

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."