

Ian Garth Fitzpatrick (1966)



A MAN ON INTIMATE TERMS WITH GOD

Former Headmaster, Desmond Abernethy, on many occasions touched on the importance of aspiring to be an energetic, upstanding, law-abiding citizen who'd make a marked difference to the world.

Given his own striking personality, this proved compelling to many of his protégés. He admired those with academic and sporting skills, but also championed what he often referred to as 'The Forgotten School Boy'. This included the battlers and especially those with courtesy, humour, frank independence and integrity.

Ian Fitzpatrick was foremost among them. He died on October 13 after an enormous and indeed courageous fight against leukaemia that lasted more than two years. Some of this time was spent in the isolation ward at the Donald Gordon Hospital in Johannesburg.

In spite of these challenges, he regularly drove alone from his home in Randburg to attend school functions, not least the 2014 and 2015 Old Boys' Dinners respectively and his 'Class of 66' 50-year Reunion two months ago. At the latter, though visibly ill, he read the Scripture at the School Friday assembly, acquitting himself extremely well.

He directed this note to his close friends in August.

Hi Guys,

Following the bone marrow last week, it seems that the Leukaemia (both types) has returned. Prof Ruff was keen for me to undergo another week of chemotherapy. A stronger dose than last time.

As a family, we've done a lot of soul-searching and decided against it. The last time (nine weeks in Hi-Care) with no improvement was a let-down. I have had 18 months of good life and plenty of support. Like Bobby Hayes, I have chosen to live this one out at home and take each day as it comes. Professor Ruff respects my decision.*

I have good days and bad days. My greatest wish is to attend the Reunion. I am praying for a miracle, but I don't wish to predict the outcome...

Best wishes,

Ian.



School House

Indeed no softy, Ian first set foot on the School House lawn in January 1962, accompanied by his elder brother Robert who'd been enrolled a year previously. They were products of a platteland school adjacent to the rough and tough Witbank coal mines.

Born 11 months apart in the same calendar year, Robert was placed academically a year ahead of Ian, but they shared the same desk. It was a time, in fact, when various forms were often located in a single room and the small classes comprised male, female, English, Afrikaans and Portuguese.

The Fitzpatrick boys often joked that they were initially pushed around by the numerically stronger 'boere', until their father, a former provincial welterweight fighter, taught them to box.

"Though younger than me, Ian was much bigger, much stronger and became our grand protector", Robert recalled. "In fact, he became the school boxing champion and was respected by all".

An interesting aside, Mr Fitzpatrick Senior later showed his colours in the School House car park. Whilst dropping his boys off one Sunday evening, he overheard a large-framed, loud senior boy directing some extremely insulting comments at them. He alighted from his car and demanded to know whether this boy wished the matter to be settled by him or Mr Abernethy.

No answer was volunteered, so Mr Fitzpatrick told the boy off, slapped him around the car park, and invited him to retaliate against 'someone his own size'. Not surprisingly, at first opportunity the boy disappeared into the dark with his tail between his legs.

Closure was put to the matter not only then, but for the balance of the Fitzpatrick boys tenures as newsboys. The incident was observed by several other parents, no doubt approvingly, and apparently news of it never reached Mr Abernethy.



Very special person

Ian was both a favourite among his School House mates from the outset and prominent among the entire 'Class of 66' throughout his years. This group, largely held together by Owen Frisby, went on to contribute more to the School materially than any previous group in PBHS's history.

"Ian was an extraordinary guy, had a superb sense of value, was extremely courageous, was highly committed, very generous, and was a marvellous friend, Old Boy and much more", remarked Owen.

"He was a man of God, integrity, honour and a true friend no matter what the circumstance", said another classmate, Keith Tindale. "One of the most committed Christian evangelists Boys' High has ever known; the school shaped and honed his life for the better. He gave 110% to everything he did, a shining example for all of us. He fought the good fight and ran the race of life excellently..."

His former skivvy boss, Donald Jones, was shaken by his passing.

Eulogy

These comments were made by Charles Marais' in a eulogy at Ian's Remembrance Service:

Fifty five years ago, in 1962, eight young boys, 12 or 13 years old, were dropped off at the steps of School House. They did not know then, nor could they have known, that the loving care of their parents would no longer be the dominant influence in their lives.

