

A celebration of life

John Grenville Williams

30 October 1936 – 7 January 2020

11.00 22 January 2020 Wenault Chapel, Thornhill Crematorium, Cardiff



a personal goodbye

Humanist
Ceremonies

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John was born in Pandy Road, Bedwas on the 30th of October 1936, and so was known to many for most of his life as either “Johnny Pandy” or “Johnny Bedwas.” He was the youngest of Sam and Dorothy’s three children and grew up in a happy home with his sister Audrey and brother David.

John had a happy childhood, he always preferred to be outside, playing in the fields at the rear of the house or out and about in the wider countryside. As he grew into his teens he took on jobs at farms in Bedwas and Rudry. He learnt to drive on a tractor at one of these jobs. He also had a paper round and remembered seeing Marilyn first when he was delivering a paper to her house.

John was intelligent but was also always very good with his hands and in later life was able to turn his hands to most things. Even at the early age of eleven he was clear-minded about himself and chose to go to a Technical Grammar school rather than follow his brother and sister to the local traditional grammar.

Outside school he loved cycling and with his friends cycled all over the UK, including trips to London, Yorkshire and Cornwall. On one occasion he missed the paddle steamer from Minehead and while it called into another port on route he rode his bike to Barry, arriving before it docked and his friends disembarked.

In school he played rugby, representing the school and later New Tredegar Technical College. He left school at fifteen when he began his apprenticeship as a mechanical engineer for B.O.A.C at the R.O.F factory in Cardiff and spent a year in Heathrow.

When he completed his apprenticeship, he joined the RAF to complete his National Service. He was older than most of his training squad and took the discipline in his stride before joining his regiment as a trade specialist. He always said he served in the Far East, meaning East Anglia.

The highlight of his service for him was playing rugby, as it meant he missed out on a less pleasant duties. He played for his camp and at least one game for the RAF. His National Service left him one unwelcome souvenir when someone fired a bren gun near his ear and he suffered with tinnitus for the rest of his life.

When he was de-mobbed he returned to B.O.A.C. and worked for the same organisation for the next forty years, while it changed its name to British Airways and then General Electric, at its Nantgarw and Treforest sites. John enjoyed work throughout his career, first as an engineer and later as a quality assurance engineer and occasionally travelled abroad with work.

He enjoyed working with friends he knew well, many of them for many years and he liked being part of the strong community at work. But John worked to live, he did not live to work. His family was always his focus and his priority.

Marilyn and John had always lived close to each other. John had an accident in his A35 Van and while it was off the road he was forced to take the bus. He used to walk to the bus stop with Marilyn who worked as an accounts clerk on the same industrial estate he did.

When his car was back on the road he started giving her a lift to work every day and their friendship blossomed. Their first date was on Boxing Day 1965 to the Maen Llywd, pub in Rudry. Nine months later they were engaged and were married in September 1967. Using John's perks from work they honeymooned in Ischia in Italy.

They started married life in a small three-bedroom house that in the coming half century John would change beyond recognition. He built extensions and upgraded the facilities, doing a lot of the work himself. On one occasion he was working so hard fitting a central heating system in the cold house on winter evenings, after a full day's work that he contracted pneumonia.

He and Marilyn enjoyed newly married life. John was playing rugby as blind-side flanker for Bedwas and they had a good social life, many friends and enjoyed country walks together.

In 1969 Huw was born, Marilyn gave up work and the three of them continued to take advantage of John's travel perks, visiting family in Australia.

In 1970 Suzie was born. Huw told me that while most people saw only the additional challenges that the family faced, his mum, dad and he have never seen it like that.

Suzie brought a new dimension to the love and joy that their family experienced, were able to express in the way they focused their lives, on each other. John's positive life affirming attitude, always looking on the bright side of life and finding the humour in everything set the tone for family life, and no one can ever remember him raising his voice.

Although frequent hospital visits and doing everything they possibly could to help Suzie get the most from her life became a big part of daily routine, John still found time for Huw.

