

John Denton OBE
22nd October 1937 – 22nd April 2019

We now come to the Tribute, when we will hear about John's life, or 'Johnny', as Merrill's sisters Wendy and Sally affectionately nicknamed him. It caught on and he was known to sign 'Johnny' on birthday cards to members of Merrill's family.

On the 22 October 1937, at 3C Muslin Hall, Thongsbridge, Holmfirth in Yorkshire, twins were born to Wilfred and Emily Denton. One was a daughter called Dorothy and the other a son called John. This completed their family as Wilfred and Emily already had a daughter called Muriel who was three when the twins were born.

Whilst Wilfred worked in the Worsted Warehouse, Emily looked after the home. The children were given a lot of freedom, although Dorothy preferred to stay at home and be with her Mother. John had many happy childhood memories of playing with Muriel in the fields near their home. They both had an adventurous streak and wanted to explore far and wide. On the occasions when Dorothy went to fetch John and Muriel back home for their tea, they would send Dorothy away to tell their Mother she could not find them!

At times Muriel was fiercely protective of John, she could tell him off but if anyone else dared – woe betide! Muriel has many fond memories of when they were children, but one particular memory sticks in her mind. At that time, children were often given cod liver oil to keep them in good health. When it was time for their Mother to give them a spoonful of the disgusting, fishy oil, John managed to get out of taking it by making himself sick. Even though Muriel and Dorothy accused John of this trick, they were actually envious that he had managed to get away with it!

Muriel and John learned to play Whist and Bridge and played as partners beating their Mum and Dad hands down! Muriel said they were pretty 'nifty' together when playing cards. John's love of card games and board games continued into his adulthood, spending many hours of fun with his children and later, with his grandchildren.

Although John was bright and had an enquiring mind, he did not pursue his education beyond school. Instead, in his late teens John joined the Navy and became a Sick Bay Attendant. He loved his job as a Medic, and would turn his hand to anything medical that was asked of him, something that would not be allowed today. During his time in the Navy John enjoyed living and working in Hong Kong, where he learnt to drive and passed his driving test. Being able to drive was particularly popular with his sisters when he was home on leave! Muriel loved dancing to the Ted Heath Band and John obligingly would take her up to London, to the Astoria or Lyceum Ballrooms.

In the mid-sixties John had met and married Beryl and had become a stepfather to her three sons, Christopher, Philip and Paul. When Beryl became pregnant with their daughter Samantha, John said that it felt like it lasted eighteen months! When Samantha was born, the neighbours put out banners to celebrate. Phew, that eighteen-month pregnancy was finally over!

After nine years John decided the Navy was not for him. He found it too parental and autocratic. Later in his life, John said he would have liked to have studied to be a doctor but by then he had his family to support. Instead, he applied for a job in the Civil Service. He said he felt he had nothing to lose, so he gave everything he could in the interviews. This paid off as he was successful! Over the years John worked in several Government Departments, initially joining the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency, CCTA, in London. He then moved to the Office of Population, Censuses and Surveys, OPCS in London, before moving to their offices in Titchfield, Hampshire.

John's first position was in computer programming. He was lucky to have had a very patient teacher called Betty Arm, as John was very inquisitive and would question and analyse

everything until he was satisfied he understood. John worked up through the grades until he reached the top position of Grade 6, Deputy Head of Information Technology. John was rewarded an OBE for his work which he joked stood for '*Oh Blooming Eck!*'. He was very humbled by this honour and accepted it on behalf of all the team he worked with. John went to Buckingham Palace to receive his OBE from the Queen. His one disappointment on that memorable day was that the Queen was dressed in a plain blue wool dress which John felt was nothing special for the occasion!

It was at Titchfield that John met Merrill. Merrill was John's Secretary for many years and over time they had grown close. On a memorable firework night, 5 November 1993, John and Merrill eventually decided to leave their respective partners to be with each other. This caused rather a stir amongst their work colleagues. There was much speculation and one rumour concluded they had run away to France, with a cat!! John said it was the happiest and proudest day of his life when he married Merrill on 2 June 2000 at Southampton Register Office.

John and Merrill had many happy holidays together, visiting Canada and enjoying staying with Maggie and Craig in Amble. John particularly liked Cornwall, which he thought of as his spiritual home. John and Merrill visited Austria many times for walking holidays. One year they went to Austria and on their wedding anniversary 2 June, they walked up the mountain to admire the flower meadows, when much to their amazement, and the local Austrians, it started to snow! They managed to dive into a café and continued to enjoy the beautiful spectacle of the snow falling as the sun shone, snug in the warmth, making this anniversary particularly memorable. On another visit they were on a guided walk over the mountains when the Austrian guide with a sense of the bizarre, produced a small trumpet out of his pocket and proceeded to play '*Edelweiss!*'

On holidays the first places John sussed out were the local 'chippy' and cake shops. This was because John's favourite foods were fish and chips, and cakes, presumably not together! Sometimes John was a bit sneaky and would choose custard tarts, knowing that as Merrill did not like them, she would not ask for a bite which meant John could have them all to himself!

