

Tribute to Cherry Schroder

Tuesday 22nd August 2017

This tribute is delivered on behalf of the Boys High community, but please forgive me if I have based much of it on my own memories of Cherry.

Mr Schroder in his time as our headmaster, frequently referred to his beloved Cherry as the "mother of the nation" and in considering this tribute, that seemed wholly appropriate as she was a motherly figure to so many in the Boys High extended family of boys, staff, parents and old boys.

Cherry was not one to ever seek the limelight, but rather played her part behind the scenes. In that respect, her most important role was as the quietly supportive wife of the headmaster. She was of course fiercely loyal to him – an important part of a remarkable marriage. This was one of those cases that bears out the old adage that behind every great man is a strong and caring woman. As any headmaster will attest, a vital part of being able to survive the daily challenges and stresses of the job is to have a sounding board; a sympathetic ear; an unfailing ally. In that Bill Schroder was blessed with the ideal partner as Cherry was by his side both literally and figuratively through twenty years spent in this school and indeed beyond that when he took on the role of managing the major fund raising campaign on behalf of the Pretorian Trust.

But there were other jobs that Cherry took on in the service of the school and amongst these was the typing of the manuscript of the history of the school and for several years running the data base of the Old Boys Association. When the school celebrated its centenary she was instrumental in having a special Boys High rose cultivated by Ludwig's roses. Dozens of those striking cultivars are found in our grounds as a reminder of someone who was a very keen gardener in her own right.

One of Cherry's most striking qualities was to treat all people as if they mattered to her and that they mattered equally. When it came to the boys they could do **no** wrong. They were all addressed as "my darling" even if many of us, including her devoted husband, must have sometimes thought otherwise of the little darlings that we sometimes saw in a rather different light! In her eyes they were Boys High boys and this was all that mattered.

There were so many ways in which she showed her caring nature, from having all of the new Form One boarders around for an evening, to chatting to boys during sports fixtures and cultural functions, to making sure that prospective head prefect candidates were put at ease before being interviewed . A story that I was reminded of this past week was of Cherry before a House Play assisting some little boy who was playing a female role but who had no accoutrements to lend some authenticity to his appearance. This brought forth the spontaneous response from Cherry of taking off all of the jewellery that she was wearing and draping it on this boy so that he could look the part!

Teaching staff would have experienced the same feeling of joining a family when they arrived here and were treated to Cherry's hospitality at the Schroder's home. Social functions after gala nights of school productions or to thank the heads of extra-mural activities were hosted in the Schroder's home and Cherry was central to the organization and catering of all these. Marriages and births and times of sadness involving staff would all bring forth greetings, kind words and expressions of sympathy. And then of course there was the annual children's Christmas party which allowed her to host even the young children of staff.

I know that one of the highlights of Cherry's time at Boys High was meeting Queen Elizabeth when she visited Pretoria and that admiration for the Queen seems so fitting in that Cherry shared the same seemingly infallible memory when it came to people's names, faces and individual quirks. To my eternal embarrassment, I once let slip about not being too partial to *cous cous* and after that there was always a special salad for me when we visited, such was Cherry's attention to detail and concern to have all of her guests feel welcome.

It may seem very strange that one of my enduring memories of Cherry and one which clearly showed what she stood for, was an after-dinner conversation relating to the exchange rate of different country's currencies. That topic continued on several occasions and it was never resolved because I asserted in a matter of fact way (I suppose as History teachers are wont to do) that this was the way the world's monetary systems worked and Cherry was firm in her belief that all currencies should be worth the same and that all people should have equal access to money. You cannot argue against that sort of logic based on the notion that quite simply what ultimately counts is that you are human.

If the measure of a life is how many other lives have benefitted by knowing you, then Cherry leaves behind, in this community, a rich legacy of caring. She was possessed of a generosity of spirit that was boundless. Etienne de Grellet (Quaker Missionary) once wrote: "*I shall pass this way but once; any good that I can do or any kindness I can show to any human being; let me do it now*". Anyone who knew Cherry would have believed that this was her natural instinct. She truly was someone whose actions spoke more loudly than any words.

So in extending our condolences to the Schroder and Housdon families, we of Boys High wish to thank you for sharing your wife, mother and grandmother with us, and we want you to know how proud we are of that association.

John Illsley