For the rest of their school days, that influence would shift to other boys, matrons, housemasters and teaching staff. Although housemasters and teachers would prove to be kind enough, the same could not be said of other, older boys, some of them bullies, who were less caring.

The group of young boys did the only thing that they could do: they relied on each other for companionship, support and protection. It was not planned, it was a natural consequence of their circumstances.

Over the next four years, their number grew as other boys joined their ranks. They came from other schools or from those who decided to prolong the delights of boarding school. In the end, the School House matric group numbered 15. Sadly, five (or one third) have passed, an extraordinary statistic for this day and age.

Fitz (or Fitzgerald) as he was known to all, was there from the beginning. He was one of those remarkable boys (and there weren't too many) who had balance when it came to work, social activities, sport and high jinks.

He was very focussed on his academic and sporting activities. He was a leader, becoming both a house and school prefect. He would often be the last to retire after a long day on the campus in stark contrast to those whose attitudes to school work were a little more laid back.

But it is not for academic or sporting prowess that we remember Fitz. It was the things that really mattered: stoep cricket, koppie kaia's, collecting pine cones, making babalas, playing gaining grounds on the rugby fields, cricket scoring over the weekends or just chilling and talking nonsense with his mates, particularly when capturing the winter sun on a lazy weekend.

He showed kindness and patience towards all, and always had the hint of good humour bubbling under the surface. But perhaps his most significant quality (and I say this with the benefit of hindsight), was that he was often the sane counterbalance to some of the ideas which his comrades came up with, which often bordered on lunacy.

The end of matric was without fanfare. We had the House Dinner for leaving matrics at which we all signed the menu (I still have it), and after classes had ended, we all drifted to various places to prepare for the exams.

There were vague ideas of meeting up sometime, but no heart-wrenching goodbyes. After the exams, we all moved on to undergo military training, attend university or make up the one or two failed subjects. But underlying as to an endless and so promising future.

Yet over time there came this dawning realisation that what we had was not just a bunch of fond memories. There was a real brotherhood, not discernible back in 1966.

At our 25th reunion, we were in touch with all fifteen and 14 managed to attend the celebration. Then at the 40th reunion, again all 15 were contacted and 13 arrived. Then, just last month, for the 50th, the surviving 11 were contacted and eight attended. This, 50 years after the end of a brief journey that lasted a mere five years, half a century ago.

Central to all of this was our dear friend Fitz. Always hard working, generous with his time and efforts, solid as rock even though his failing health suggested otherwise, determined, pragmatic and enthusiastic right to the end.

This day will come to all of us, leaving sadness in its wake. But ahead lies the greatest reunion of all and what an event that is going to be!

Post-school career and family

In 1966, drafted into the military, Ian did his naval basic training in Simonstown and subsequently completed the Naval Officers course in Gordons Bay and spent three months at sea on the 'SAS Windhoek'. In 1969 he was promoted to Ensign and Sub. Lt.

In 1968 he set his sights on teaching, attended Natal University in Pietermaritzburg, failed two subjects in his first year and was ordered by his father to either pay his own way or pack it up. He opted for the latter.

Ian moved to Johannesburg, joined Keartland Press – a large printing and packaging company – and spent several years with it. In 1978 he ventured into business with four colleagues and set up a division for a company called Adcolour.

He subsequently acquired financial control of the division, renamed it Colorscan, amalgamated it with Adcolour, and was appointed MD of the Johannesburg operation. However, it ran into financial distress and Ian lost everything.

He pulled himself up by the bootstraps, consulted to the printing and publishing industries, and joined Creda Communications as Sales Executive. Creda is involved in the printing of books, magazines and other products and printed the School House history.

Ian married twice, first to Diana Sharp in 1974 (the marriage lasted for 21 years) and then to Marie Claire Haslam in 1997. Two children were born out of the first marriage, Catherine and James.

Marie Claire had four children from a previous marriage, namely Natasha, Tandi, Philip and Peter.

A major bond between Ian and Marie Claire was their involvement with the New Creation Family Church in Robin Hills, Randburg, and its associated school, The King School, with 700 pupils. Ian also served as Chairman of the Oasis Babies Home for abandoned and HIV children.

**Bobby Hayes, who passed away some time ago, was in the same form as Ian and also a member of School House.*

Leon Kok