

TRIBUTE TO JOHN LOVERIDGE BY SHEILA EDWARDS

John, JCL, Loveridge and occasionally Chunky - all names for the same person about whom each of us will have very different memories. He was undoubtedly a man of two extremes, experiencing and creating both great joy and enthusiasm but often beset by unwarranted self-doubt.

Perhaps my advantage was to have known John in several different contexts: with his family, via a mutual close friend, Ruth, who had known John long before I met him, with his many friends in Norfolk and with my own family. However, I wish I had known him when he was wearing his lettuce green trousers with the 45 inch flares and his muslin shirt, as he made his way to Covent Garden. Some of you here may remember it. I've had to make do with the photograph.

On one occasion, probably after a few glasses of wine, I said it seemed a great waste that there was no way that the knowledge accumulated in a lifetime could be preserved after our death. John, describing this as a ridiculous idea, said he would have little worth preserving, compared to his brilliant niece and nephew, Carolyn and Ross, his brother David, an excellent craftsman, and his sister, Joan, who was always so much better organised than he was.

Of course, he was wrong!

On climate alone, he could have filled several volumes, with a similar number devoted to classical music, especially opera. I have known no-one who could listen to a few bars of opera, name the opera, composer, and soloists and give the date of the recording. No less impressive was his knowledge of history, literature, current affairs, and cuisine of different types. Long walks in the forest and enthusiasm for bird watching extended the range of the Loveridge encyclopaedia.

When I recently moved near Wrexham, John informed me that if I had to move back to Wales, I had chosen well as the area had lower rainfall and warmer summers than anywhere else in the country. (The last few weeks have proved him right). He followed up with more detailed data and something about prevailing winds, by which time he had lost me. However, those details and enthusiasms inspired many of his Geography pupils both at Buckhurst Hill, in Essex and at Brentwood School, where I had met him.

On hearing of John's death, one of those former pupils at Brentwood, Liz Farmer, contacted me with a tale of how John had inspired her interest in climate. He had once taken her class of 12-year-old girls outside during a lesson, with a thunderstorm in full slate, to explain cloud formation.

They had all returned to the classroom drenched but enthused, with John lucky to have escaped a reprimand from the hierarchy. Liz explained that at the time of writing, there was a rare thunderstorm brewing where she lived and she was about to go outside and stand in the rain to remember John. Now working at Bergen university in Norway, Liz leads a team of post-doctoral researchers looking at climate and its effects on the seas of the northern hemisphere.

John and I often spent holidays in various parts of France, accompanying school trips, with groups of other teacher friends and together. He was always our personal meteorologist. There were innumerable memorable occasions but only time to mention a few. On one 6th form work experience trip, John stayed with a teacher and her journalist husband. They spoke little English and, though John's French was competent, it was far from fluent. When I asked him how they'd spent the first evening, John said

that they had discussed the problems of Northern Ireland. I was surprised but knew that a few glasses of red wine could bolster John's confidence to unknown levels. Later, the husband quietly said they had had an interesting but confusing evening; they were unsure who Mo Mowlem was, but thought she might have had something to do with the plot of an opera, as although they did talk about recent events in Northern Ireland, John seemed to be using the vocabulary of various 19c. French operas.

This was not the only time opera cropped up on one of our holidays! On a Mediterranean cruise, John was intent on being able to listen to his favourite music, and, as John's neighbours in Brookside will know, he enjoyed his music at full blast. On one occasion, there was a tap at the cabin door, and someone from the next cabin solemnly said "I can just about cope with 'The Queen of the Night' but the tenor singing along is the last straw" John apologised profusely and was too embarrassed to leave his cabin for the next few days.

He was most confident on home ground and became a brilliant cook, especially of Indian cuisine. His preparation took days, after a visit to Magdalen Street for authentic spices; he insisted on being left undisturbed until the many courses were ready for serving. For this process, John had every cooking gadget ever invented; all were used and left, waiting for a few guests to clear away after the event - which they viewed as a fair exchange, while John lay back in his reclining chair, totally exhausted by his efforts - but hopefully pleased with what would have been a triumph.

Wherever he went, John found it easy to engage people in friendly conversation and those on the checkout in Tesco's would always greet him as a friend on his daily visits. He also collected friends on holiday and predictably entertained them with his wit and knowledge.

Occasionally, this tendency to think of most people as potential friends backfired and, having retired from teaching on ill health grounds, John had to have an assessment. He felt everything had gone very well as he had noticed the assessor had the libretto of a Puccini opera on his table and they had spent the time discussing favourite arias, with John bringing the assessment to a close by singing his own favourite. He was genuinely shocked to find out later that he had failed the assessment.

He made friends too with young children, sharing in the silliness that had them laughing and giggling uncontrollably, - bouncing along a landing like a kangaroo or dressed in Hawaiian shirts and Lei for a Christmas lunch with a difference or organising an easter egg hunt wearing pair of pink bunny ears. When he was at his best, there were no age limits to the audiences that John could entertain. Those he had first known as very small children, still, as adults, have happy memories of him and when he used to visit his mother, Vera at Hill Barn, the other residents were always pleased to see him.

John was never fully convinced of his own abilities, and he was sometimes affected by that lack of self-belief that led him to walk away from problems he felt unable to solve. He was potentially an exceptional teacher but eventually realised that it presented challenges that caused him too much anxiety and he was able to retire early. At that point, he moved to Norfolk and, for many years, the change gave him a new lease of life, - his garden, birding with David, walks with John Mallen, time spent at the Lodge, at Redwater House, The Croft, Fieldfare and Mistlethrush Barn, visits from friends and family and so many holidays - and all to the accompaniment of his beloved, classical music.

There are so many other stories to recount but if you were to ask John when he was happiest, I think he would say it was when he was looking after his mother, Vera. At times, he may have found it stressful, but he also found it rewarding and I hope he realised that he also gave his mother that new lease of life, encouraging her to socialise and caring for her in every possible way.

And my memories of John? Since hearing of his death, I have had Steeleye Span's "All around my hat" playing over and over again in my head. It accompanied us on our many journeys to France and epitomised the feeling of joy that John could inspire in others when he was at his best. What will his legacy be for you? He was one of a kind who will have left us all with different personal memories. However, we can look back and remember that John proved over and over again that even in the midst of difficult times, there can be moments of unbridled laughter and joy.