

## **A GUY CALLED VERNON**

It is with great sadness that we learned belatedly of the passing of Vernon Oliver (1948-2018). He died in October last year from very aggressive bladder cancer.

He suffered a heart attack in 2014; after his recovery his wish was to travel around southern Africa, but unfortunately long trips had to be ruled out.

Four years later he was diagnosed with stage 4 bladder cancer; went for chemotherapy and radiation, but was left much weakened. "The doctors decided to remove the bladder, everyone was optimistic after the operation, but Vernon passed away at the Urology Hospital in Pretoria", Karin, his wife of 34 years, told us.

One of a special kind, Vernon was a much loved personality of School House in the early and mid-sixties. Tributes from his former housemates, in fact, have pointed unequivocally to his wonderful rapport with all, marvelous sportsmanship and a delight in any company.

Said Charles Marais, a former School House head boy: "Vernon was one of those guys who made being a boarder really worthwhile and fun, and he'll undoubtedly be sorely missed by all".

As one who participated in numerous sporting engagements with him, it was clear to the writer that Vernon held emphatically to precepts such as one person upholding sportsmanship is far better than 100 teaching it; what you are as a person is more important than what you are as a sportsman; and that victory in the quality of competition is infinitely more significant than the final score.

Karin recalls that academics were secondary in his life. "In 1961 Vernon started at Boys' High, moving into School House, and as an avid sportsman participated enthusiastically in school cricket, rugby, tennis, cross-country and athletics. He also partook in House teams with enormous gusto. On passing matric, his house-master, Mr Vivien Henry, remarked that no-one's results surprised him more".

Born in Pretoria to parents Noelle and Edward Oliver, Vernon grew up on the family farm 'Edendale' near Cullinan with his sister Valerie, and cousins Brenda, Peter and David Murray. Both Peter and David were in School House, and much later their brother Vincent (1977).

He attended Cullinan Primary School for his first few grades and then transferred to Brooklyn School as a boarder at St Peter's Hostel under the care of the revered Mrs Cable. She subsequently became Senior House Matron at School House.

On matriculating at Boys High in 1965, Vernon was conscripted into the Army and assigned to the Signal Corps, spending many months on active duty in the former South West Africa.

On leaving the Army, he worked for Brookbond in Pretoria West, testing coffee and buying consumables good. However, his yearning for farm life ran strongly in his blood, and he then joined his father on the family farm.

He retired from farming in 1997 and then dabbled in computers repairs and a bit of teaching.

In his spare time, says Karin, he had a little electronics workshop and enjoyed creating various gadgets. He also loved the outdoors, fishing and camping.

All indications are that Vernon also had a keen interest in art, and had a close association with eminent Boys High art teacher, Prof Walter Battiss. Wilf Brown recalled that when he and his two brothers, Stan and Tom, visited 'Edendale' at the time of the School House 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2014, Vernon fervently showed them his Battiss sketches. Walter was a friend of the family and regularly visited the farm.

As a schoolboy, in fact, some recall that Vernon often spent time studying Prof Battiss' blackboard sketches and poring over others lying around the Master's disheveled classroom, and then regaling about it all at dinner. Prof Battiss had spent most of his childhood in the rural Orange Free State, where he explored the local Bushmen Rock Art and developed an interest in archeology.

Vernon married Karin, a product of Pretoria Girls High, in 1985, and they were blessed with two children, Glen (School House 2005), and Megan, who also attended Girls High.

Vernon had apparently met Karin at her sister, Linda's 21<sup>st</sup> birthday party in 1983. She was a student at Wits University at the time; Vincent, Vernon's brother, was a friend of hers; and she met the Oliver family on the farm.

"Two years later I moved from Johannesburg to be a farmer's wife", Karin recalls. "I loved the freedom and fresh air the farm offered, but on and off I worked as a bookkeeper in and around Pretoria".

Vernon frequently spoke of his days at Boys High as if they were yesterday, she recounted. "He would go through his photos and recall every boy's name and the sports teams and position in which they played. He made friends for life at the School!

"Witness to these reminiscences, Glen couldn't wait his turn at School House. He excelled academically and captained the School's rugby seconds team in his matric year, and was vice-head of School House, making his father extremely proud".

Glen studied accounting sciences at Tuks and Unisa and completed his articles at Deloitte. He currently works as CFO of a growing vehicle tracking company in Johannesburg, is 'newly' married to Kim, and they live in the city.

"Megan expressed little interest in being a boarder", says Karin, "so we did the daily commute'. She graduated at Tuks with a BA Law but was never going to be a lawyer. She then completed her Btech Medical Orthotics and Prosthetics at TUT and is currently living in Cape Town and working at the Western Cape Government Orthotics and Prosthetics Centre.

"Vernon loved and supported his children unconditionally, and is truly missed".

LEON KOK (1964)