged by his school teachers, Graham went on to do his teacher training. He studied PE and Geography for two years at St Luke's in Exeter. He moved to Carnegie College in Leeds to specialise in PE for the third year and was one of only a very few that got a Distinction. In September 1959 Graham started his first teaching job at Wallington Grammar School in Surrey and, after just a few weeks, he received a letter out of the blue asking if he wanted a job teaching PE and Geography at Ottershaw School. He did – and he started there in January 1960. He was the first Old Boy to return to the school as a teacher.

According to the Ottershaw Gazette, Graham thoroughly enjoyed his duties, especially teaching PE. He always tried to show the boys what to do rather than tell them what to do. Graham was quoted as saying, "My motto was, if you like, 'inspiration before perspiration'. I didn't expect a boy to do anything in PE that I couldn't do myself.... I always took part in the cross-country. I wasn't standing at the side with a stop-watch. I went around with the boys, jogging along with the stragglers, searching in the bushes now and then for anyone who had stopped off for a cigarette!"

He organised gymnastics displays at various official functions including the Duke of Edinburgh Awards. Graham had the knack for getting the best out of his pupils. The school won various competitions including Surrey Grammar Schools' Swimming Competition which the team won every year.

Perhaps the most memorable event was when Graham taught touch rugby to the Upper Sixth form. This was no ordinary game. What made it unique was the boys were only wearing shorts - no shirts, no shoes and it was outside in the snow! The lesson reportedly ended with Graham and a close friend being pelted with snowballs, after which the whole group plunged into the indoor swimming pool. Graham was quoted in the Gazette as remarking with a chuckle, "Daren't do it now! You'd be in serious trouble!"

Graham made some good friends while at the school. He remained a member of the Old Boys' network, received newsletters and stayed in contact with some fellow teachers and students. On news of Graham's death, the family received nearly forty lovely email messages, primarily expressing fond memories and gratitude for the impact he had had on each of them.

Graham met Janet through hockey. She said, "I met Graham on the side of a pitch. His sister, Penny, was playing in a hockey game at the college where she was studying. I was a lecturer in PE there. Graham had gone to pick her up. He asked me if I could show him around the gym." Janet laughed saying, "I later discovered he was already familiar with the gym! It was clearly his chat-up line - it worked!" She added, "Graham was charming, good looking and good fun." Hockey continued to be important to the family and when Anita and Tracey were of secondary school age they were members of the same hockey club as their Mum and Dad for a while.

The couple courted for just six months, marrying on 30th March 1963. Graham always doted on his wife even after 55 years of living under the same roof. At first, they lived in school accommodation. Then they bought a little house of their own in Ottershaw. They also bought a brand-new MG Midget - note that it was a sporty vehicle! They had their first baby, Anita, in December 1966.

The following year Graham decided to leave Ottershaw and do further training. He embarked on a year's course in 'Educational Dance' which was apparently the in-thing at the time. However, he didn't really enjoy what was being taught but the Gazette quoted him as saying he had "...quite a good time there - there were seven blokes and about 120 women!" Janet and Anita both affectionately said, "He was quite a ladies' man!"

Following this, Graham spent a little time teaching in a Primary School and as a Teacher Advisor for Surrey County Council. Janet and Graham then had their second baby daughter, Tracey, in August 1968. The following year the family moved to Chesham, Buckinghamshire, where Graham started work as a Lecturer in PE and Mountain Leadership at Newland Park Teacher Training College in Chalfont St Giles.

In January 1971 the couple had their third child: Anita and Tracey were joined by a little brother, Danny. Graham was thrilled to have a son – Janet was too as otherwise she may have had to continue to have children until a son was born!

Though Newland Park College changed in shape and name over the years, Graham worked for the organisation for around 23 years where he was in charge of sports and recreation. He acquired another nickname; this time 'Chunky' – obviously as a result of his muscular physique! Whilst there, he frequently took his students to some of the highest peaks in the UK to practice mountaineering, despite his own initial fear of heights!

In a similar way to the emails received from Ottershaw Old Boys, the feedback the family received via the Facebook page for Newland Park following the news of his passing was again overwhelming. So many messages were posted about the memories students had of him and the 'legend' that he was.

He was in a fortunate position to be able to semi-retire in his early fifties. After he left Newland Park he did a bit of supply teaching every now and then (in between rounds of golf!) until he officially fully retired in 1996 at the age of 60.

Graham was very sporty, athletic, physically fit and strong. He had a passion for cricket, hockey and golf. He had been a member of Gerrards Cross Golf Club where he played for about 20 years when living in Buckinghamshire. He was also a long-standing member of

Sene Valley Golf Club in Hythe until very recently when he had to stop due to declining health. Graham persevered with his golf, going around the course in a buggy, long after many would have given up! The club are currently flying their flag at half-mast as a sign of respect to him as a much-valued member over many years. According to Janet he got great satisfaction from knowing he had once achieved a hole in one, but this was also a matter of frustration for him as it was never officially recorded as such; having been on his own at the time it had not been witnessed by anyone!

