

## Tribute to Susan

Rod recalled how Susan had greatly impressed her first headmaster in Abingdon. I shall be eternally grateful to Honora and Jim Valentine that they were not equally impressed and decided that their 8 year old daughter should not be the remedial reading assistant to the rest of her class.

So Susan moved to Dunmore Primary and we started a fifty year friendship that grounded my life, provided the inspiration for anything I have achieved and allowed me to share in much joy.

We were intellectual rivals from the start, although the rivalry was simply a spur to ensure that we both produced our individual best. Susan did not actually need a rival since she was perpetually competing with herself to turn the outstanding into the perfect. However, my proudest academic achievement was not my degree, but once, and only once, beating her in an English test.

Jean will recall Susan's academic record. But I do want to mention that after O levels she had to decide whether to concentrate on English or on sciences where she had also gained top grades. Jim, as a scientist, would have liked his daughter to follow him and Susan, who loved to make her father proud, struggled briefly before going her own way. Her delight, when he rewarded her choice with a beautiful camel coat, was palpable.

How can I share with you a lifelong friendship? As always with Susan, friendship grew through her ability to express everything in the most apposite words. When we first met, we would cycle home from school together and stop at the end of her street for a heart to heart talk. Then I would speed home, pick up the phone and continue our conversation for another hour. This was not SMS banality: our phones still had to be connected manually by an operator.

With three others we formed a girl band appropriately called 'The Gossip' and followed the early Beatles by having a smart dress-code, including the tiniest of black mini-skirts that I shudder to remember. Susan wrote the lyrics and Barbara the music of the song

that once won us 10 shilling book-tokens. Our rendition of Plaisir d'Amour was popular with those in doomed teenage romances.

During our adolescence, Susan was always the loving anchor that made it possible to face whatever life and hormones brought. Lunchtimes with Brenda and Rod provided non-parental adult wisdom, but we also had our private place for teenage soul-searching. I hope the willow on the banks of the Thames with the branch over the water that seated two, still stands. I need to sit there and whisper 'Thank you Sue'.

Of course the whole of our grammar school recognised that Susan was special. We voted her on to the School Council every year except when she wanted to make room for someone else. She wrote an ironic poem about being a prefect. She was an inspirational Head Girl who made our new Headmaster live up to our expectations for reform. Her 6<sup>th</sup> form English teacher still remembers with delight a golden class that also included Elinor and Reg.

At first it looked as though the end of 1971 was going to be ghastly. I had received the longed-for telegram offering a place at Girton and for a week she heard nothing from Newnham. She hid her pain and insisted I should celebrate but I could not imagine why the world had turned upside down. After all, she had walked out of the written entrance exam saying "Those questions were such fun". Then a letter came offering her a place deferred for a year. True celebrations started. They were capped on New Year's Eve when I held a party to which Susan invited Howard. At 18 she had found a life partner worthy of her. She was so happy that the perry went to her head. Susan actually stumbled on words. Fizzy Pear became Pizzy Fair and was used later to name their precious canoe.

Sharing the joys of Susan's life and later that of her family was a huge privilege.

In early 1979 Susan wrote one of her wonderful letters to tell me that her Harkness Fellowship would be further blessed by a first baby. For the first and only time in my life I sent a telegram congratulating them.

The greatest thing Susan did was to bear Laura, Lindsay and Sophie and, with Howard, to raise them, bathed in love, to be the exceptional people they are. Some of you will know that my mother was not easily impressed. However, after an evening with the Mannings she rang me to say how much she loved talking to the girls because they were so stimulating and delightful.

A small example must suffice to show how Susan gave them the right values. In the early years money was tight, so she decided cottage cheese should be an extravagant treat reserved to make occasions special. I never did find out when the girls learned that it was not as costly as caviar!

I shall finish with one of the poems Susan published, anonymously of course, in our school magazine. I wish there was time for all of the 4 poems I found. However, this extract from 'But autumn came quickly' must do:

A frosted spider's web hangs suspended  
In time. My frozen thoughts thaw to this sight,  
But sink back, into painless oblivion, before  
I remember what has ended.

Summer was thoughtless, carefree and gay,  
Ages ago, but only last week. What can I say  
Now – but Autumn came quickly this year  
And left me alone.

Honora, Howard, Laura, Lindsay Sophie, John, Claire and all Susan's family and friends, we are not alone. We can give each other some of the love that she gave us.

*Jill Hanna, Edinburgh 25 January 2013.*