

## **Eulogy for John Ewens**

**11 May 2012**

John knew he had not long for this life after a lengthy and debilitating illness. He wrote his own eulogy and passed it to Roy Coole. Roy has passed it to Bob Bartlett as chairman of Retired Comrades to circulate.

**Roy,**

This is a cross between a eulogy and my life story. I chose you because we have been mates for almost 30 years and our sense of humour is not only very witty but very similar.

**John**

John Ewens was born in 1937 only half a mile from where we sit. His father crossed swords with the police even before he was born. The story is rather funny when you think about what might have happened today. He lived in a bachelor pad in Portsmouth and belonged to a local gun club for target practice and kept his .303 at home. There was a starling that used to sit on a chimney pot opposite and wake him up early every morning. One morning he got up, put a bullet up the breach, window up, rested it on the sill, took aim and fired. Bird flew away ginning its face off and the bedroom filled with the smell of cordite. Landlady barged in, saw dad in his pyjamas with a smoking gun and rang the Police. All he got was a telling off by a copper on a bike and told not to be so silly in future. I hate to think what might have happened today. Sid and Vera got married in the 30s and bought a new semi in St Johns for £650. Two years later John was born and two years later the war started. Sid got called up into the RAF and they made him a lorry driver. He put it in a ditch and that was the end of driving. They made him an ack ack gunner. He ended up in Germany at the end of the war. Vera had not felt safe on her own with a young child so she moved in with Sid's sister in the middle of Portsmouth. When most people moved out of inner cities in the war, Vera and John moved into one. They slept on a mattress on the floor underneath a piano. Just in case a bomb fell down the chimney! The air raid shelter was down the garden and they had to get into it most nights. After the all clear John used to stand out the front gate watching the fire engines go by. He was only about 4 years old. Vera used to say 'Don't get cold. Come in when you are ready'. Something else that has changed over the years!

In late 1944 wrote Syd and said the house in St Johns had got bomb damage. Will she go home and sort it out? At that time if you got bomb damage the government paid for it to be repaired. They found a large crack all the way down one wall, top to bottom. Vera wrote back and said it was settling in cracks as no bombs had fallen on the village. The nearest one is where Goldsworth Park is now. Sid got his own way and when he came home it had all been done for free. John was about seven when they came back to St Johns.

This church and the village club were the focal points of the village and most of the village children came to Sunday school. It was a good place to be a child growing up. The Rev Edmonds was the vicar and his daughter, a large formidable spinster, was the organist. There were 14 boys, 8 men and about 6 young ladies. New boys had to do a year's probation in the front row of the church. John joined the choir as soon as he got back to the village. His musical career was to last for over 60 years.

When he was about 12 he noticed this very attractive girl who sat opposite him. They kept looking at each other and smiling. In the end John cupped his hand and in a whisper, as he does, he said, 'See you after church'. At that precise moment, the vicar who had turned round to point to the altar saw the boys were all giggling and said in a stern voice, 'Will the boys be quiet!' With that Miss Edmonds spun round prodded John and said, 'Quiet, you stupid boy. Everybody then heard John say, 'Ouch Miss, that hurt.' This young lady, Miss Sylvia Cook met John after church and they have been together for over 60 years.

When John was 11 he went to Woking Grammar School for 6 years. It later became the Police Station. Academically he was an absolute flop but there were so many exciting things to do that didn't require homework or exams. With great gusto he involved himself in the debating society, the drama club, athletics, cross country running, boxing and the school choir. He sang in performances of Handell's Messiah both as a boy and as a bass. In his last year he got into the finals of his weight at boxing. His opponent was a well built sixth former who was also in John's house at school. It didn't matter who won, there was only two points up for grabs. John tried to do a deal but this lad said 'Oh no. I want to win.' Result was John got a black eye in the first round and put through the ropes. When the ref pulled him back in he got another one. John lost and Vera was not pleased.

