

Our family was away for a few days, last week, and we were enormously saddened to hear of Cherry's death. After I'd spoken to Bill, I was enormously humbled by his request to say a few words today, which then led me to being enormously nervous at the thought of sharing the same stage as the other speakers who are both articulate and erudite.

When we were reminiscing about Cherry last week, Clive said what a kind person Cherry was. In his own words, he'd fairly often found himself in Bill's office because he could be darn naughty but no matter what he'd been up to, Cherry was always so NICE to him. If a naughty 18-year-old could remember that about his Headmaster's wife, 25 years on, says volumes about how she was regarded by the boys. I remember Bill sending one or two hardened smokers to have their mid-morning fix during break outside his lounge window. They had to remove their ties and blazers and were only allowed there one at a time – no companionable smoke break, this. However, they would always find an ashtray and a box of mints on the window ledge – not courtesy of the Headmaster, I might add! And if the bridge ladies happened to be there, their astonished looks and questions were met with Cherry's inimitable giggle and no explanation!

Much the same applied to the staff.

Initially, as one didn't know what to expect of a new Headmaster's wife, the odd staff member ventured up the hill – I'm sure much of it was out of curiosity, a few may have thought to get into the new Head's good books via his wife – but no matter the reason, the little trickle became a steady stream. Of course one usually had to get past Kleinbooi who, depending on his mood, could make it quite difficult. He worshipped his Missie. His position as gardener

and self-appointed carer of Cherry gave Kleinbooi great status and his vigorous defence of her was because he saw her not as an employer but someone who truly cared for and looked after him and his family. This wasn't to say that he didn't scold her, mind, or take her gardening advice – he generally considered himself to be in charge and Cherry bowed to his superior knowledge regarding particularly, her roses – knowledge that she'd imparted to him!

Academic and support staff members would appear for a cup of tea or a glass of wine, for a chat, for a shoulder to cry on, for advice or to have a moan ... all in the full knowledge that Cherry remained non-judgemental and their confidences were totally respected. She was like a warm sponge, absorbing information about them and their families, not because she was inquisitive but because she truly cared for people and information seemed to spill out of them in the face of such compassion and affection. She was interested in their families and school activities, be they cultural, sporting or to do with the gardens and grounds, which she loved. She could be found on the sidelines or in the audience of numerous musical and dramatic productions, rugby, hockey, swimming and many other activities. During House Plays she'd help the staff and parents in charge of make-up – I think, frankly, those make-up sessions turned into backstage socials! She knew about, was interested in and acknowledged so many of the school activities. This, combined with an impish sense of humour and a genuine interest, was compelling and they loved her for it.

Children of the koppie staff found their way into her garden in the full knowledge that they'd be welcomed with open arms and the cookie jar was always full. The annual Father Christmas morning

was such fun and not only because one saw Chalkie in the guise of Father Christmas. Treats in boxes for the children were provided by Mother Christmas and there was no cut-off age, although, generally, children still had to be attending school! In fact, now and then I had to gently remind staff that they needed to have children (or grandchildren) in order to attend, not that it made a shred of difference to Mackie; he came anyway!

Invitations to the annual “op-skop” were like gold! This end of the year function started as a way to say thank you to the parents who’d helped with food and the like at extra-mural activities. Governors and staff members, who headed up these activities, were soon included. As time went on, I’d receive more and more plaintive wails asking why someone hadn’t been invited; he or she was sure he’d assisted with SOMETHING during the year. The smiling, hospitable and welcoming hostess had everything to do with that – although her cherries wrapped in bacon were a considerable draw card too!

“Lots of people want to ride with you in the limo but a friend is someone who’ll take the bus with you when the limo breaks down.” I read this saying by Oprah Winfrey and to me it epitomises all that we held dear about Cherry. In fact, she’d have taken the bus every time. Everything Cherry did in the school environment was based on her support of Bill; she, herself, abhorred being the centre of attention and yet she attracted people like a magnet.

To me, personally, she was the most understanding and amazing Boss’s wife. There were times when she made me feel that I, and I alone, was responsible for every good thing that happened in the School. She was a very dear friend to me and to so many of the

staff. While Cherry was in hospital, and during this past week, I received many texts and phone calls from various quarters, and the common thread was a personal grief to lose such a special friend and a feeling of great sadness for her family.

Cherry will be inextricably linked to Boys High in the minds of all of the staff despite her desire to take a back seat. A phenomenal, gracious lady, who'd have been horrified by all these accolades, in saying goodbye, we thank you for being you.