

## **Tribute to Steve Parry (1952–2016) by Ken Humphrey**

Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> of November 2016; it's evening, Chelsea have just managed to squeeze a hard-fought win against Spurs and as I reach for the phone to give Steve a call for our customary post-match chat, I experience that sinking feeling – I can never do that again.

A lifetime of supporting Chelsea had taught us about the highs and lows of life and we often had post-match conversations right up till the Sunday before he died. I had been listening to the match against Middlesbrough on the radio and he had been watching it live, courtesy of Hazel and Ali. It was another tough match and he was so relieved and happy after that win; it was the last conversation I had with him.

It is so hard to believe that on the previous Saturday he had twisted my arm to take photos of his marriage to Sandra. He knew how much I 'love' wedding photography, but he also knew that 51 years of true friendship would help me overcome that particular phobia. Sadly, he never got to see the photos.

Let's take a step back in time. It is September 1965, I am 14 and on my way to King Edward's School in Witley, Surrey. The school was founded in London in 1553 by Edward VI as Royal Bridewell Hospital; it was a place for the training and education of poor children. It was renamed King Edwards School in 1860 and moved in 1867 to a 100 acre site in Witley, set in the stunning Surrey countryside; it became co-educational in 1952; it is steeped in history and has strong links with the Royal Family.

I am of course totally unaware of this as I join the latest band of waifs and strays on the platform at Waterloo. Looking back, it was very much like going to Hogwarts, only we didn't have to walk through station walls, merely clamber into a carriage full of chattering children. Somewhere in the throng is Richard Reed, another new boy, but we have yet to meet. Soon the train is bustling out of a grim London and then snaking its way slowly into the beautiful Surrey countryside. Before long we are struggling up the hill with our heavy suitcases, awestruck by the imposing front façade of the school and into our dormitories where the beds are in neat rows with hospital corners and top sheets in pristine, taut, straight lines; all under the watchful eye of our matron Mrs Trump, she is Wendy and we are her Lost Boys; she had a very soft spot for Steve; come to think of it, most women had a soft spot for Steve!

Thus begins a spell of five extremely happy years resulting in friendships that have lasted over 5 decades. I find myself surrounded by happy, caring, like-minded children and staff; one big family. It is a far cry from my Secondary School in Acton where on the first day I learned to dodge through a hedge and escape the newbie initiation by the seniors, whilst staff looked the other way.

Try as I might I cannot recall exactly how Steve and I became friends. He had started in 1963 along with Derek Rodman and Pete Ashby. Perhaps it was something to do with his beautiful older sister Hazel; all the boys in the school were in love with her and, being friends with Steve, might mean you could get that much closer to her. Phil Power recently reminded me that it also paid to be

nice to Steve as he was in charge of haircuts; I seem to remember some poor kids having to go every week to make up the numbers, as that gave some of us a chance to grow our hair a little longer; yes, I did have hair once. In reality, it was probably more to do with the fact that we were in the same year and the same house, Grafton, along with Richard. Pete was in Edward house, also in the sunny Southside wing of the school and we all supported Chelsea, so it was fate really. Somehow Derek and Steve Gotting, from Ridley House in the dark Northside, managed to infiltrate the band.

Cricket was key to our relationship; we opened the bowling together; Steve was quick and loved whistling the ball past openers' ears, particularly if they had the audacity to pinch a run off him. Batsmen's eyes used to light up when they saw me trundle in with my medium pacers, but they soon dimmed with the clatter of stumps as they tried to heave my line and length deliveries over the fence; I can still see Steve gesturing and mouthing, 'I got you that one.' He swore I would not have taken nearly as many wickets if he hadn't been at the other end terrifying batsmen; he was probably right. When we weren't representing our house, the school or the numerous other teams we played for, we were honing our skills in the nets; always spending time together. Richard was the scorer with his neat writing and coloured pencils, so more bonds were being forged.

Football was very important in our lives. We were both in the 2<sup>nd</sup> XI and occasionally in the 1<sup>st</sup>; Steve in goal and me in the forward line. When we weren't playing competitively we were on Lower Side with his Peter Bonetti trying to save my Bobby Tambling free kicks and penalties; halcyon days. Steve threw the javelin in competition with Pete, both tall and blond, they were often mistaken for each other, but not by Carole Halligan, who fondly remembers the 'blond Adonis in his cricket whites, with the eyes that always had a sparkle'.