John loved his food and liked to cook traditional dishes, but the food had to be hot. He said this came about as his Mother had not been a very good cook. Cousin Daphne remembers John's very professional looking brandy snap baskets. She was even more impressed when she tried making them herself and realised how difficult it was.

John liked to socialise, going out for meals with friends and having them round for meals. Merrill joined the local Hatch Grange WI and was keen to take part in the local West End carnival. When Merrill invited the WI ladies to come to the house to help with preparations, John was quick to dish out the tea and biscuits and join in the fun with all those lovely ladies!

John was very much a people person. Over the years John made very close friends, Maggie and Craig, Paula and George, David and Hilary, Diane and Syd, Bernard and Chris, to name a few. Janet was a special and loyal friend to John for over 40 years. He was non-judgemental, spiritual, very fierce to defend his sovereignty and space and encouraged others to be themselves. John liked to analyse things. He loved having deep meaningful conversations, often with his own views being kept well hidden, but asking questions and trying to understand the other person's views. Sometimes if John was in a lengthy discussion with Merrill, her eyes would cloud over, well before he had finished!

John was interested to learn about the many religions from around the world. He particularly enjoyed discussions with his friend Sue, a Jehovah's Witness and they had many a conversation about their beliefs. John belonged to a Spiritual Group in Fareham called Concepts, which he enjoyed, as he was with like-minded people. He liked Tarot, Meditation and going to the '*Mind, Body and Spirit*' shows in London. He was always interested in learning new things and trained and practiced Reflexology for a while. If you remember the

Maureen Lipman advert for British Telecom, Merrill said Reflexology was John's one and only 'ology'!

John did have his foibles! He had a bugbear that books should be in topic order and not in size when they were on the shelves. He was not good at following directions if he was using the Navigator in his car. He always wanted to go down a road that he was not supposed to!

Over the years John's family had grown and grown. John had become a favourite of his stepson Marc and his family Julie, Ellie and Ben. He was a grandfather to Peter, Phillip, Lewis and Daniel and great-grandfather to Solomon and Pixie.

To end this tribute, here are a collection of fond memories from John's children and grandchildren.

Peter, John's grandson said he will miss the in-depth conversations and encouragement he had from his Grandad. His brother Phillip, in his own words, said:

'There is such a lot that I could say about my Grandad, about ways he has helped me. But the main thing I remember is that my Grandad was one of only two people who always believed in me, never gave up on me and never offered me anything but positivity and enthusiasm, however bad things seemed. He took an interest in every aspect of my life. He always greeted me with the biggest, most beautiful smile. He was quite literally a shining light in my life and now that light has gone from my life. I will miss him greatly.'

Samantha still chuckles at picturing her Dad in his elf costume at a Scouting 'Do' one Christmas, wearing stick-on plastic ears as he handed out the Christmas presents. She also remembers her Dad buying her a cat for her birthday. John named it for her and called it 'Amiee', which he explained meant 'friend'. Samantha was always grateful for how her Dad encouraged her at school and for his vision in recognising that Samantha should take a degree in Nursing to help give her an advantage in her chosen career.

John was very proud of both Samantha and Paul. John had become close to Paul and adopted him as his son, to which Paul said:

'Dad and I adopted each other, and it was obvious very early on that he loved me as much as I loved him! On two occasions over the past few years people said they could see the resemblance in the two of us, I don't know who had the biggest smile me or Dad, and no, we didn't let on!!'

Paul remembers happy holidays to visit Auntie Muriel in Yorkshire. Sometimes in the early days, times had been hard for the family, but John's love of food and cooking meant on Saturdays he always cooked from fresh, for all the family.

John also had a special place for Paul's partner, Yvonne, who he thought of as another daughter. For Paul and Yvonne, family, food and his home gave John his love of life and they loved him for it. For John, garlic was a definite 'no no', in any shape or form. He did not even like the smell of it, if it was being used in cooking. There were times when John did not realise Yvonne had sneaked in some garlic without telling him!

Paul and Yvonne remember how John always had a plan. He did things wholeheartedly, with his heart and soul, never doing anything by halves!! A lasting memory for Paul and Yvonne was from just a few years ago, one Christmas Day. Wearing a chef's hat and apron, John was in the kitchen halfway through cooking Christmas lunch, when spurred on by Yvonne, he started dancing in 'Gangnam Style'! Picture that, if you can!

There is so much to say about the many aspects of John's likes, dislikes, personality, love of his home and garden, how John was always eager to learn something new from anyone he met, whether it was a new piece of music or a new idea. He loved to initiate a deep,

analytical conversation but he let only a few people get to know what he was really thinking, the 'true' and inner John. But like Merrill, perhaps your eyes would eventually glaze over and did you know he was very proud that at the age of 81 he still had his own teeth?!

Although with John's death, a gentle warrior, a bright star has faded, the love and happy memories will continue for his family, friends, neighbours and acquaintances and all those he met during his life. Many will say how proud and honoured they are to have known John.