But Graham's early sporting love had been for gymnastics and he was a very able gymnast. Apparently one of his party tricks was to do headstands whilst flailing his legs all around! He could stay upside down for extraordinary lengths of time; he was still able to do this until he was about seventy! He loved the fact that he could entertain at celebrations with his headstands; an example being him doing a headstand on a bar table, wearing skimpy pants and fishnet stockings at Anita's 18th birthday party! The photo of Graham doing a headstand on a wall in the Order of Service was taken at Tracey's 21st celebration in Chesham...and this was after a few drinks!

Graham has also been passionate for years about John Wayne, Frank Sinatra and Arsenal football team (the latter along with his son Danny). However, he got bored with how Arsenal were playing in the last couple of seasons but remained loyal to the team and would still have hearty banter with the Carney family who are all passionate Liverpool fans!

Graham started collecting stamps as a young boy and continued this hobby throughout his life. This passion for collecting led to an interest in World War 2 Prisoner of War mail and he was one of the first people to start collecting this. His collection won many awards and it continues to do so worldwide with its new owner in New Zealand.

In 1994 Oliver was born, making Graham and Janet grandparents for the first time. Graham was so excited that he got straight in his car and drove the couple of hours to visit Tracey. Poor Janet had to wait for the following day as she was at work! Graham became 'Pop' to seven grandchildren, Ollie, Will (or Billy as Graham called him), Jade, Lucy, Matthew, Yazzy and Emily. Daughter Anita said, "Dad was always really interested in them all and gave them the same encouragement to do well as he had given his own children and his pupils, but he used to be dismayed that few of them showed any flair in gymnastics!" In fact, Anita's three children are all very sporty but "two of them cannot even do a forward roll in spite of his coaching efforts!" Granddaughter Yaz said, "If I were to think of Pop at his happiest he would be sunbathing in his garden surrounded by us all." Ollie, Will and Matt, as his three grandsons, recall him frequently asking them to show him their (tensed) muscles, upon which he would then comment!

Graham really enjoyed holidaying with Janet and his children. He put great effort into organising everything. He was super, super, organised as he relished planning and getting ready for these trips. As he and Janet were both teachers the family could be away for long periods in the Summer, towing their trailer-tent to various places in Europe. They went to the South of France a lot as the family grew older.

Anita said, "As well as being well organised, Dad was methodical and thorough, he would never rush into making any kind of decision. He would have to weigh up the pros and cons from every angle before being certain it was the right thing to do. Then, once decided, he would want a cut-price deal. If anyone could drive a hard-bargain, Dad could!" Graham was keen to access new technologies but, as hard as he tried, he just couldn't get his head really around these! Fortunately, he could call on one of his children or grandchildren to help him out when (often!) needed.

Graham really was the outdoorsy type. Anita laughed, "Dad was such a sun worshipper that he would cross to the other side of the road just to get out of the shade". He loved being in his garden, whether that be to just potter about planting and tidying up or to sit lapping up the sun. He planted a rose bush in honour of each of his children when he moved to Saltwood, Kent; red for Anita, yellow for Tracey and white for Danny. There are many photos of Graham in his garden (and other places) wearing his tiny little figure-hugging trunks, just about covering the right parts of his bronzed muscular body!

Janet said, "Graham was very sociable, he could talk to anyone and he got on with everyone." Anita added, "He liked a laugh, in fact he really could get fits of the giggles. But he could also wind people up - Dad was very opinionated. But what made me laugh is that he would change his opinions frequently. One day he would say 'black is white' and two weeks later he would say, 'no, white is black.' For an educated man Dad could have the most uneducated opinions!" Janet laughed and said, "I would often suggest something and Graham would completely disagree with me. A month later he would come up with the same good idea, thinking he had thought it up himself. There was no point in trying to convince him otherwise!"

Graham had a lot of good friends, but mention must go to two especially long-standing ones. Aubrey and Graham met as Lecturers at Newland Park College and they were great friends for 50 years. This friendship continued on the golf course too, well into their retirement. Michel and Graham were also great friends for around 44 years, through golf and hockey.

Graham was diagnosed with Prostate cancer over 20 years ago. He was his specialist's longest surviving patient. He had had a pacemaker for six years and also suffered with arthritis. When he was diagnosed with secondary bone cancer a couple of years ago he was determined not to let any medical issues stop him from enjoying himself. He continued to play golf and do his garden and go to the gym. Janet explained, "Having been such a fit man he found getting weaker very hard; he couldn't get his head around getting older. He never really got used to it."

Graham's health took a significant turn for the worse in his final few weeks with so many hospital appointments for various ailments, but his rapid decline in his last few days was sudden. The Pilgrims Hospices Community Team stepped in to help and according to Janet the staff who gave Graham his end of life care at home were 'simply brilliant'.

On Thursday 19th July 2018 Graham died peacefully at home with members of his family beside him. He was 82.