John and Sylvia's romance was beginning to flourish and John became head choir boy. They talked about the future and John thought he might like to go into the RAF. A few weeks later at tea time he said, "Er I've joined the RAF today." Sid said "Well done, Son" Mother said "How long for?" He whispered "Only 5 years." The rest of the conversation was not recorded. On the 27<sup>th</sup> Jan John toddled off for 5 years. He couldn't go on the earliest day for his age, i.e. 17 years and six months, as it was a Sunday and the RAF wasn't open. January 1955 was one of the coldest winters in Lancashire for many years and John was right in the middle of it. Just after his arrival the squad corporal asked for volunteers for the Flight Boxing Tournament. Failed boxer John put his hand up and there followed two weeks of running in the snow at 5 am. He caught pneumonia and was back squaded. When he came back he found himself with 108 Nat. Servicemen. As a regular he was not popular! The only fun he got out of that course was firing a Bren gun on the range. He had never seen one of these. He was told to fire from the hip, single shot at the target. Nobody told him there was a little button near the trigger guard, single shot or rapid fire. His was on rapid fire. He put a line of bullets round the target, up the sand, over the wall into heavens knows where. He stood there with this smoking gun in his hands. The range Corporal was not amused.

John went to RAF Netheravon in Wiltshire for training as a RAF Policeman. He still wasn't 18 years old. The drill sergeants needed a senior man to lead his course round the camp, get it to lessons and wherever else it was supposed to be, on time. John still didn't volunteer but still got the job, a set of orders and a white lanyard. The course had about 33 on it including 8 WAFFs. They all did a basic 4 week police course. This was followed by a 4 week motorcycle course. John chose a motorbike, thinking, "Well I can ride a bike, it can't be much different." This was followed by a twelve week intensive law course. John came top of the course and didn't get inspected on the final pass out. That night they were all sent on embarkation leave and two weeks later they all flew into RAF Nicosia in Cyprus. This was at the start of the EOKA terrorist campaign and British Servicemen were starting to get killed.

One morning, not long after they arrived, they were on the morning parade. The sergeant appeared with his clip board and said, "I need two volunteers to go to a new camp near Limassol to start a new Police detachment." Everybody stood still and John felt a push in the back. The sergeant said "I saw that; the one who volunteered and the one who pushed him.

Go and get packed.” They flew down to a brand new camp, RAF Akrotiri. They met two men from RAF El Adam who brought a Land Rover and a motorcycle with them and together with an Irish Sergeant from the Far East; they started an RAF Police Section. John and Bill, he who pushed John, got the motor bike between them. The following day he did his first motorcycle patrol with a loaded Sten gun on his back and a revolver strapped to his right knee. He felt like the cowboy Wyatt Earp. All he wanted was Tonto written on the petrol tank and a lasso on the other shoulder. Three days later John went to his first fatal as a result of terrorist activity ensuring he grew up overnight. John was to spend two and a half years in Cyprus and saw death frequently.

John did two more years in the north of England and one weekend when he was home he bumped into the late PC Ken Surridge in St Johns. A few weeks later he met PS Jock Ball, the recruiting sergeant and having already done the exams, he was in. In Jan 1960 eight Surrey recruits went to Sandgate. Four fell by the wayside. The four who passed their probation were John, Chief D.I. Tim Blake, PC Ron Kimber and Chief Insp John Hoyle. Sandgate, the Police Training School had two remarkable characters there at that time. 'Punchy Wallace was the PTI. He used to take you for runs along the sea front. After a while he would shout out, 'Into the water; go!' The sea in January was not for the faint hearted. Drill sessions with ex-guards Sergeant Will Squires were another comical event. When he inspected you each day you had to come to attention and shout your name and force out. One of the squad was Brown of Brighton Borough. He had been a Corporal of Horse in the Blues and Royals. When he used to shout his name and force, Sergeant Squires used to jump. I am sure they heard him in Folkestone.

The course duly passed out and John was posted to Guildford. In the spring of that year John and Sylvia decided to get married. The trouble was the date they had chosen was John's week of nights. The fact that he had to have the superintendent's permission to change his 10/6 to a 6/2 late is almost unbelievable these days. On the 16th July 1960, which was a bright and sunny day John and Sylvia got married in this very church. They got a police house in 1961 and moved to Woking where John became a divisional motorcyclist.

