

VALEDICTORY

Christopher Arthur Tuman Jennison

CHRIS

There is a profound difference between a man who breaks the rules and someone who does not accept the rules. This man was too independent of thought for the constraint of too many rules.

On Thursday evening the 6th of September Chris Jennison fell asleep hard and today I grieve deeply. The words fell asleep hard are etched in stone – a headstone – which serves as a monument to the memory of CAEDMON the father of English sacred song who indeed fell asleep hard by AD 680.

The cemetery where he lies is on high ground and after climbing to it and passing through you stand in the ruins of Whitby Abbey. This place Chris regarded as his spiritual home. He took his daughters there so they could feel what he felt. It is not unlike the feeling one gets at Anzac Cove Gallipoli, an emotional connection beyond words.

There are towns on the east coast of England that ring familiar – Scarborough, Robin Hoods Bay and there is an island connected to the mainland by a slender causeway which at certain phases of the moon is impassable. Lindisfarne, Holy Island where the Vikings struck without warning, sacked the place and massacred its occupants. This began their occupation and domination of the Britons.

A proud Yorkshireman Chris was but there is no doubt that the blood of Norsemen ran through him. His spiritual beliefs ran deep but of religion he may have echoed LENIN when that man said, "Religion is the opiate of the masses".

Chris was a warrior but without the cruelty inherent in some. He was an enigma, pursuing knowledge of things puzzling in themselves. To simply say he was well read would be to understate. He was self educated and university tutored. His grasp of a wide range of subjects was astonishing, his historical memory impeccable. But this came later in his life.

His father served many years before the colours, The Green Howards and Chris followed into the military the 2nd Battalion the Parachute Regiment with service in Cyprus. 1962 he was in Australia, we crossed paths in the Royal Australian Regiment. The following year was S.A.S. selection, we crossed paths again when he did his Aussie Para course. His service till 1976 is spoken for in these medals of his that I wear today. They are of no great moment in themselves they simply tell, in military circles, where he served and to a lesser extent his length of service. Many of you wear the same. How you served is another matter and believe me Chris Jennison could wear his with pride. For those who trod operational ground with him, were trained or

counselled by him I know you experienced his passion for and commitment to his Regiment. His compassion is legend.

So, Chris Jennison was a bloody saint, eh. BULLSHIT! He made his fair share of mistakes but then only those who do nothing don't make mistakes. His saving grace was honesty, he always did the best he could with what he had. Some will remember him as a hard drinking man, an alcoholic in any language. Chris turned that around, he was sober for the last 30 years of his life. He found a way to regain those good things that military service can corrupt in a man. Buddhists use that term 'The Way' one of the many disciplines he studied.

He kept his own counsel. Able to go unnoticed in a crowd and comfortable in any company he was always a candidate for a veiled existence. He gained respect from home grown and foreign agencies. He was instrumental in the foundation, training and field control of one such group. He was a diligent task master.

So this is the Jubilee Year. There are people at Swanbourne who first saw the dunes in '57 and others who tasted their unkindness this year. As a consequence many have never met. Some feel, 'well he wasn't of my time, and so, so what'. Yet they are all the same animal. Chris will always be of your time. His philosophy, his counsel is timeless. Never forget this man he is the stuff of folklore.

There are those present who have never worn a uniform, others who have but never served in the West. Many have travelled a long way for this one day. There are many who simply enjoyed his company. They walked away with a finer understanding of integrity and humility. We are gathered for one man, a true brother in arms whose embrace is now denied me. Never will I lift a phone again and hear, "NOW THEN IT'S ME!" in his familiar Yorkshire brogue.

But no matter how we as friends feel there is no comparison to that emptiness felt by family. In particular, his daughters Kristienne and Hannah, 'Two Flowers' Lily Rose and young Eli his grandchildren. Never in my lifetime have I experienced a love so palpable as that in the Jennison household, a love that will see them move forward with strength and confidence. That Jennison mantra as familiar to them and many of us may assist:

'The strength of the wolf is in the pack and the strength of the pack is in the wolf.'

Denied Marilyn and I at this time is a homecoming we cannot share. Lessons learnt other cultures touched things for him to clarify, qualify, add a deeper meaning to. Discussions I had with Chris could be passionate, he a Yorkshireman – hence the white roses – me a Lancashireman, the red rose. The War of the Roses could be resurrected but never was there a serious cross word spoken and as the girls can attest, never, ever, did we part in anger. Yet at this final parting I feel anger but the emotion anger takes many

forms and I recognise it as selfishness. Death is simply the final stage of growth.

Chris lived an extraordinary life. At 67 he was only three years my senior but in worldliness the breach was ten fold. Put shortly Chris Jennison was a good man, a father figure to be admired and a terrific 'POPPY'. He was so much to so many.

Thomas Moore the Irish Poet 1779 – 1852 in a letter to Thomas Hume wrote,

*"How shall we rank thee on glory's page?
Thou more than soldier and just less than sage."*

Alive today he may well have addressed it to Clackline – Attention Jennison!