

John Ross

In memoriam

John was my first nephew. He began as a bright and active boy and matured into a kind and gentle man who made a good impression on all who met him.

As well as being the beloved first child of his mother Helen, he was a model elder brother to his siblings Shaun, Dane, Andrea and Mike, who are all saddened beyond words by his departure, and he was a devoted father to his children Chloe and Sam.

Born in April 1968, John grew up with a strong bond to the countryside and an obvious liking for the outdoor life. Yet he also cultivated a deep and rich inner world, which he revealed in careful attention to all that he did and in mastering numerous challenging fields of achievement. He was an avid reader, on a wide range of topics, and developed a special liking for science fiction and ideas about the future.

Early signs of his strength of body and mind were there in plenty. As a child, he was happy and outgoing, and when the family lived in the village of Fonthill Bishop near Salisbury, he and his brothers Shaun and Dane used to explore the surrounding countryside, catching minnows in a stream, delving into caves, playing on a rope swing, climbing apple trees (where John was always the fastest up a tree), and biking around the local woodland tracks.

Back in Poole, living at Knighton Farm, John grew into a sturdy lad who excelled at sports. He was a fast runner, known at Oakmead School as the “pocket rocket” for his speedy sprinting. John also played on the wing in the school rugby team, where his strength and speed were a great advantage. His rugby tackle was especially feared, and he once broke the sports master’s ribs in a hard tackle during a match between pupils and teachers.

Yet John also shone at indoor pursuits. He was a star at technical drawing, and this talent soon widened into a love of drawing that led to graphic designs of remarkable beauty. His brother Shaun later adopted his art GCSE piece, a dragon design, as a stylish tattoo. His sister Andrea, inspired by his art, went on to a remarkable career in art and design in London. John loved music too, with eclectic tastes that ranged from Gregorian choral chants to folk music. He even learned to play the oboe, the saxophone and the flute.

John passed his early exams with ease and started sixth-form studies at Poole Grammar School. But he found the course content too confining, and soon moved on to a temporary job which involved his cycling the equivalent of a full marathon each day to get to and from work. Then he joined the army. This was a natural career for a young man of his strength and inclination.

The army was hard on John at first, and he had to persevere to cope with institutional life among strangers. After the basic training course, he was awarded a specially made plaque to honour his personal achievement as the “most improved” recruit.

John stayed in the army for seven years and reached the rank of Lance Corporal. He served widely, including a long posting in Germany and two stints in Northern Ireland. He also learned many skills, including HGV driving, skiing, and working with computers.

The computer skills were the key to the next phase in John’s life. He enrolled at Bournemouth University to work for a B.Sc. degree in computer science. There he worked especially on 3D graphics

and learned the esoteric arts of advanced programming. His careful and methodical approach to any tasks he had to do paid off here, and flowered into a competence that sustained the rest of his working career.

At Bournemouth University, John made ends meet by working part-time at a local branch of Tesco's. There he met his future wife Mandy, who became the mother of his children Chloe and Sam. He was devoted to the kids, and was always ready to do anything, however inconvenient for his own activities, to help them on their way.

My next real contact with John only began in 2013, when he was already an established family man. I was impressed anew by his wide interests, his sharp wit, and his robust good sense on the issues we discussed. Indeed, it was only since then that I learned of the full range and depth of his impact on those around him.

His sister Andrea called him the teacher of the family. He introduced her not only to art but also to badminton, which she has played with enough success over the years to win trophies and develop a lifelong love of the game. John used to let his brothers Dane and Mike accompany him on his fitness runs at the crack of dawn, but they left Dane puffing to keep up and gave Mike a struggle even to tag along on his pushbike. John also introduced Mike to the martial art Aikido.

John loved Aikido not only for its effectiveness in combat but also for its gentle philosophy, which in a very oriental way stressed harmony and balance over aggression and brutality. Mike was a natural for Aikido, and quickly went on to become the youngest Aikido black belt in England, and then to win awards at national level as a kick boxer. For John, the key was not to lose the benign outlook. His ultimate accolade in any activity was a quiet smile.

Yet John was no pushover. During his early army days, at home on leave, he witnessed a drunken guest behaving boorishly toward his mother Helen. John leapt upon the guest, pinned him to the floor and warned him, "One move and I'll rip your balls off." That was John — meek and polite until it was high time to act — then he was fearless.

But we should rather remember his gentle side. He loved good order and regular routines and disliked nothing more than mess and chaos. He was not what people call a social animal but he appreciated good company and always took the opportunity to accompany friends to events such as music concerts, theatre, cinema, or pub quizzes. Live music always appealed to him, and he developed a special love for the performances of the folk singers Chris While and her daughter Kelly, whose rendition of the song "Highwayman" was his favourite — and the song we have chosen to play for you here.

In summary, everyone who met John remarked on his kind, gentle and patient nature, and also on his witty spirit. His fondness for Eastern philosophy included sympathy for belief in reincarnation, which is the theme of the chosen song, and I think he would have been quietly certain his spirit would live on and return one day in a new form. Meanwhile, we can all be grateful he was among us, to inspire us with a life of gentle humility, yet also one of strength and accomplishment, and above all to have raised two quite delightful children, Chloe and Sam.