

Nick Hodson – a tribute – 27/5/2106

We are here to say goodbye to my dear brother Nick, and to celebrate a hugely talented man, who enriched the lives of so many of us, family, friends and pupils, far and wide. He was clever, practical, dutiful and generous, one of a kind.

In 1933, Harry Hodson, a young brilliant international economist, visiting Sydney, met Margaret Honey, 20-year old toast of the town, and married her in a whirlwind romance. Nick was born the next year. The unconventional marriage engendered an exceptional child.

Nick had a logical mind that started from his own innate set of principles, kindness and integrity; he had a strong personality and was never afraid to express his ideas, not easily tolerating illogic or artificiality. He was lovable, but could be a difficult child, frequently challenging convention.

I was born just under three years later, and was dominated in early life by my big brother. I learned at a young age how to be tactful to avoid trouble, and also when to take to my heels. We became, all the same, close life-long friends, and together enjoyed things that worked and had deep technical discussions that nobody else could understand.

Nick, at 8, went to West Downs School, then in Blair Castle in the Scottish Highlands, its war-time abode. It was a beautiful place, in the great outdoors, and although the school returned to its Winchester home in 1946, by then Scotland was deep in his soul. He loved the school and did well.

After the war, our parents decided that seaside life would be good for their three boys, and bought a house at Seaview, Isle of Wight, and also a small sailing dinghy that Nick and I sailed enthusiastically in the East Solent. Seaview was a centre of competitive sailing, but Nick had no time for that sort of thing, and was quite satisfied with what we had. He loved the sea, a major life-strand for him.

Nick grew up clever, physically strong. He was practical and decisive. A friend of the family lodged his motorbike in our garage in Seaview, and showed Nick how to ride it. One day, Nick said to me 'let's make it go!', and he kick-started it. The bike backfired, and the carburettor burst into flames. 'Quick, get leaf mould and pack it round the

carburettor to stifle the flames'. We both did, and it worked. We and the bike survived. Wow!!

Nick won a Kings Scholarship to Eton, and was successful in all subjects. Later, his practical instincts and love of the sea led to his applying to the Navy for officer training, and he passed into Dartmouth top of the list. He soon realised that the Navy with its rigorous conventions was not for his free spirit. Our father managed to extricate him, and he went up to Balliol College, Oxford, at the end of 1953, where he won an open scholarship in mathematics.

He did not enjoy university maths, so unlike school maths, but rowing became a major interest, with successes in single and double sculls, the latter often with his close friend Jon Kay-Mouat, who became President of Alderney. Nick later acquired a cottage in Alderney, and a tiny cruising sail-boat, Minique. For many years, he sailed to Alderney and back, in fine weather and foul, steering in bad conditions by the direction that the gannets were flying. Nick was intrepid almost beyond belief.

Leaving Oxford with a poor degree, he joined the Merchant Navy, realising before long that this was not for him. So he joined Atomic Power Constructions as a scientist, helping design the Dungeness atomic power station. He enjoyed the work, but found the company politics stifling. So he became a schoolmaster – teaching maths and physics, first at Eton and then at Radley and was involved greatly with school rowing and other outdoor activities.

He was an outstanding teacher, with a clear mind, articulate, on top of the subject, and a match for non-compliant pupils. This career, however, was not the answer, so Nick completely changed career direction again, joining P&O, the global shipping company.

His long career there reflected his love of the sea, and also took him into computers. In this he was a genius. He became the operative who consolidated the P&O operating division accounts, using his own micro-computer programs. He was fearless in extracting the monthly data from reluctant general managers, and the Chairman of P&O himself was reprimanded by Nick on more than one occasion. A perfectionist, his software flare was fulfilling for him. On retirement, he harnessed this great talent to become a leading creator of E-books, right up to the time of his first stroke.

Nick took up canoeing as he grew older, and this replaced the intrepid open-water sailing in Minique. He became a leading canoe instructor for young people particularly at

Shadwell. His love of Scotland took him to the island of Barra, where, summer after summer, he ran canoe training and was a local institution!

He was a faithful member of the Mercers' company, attending every General Court, and contributing new viewpoints in committee.

Throughout his life, Nick was a wonderful companion, kind, full of interesting conversation, with a wonderful power of recall. He could get on with anybody, was loved within his close and extended family, and formed close, loyal and attentive friendships. One particular friendship was with Marc Spenser, whose family Nick had known since Marc was a boy. Marc, his lodger for 36 years, was a faithful companion, helper and intellectual foil – and we all owe Marc a special debt of gratitude for what he brought to Nick, right up to the last moments of his life.

In 1971, Nick married Jean Watson, who had a young son Driss. Vicky was born a year later. Nick was a devoted father to both children (Driss later took his step-father's surname), but the marriage was not a success. After they separated, Nick saw the children whenever he could, and, as they grew into adulthood and eventually marriage, he was not just a father and loving grandfather but a close friend and reliable supporter.

We are particularly grateful to Vicky, who, as a real act of love, took on the onerous, and often heart-rending task of Attorney in Nick's last months.

My most enduring memory of Nick in latter years is of him, in the armchair in the corner of our big kitchen, entertaining us with amazing memories, and sharing his thoughts on so many subjects, often hilariously politically incorrect, for he had a keen sense of humour that could be ribald and irreverent.

We loved him for his intelligence, for his friendship and love, for his deep and dutiful loyalty and kindness to family and friends, for his huge sense of integrity, for his braveness and resilience in a sometimes difficult life, for his ability to teach and to entertain, for his humanity and for his interest in other people.

He was a good man, and a kind one. May he rest in peace.

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