He was always there for him, helping his with his homework and anything else he showed an interest in. He encouraged Huw and helped him develop these interests, but although he never pushed Huw in any particular direction, many of their interests were similar; rugby, chess, woodwork, building Airfix models or rebuilding and repairing an old car together for Huw to drive.

Huw was given an excellent role model in his father; someone to look up to and to emulate, as indeed were many of Huw's friends. Since John's death the family have received many cards and texts from friends echoing the sentiment Huw's friend Steve wrote in his card, "He certainly inspired me how to be a good man, husband and father."

In 1987 Huw gained a place at Sussex University to John and Marilyn's great pride. He left home, leaving a tight little trio who did everything together and travelled a lot. John retired in 1993, he took up painting and drawing again, something he had enjoyed in his youth and for which he showed a talent, though typically a talent he was always humble about.

Over the first three years of retirement he, Marilyn and Suzie travelled even more. They enjoyed their lives and gained a lot from their many trips including visiting Florida three times, Greece for a month, San Francisco and Australia to see family. It was obvious to Marilyn that John got his enjoyment from being with his family and the joy that it gave him was infectious making their home a happy place to be. He was always laughing and joking, with a razor-sharp wit that never left him.

In 1996 Suzie suffered a serious medical negligence accident that left her in need of greater and constant care and assistance. This dramatically changed the practicalities of life in the Williams household, with many lovely people becoming part of the team that helped her.

But it did not change the things that had always been important for John and his family. Their love and happiness faced the challenges head on. Marilyn told me that John was able to get his joy from the small things in life, be it time spent with Marilyn, visits from Huw, Debs, Cyrus and Casper, a smile from Suzie, or a joke with one of the carers.

Nine years ago, John noticed minor lapses in his memory and was diagnosed with Alzheimer's, luckily the progress was slow and most people didn't notice any change. More recently he had suffered from heart problems, but he was generally fit and able, apart from some old rugby aches and pains.

John was taken ill on the 5th of January and was taken into hospital and appeared to be recovering well. So his death on the 7th of January has come as huge shock to his loving family and his many friend who miss his deeply.

Huw Williams Tribute to his Father

I am a lucky man in many ways. I am lucky because of the man my father was. He was a good man. That might sound like small praise, but I think the best you can ever say of a man's life, is that he was good. He was good to those who knew him and he was good to people he didn't know. I am lucky because he was always good to me.

He loved the beauty of the natural world and he saw that beauty everywhere. He would stop and stare, where others would pass by. I am lucky because he taught me to see that beauty too.

And I am lucky that after fifty one years with him there was nothing left unsaid. We'd told each other we loved one another and we both knew we meant it. My father was a good man and I am lucky to have had his love.

Brian Everett's Tribute "John the Fisherman"

For those of you that knew John well you'll realise this is a big misnomer. Other than perhaps tickling a trout or two, I don't think John has been known to pick up a rod.

However, John did possess all the qualities of a good fisherman, determination, humour, a sense of adventure, education, patience, honesty and satisfaction in a job well done

Some forty-two years ago Rita and I together with our three-month-old son Nick and a big silly Dalmatian came across the border from Sheffield and landed at Lon y Gors, which backed onto John and Mal's family home.

Shortly after we arrived, in for what was us, an unfamiliar and foreign land, we were caught, hooked by the friendliness, understanding and ultimately, love of a wonderful man and his family.

We lived there for two years before moving back across the border, such a short time but such a big effect.

Over the next forty years, our family, almost magnetically, became closer and closer to the Williams's, sharing the highs and lows and in particular enjoying John's wicked sense of humour as he dealt with all the ladies in his life.

We were told that John was a rugby player in his youth, although I always had a bit of a problem believing that as I could imagine John tackling someone and then stopping to make sure that were OK, such was his consideration of others.

John's wit was infectious, his warm and caring nature irresistible.

"Bydd colled fawr ar eich ol, gorffwyswch mewn heddwch"

You'll be sorely missed Butt. Rest in Peace