There were no personal radios in those days so the motorcyclists got most of the jobs. It was a wonderful way of learning the job. About 1964 he moved he moved to Burpham Traffic Centre and in 1970 he became the constable's representative for the whole county. John did all the organizing of the Social outings at the Traffic Centre and one day he and Pete Ritchie were driving up to Crown Court at Kingston when Peter said "Would you organize a sponsored drive for me. I want to raise money for three Surrey Charities. John said "Where do you want to go and for how long?" Peter said "I want to go to Northcape and it will take four to six weeks". John said "Why do you want all that leave, Its only up by Glasgow". Peter said "It's inside the arctic circle where the Marines go for Arctic warfare training in April and May". John said "When do you want to go?" Peter said "Oh in January, when the snow is really deep". By the time they had come back from Court John had agreed to do it and even the team had been chosen, Des McFadden, Dick Bond, and Fred Jackson. The whole thing took 18 months to organize and it raised quite a few thousand pounds for the three charities. All four had had the experience of a life time and it included sleeping on a jeweller's shop floor just a few miles from the Russian border.

John made many life long friends on Traffic Dept and in retirement started the now once a year Traffic Dept reunion. All through this time John had been making a steady climb up the Federation ladder. He became Secretary of the Constables Branch Board, Vice Secretary of the Joint Board and then finally was elected Secretary of the Joint Board. One amusing story from this period was when he and his chairman, Chief Inspector Jim Mundell used to go to meetings up and down the country. Jim was a non traffic person and was always pulling Johns leg about his

knowledge of the country. Jim proved his point one wet and rainy evening up in the Midlands when John not only managed to take Jim to the wrong hotel, he managed to take him to the wrong town! Jim was not amused as by the time they got there the meeting had started and the bar was shut.

Round about 1984 an invitation came from the Home Office to attend a garden party at Buckingham Palace for two people. John decided that as he had opened the envelope first he and Sylvia would go. Jim didn't get a look in. Sorry mate. It was the hottest day of the year and in the afternoon John and Sylvia were sitting on the grass looking for important people when someone crept up behind Sylvia and planted a kiss on her cheek. She squealed and looked up and it was the DCC John Smith, later to become Sir John Smith, Deputy Commissioner at the Yard. They all walked back to the Yard for cups of tea and when they were leaving Sir John said, "Ted Stevens is my driver for today. I will get him to take you back to the Mall." John's 1970 Toledo was parked amongst all the Rolls Royce. They went down to reception and there was Ted standing with the rear door open. John thought for one awful moment Ted was going to salute. John raised his top hat and Ted grinned, as only he could do, and stuck his tongue out.

In 1986 John's career came to an abrupt end. Following a heart attack in Crete, John went to the Doctors when he returned. He gave him an ECG, called an ambulance and John went to hospital and that was the end of that. He never served as a policeman again. He had by-pass surgery and left in April 1987. The following day John joined NARPO and was an active member till the day he died. For many years he was Vice Chairman of the branch and organized many of the outings including the annual lunch. The thing that gave him most pleasure was being made a life member of NARPO. It was proposed by his good friend David Harding, endorsed by the Board and the National Executive of NARPO. The certificate has pride of place on John's wall in the living room.

John and Sylvia had two girls, Jackie and Angela. They had three children between them, Jason and Sean and then Kirsty to Angela. The two boys are in good trades and Kirsty is a WPC in Surrey. Together with big Shaun, Keith, Kieran and Becky they are a good family and will take care of each other. Sylvia has been involved with Holy Trinity Church for over 30 years and one of the things they have is Prayer Groups. One group led by Margaret Storie prays for people who are sick. John would like to thank them all for praying for him so often. Their faith is a shining example to all that they meet and pray for people in need. Thank you girls!

In his latter years John developed Fibrosis, which is the decline of the lungs. He came under the care of the respiratory team at St Peters hospital and through that the British Lung Foundation and the local Breath Easy group. They both joined these groups He is convinced the team at St Peters extended his life a few years. That leaves you Sylvia. A good mate, a superb mother, a wonderful cook, the best wife a bloke could ask for. Loves you SME