Given what life had thrown at Steve and Hazel, it is a testament to his character that those eyes could sparkle at all; he never bore grudges, except against Leeds United or Arsenal, maybe Man United.

Several people have mentioned Steve's determination; Derek remembers a teacher telling him he wouldn't do well at carpentry; what do teachers know! I remember when he tried to teach himself how to play the guitar; he practised for weeks learning Bobby Shafto and, when he got it, he was so proud he played it again and again and again and again; in fact, he played it so often someone suggested, that for the future safety of his guitar, he might want to learn something else; he paused for a moment and then continued regardless. Mild mannered he may have been but, when he set his mind to something....well.

Being tall and athletic, he was in the First Team for basketball with Pete, Derek and Steve Gotting, who recalls him as being 'a real competitor and a good guy to be beside in any occasion'. Not being tall and athletic, I was the scorer and that meant we all spent even more time together, particularly when travelling to away matches and singing our hearts out in the minibus, as we did for football and cricket.

He hated losing in sports, particularly his beloved Chelsea and in the '60's Chelsea seemed to lose more often than not; this would darken his mood and the rest of Saturday could be a write-off, something his girlfriends of the time would certainly testify. But we still kept the faith and attended as many home games as possible during the holidays, walking to Stamford Bridge and back

from my mum's flat in Grosvenor Road in Chiswick; no wonder we were thin in those days. The flat played a very important part in our school holidays. Steve would often come and stay for the entire break, or so it seemed, as would Pete, Derek, Richard and anyone else who happened to join our merry throng. It's amazing how many people we managed to squeeze into my tiny bedroom.

That bedroom was our den and there are so many happy memories of trips to the City Barge, where we would get cheap rounds because the barmaids thought I looked like Englebert Humperdink's younger brother and Steve looked like Bowie, followed by late night card sessions drinking Watney's Red Barrel, John Courage, Lord Tankard and the like, before we progressed to Fullers, Ruddles, fine wines and malt whisky. There were dawn walks along the Thames and then back to my room to crash out before being woken up by the smell of a cooked breakfast, being prepared by my wonderful mother.

All this helped take Steve's mind off the fact that his Aunt and Uncle, who were his guardians, had insisted he bring his pyjamas to our 'sleepovers'; he never wore them, but he never lived it down either.

In the 70's our Band of Brothers started to expand as it now encompassed Kim, Ruth, Su, Sally, Cathy, Tom, Peggy, Nicky and Michael; Winchester Weekends were added to our vocabulary of fun. Peggy reminded me that, although Steve had a dry sense of humour, he could also be a bit of a clown and she fondly remembers Steve and Richard striding down the road very convincingly copying John Cleese's ministry of silly walks and the fact that they seemed to know the whole of 'Monty Python's Flying Circus' inside out and often re-enacted some of the funniest sketches brilliantly. Nicky commented on how he could be all serious one moment, the next he would turn a spoon into a microphone and belt out a favourite song; Bowie or the Boss most likely. I will miss those silly moments.

On their wedding day, I apologised to Steve for my dark suit. Unfortunately, living in Cornwall, there isn't much call for suits, so my dark one is now the only one that fits and therefore has to suffice for weddings and funerals. He looked down at his dark suit and said, 'Don't worry mate, this is my only suit as well, guess they'll be burying me in it soon. Conversations like that can only happen when you have known someone closely for a long, long time.

On the evening of the wedding when Ruth and I were the last to say goodbye, having shared a final malt with Steve, he gave us both one of his great big hugs, having tried to tell people all day that he couldn't touch anyone as he was Neutropenic; the look in his eyes told us that we were probably seeing him and touching him for the last time.

'Time it was  
And what a time it was, it was  
A time of innocence  
A time of confidences  
Long ago it must be  
I have a photograph  
Preserve your memories  
They're all that's left you.'

It is fitting that we are in the Carew to raise a glass or two in memory of a very dear friend, so let's just pause for a moment and reflect upon the end of a wonderful innings, beautifully crafted and played with the minimum of fuss.

During the recent match against West Brom, it looked as though Chelsea were going to be frustrated by a 10 man defence and our winning streak was coming to an end. I looked up to the Heavens and said, 'Come on mate, have a word'; minutes later Diego scored a wonder goal to give Chelsea the win. I then realised, God must be a woman and she obviously has a soft spot for Steve as well.

To Steve



1965/66

1968

2014