

Tim Cotton (Sa '73)

Too soon? When is it too soon? At this stage in life, most of us have long forgotten the half time speech.

Yet some memories from those days back at Bryanston Pres 4 study (or was it Pres 3?) persist against a hazy backdrop of vague sounds, smells and long lost feelings. The music of John Mayall, Fragile, Brian Ferry, Aqualung, Emerson Lake and Palmer, Jimi Hendrix – the louder the better. Coffee and toast at morning break. Over-waxed hardwood floors. Chlorine bleached basements and bathrooms. The excitement of Bryanston going co-ed in our final year. An indistinct cloud of memories against which a few recollections remain vivid.

And it is those vivid stories, trivial in their essence, that are trying to tell us something about ourselves to ourselves, that reveal certain truths long buried in our sub-consciousness.

The truth is that Tim was always a better friend to me than I was to him. As reliable and constant a friend Tim was to me, I was just a pain.

I still remember Tim's A level physical science project, in which he measured the tensile strength of human hair. The schoolboy prankster in me took it upon myself to volunteer my "extra-strength" pubic hair as I chased Tim through the physics lab with my precious donation to the cause.

And there was the time some local Blandford Forum girl came to our study for coffee and upon leaving suggested that we might want to carefully wash her coffee mug -- without any further explanation as to what communicable disease she might have. Tim, ever the gentleman, walked her out of the building while I jumbled up all the mugs on the coffee table to compel Tim to carefully wash them all – a rare sight indeed.

And through it all Tim remained the constant friend. The engine room in our rowing eight. The second row forward in that memorable unbeaten season for the second XV. Tim was always there. Ever present, always reliable.

But Bryanston was not the end of the road for our friendship. I continued to bedevil him at Imperial College, where Tim studied Material Science – a subject befitting someone so solid – while Steve Sarre and I hung out over in Engineering, focusing primarily on fluid mechanics in the Union Bar.

My enduring Tim memory at Imperial College was our weekly poker sessions, where the loser would buy dinner at Strikes, a then novel burger joint on the Gloucester Road, where you could pile up as much relish as you pleased on your burger – and it pleased Tim to do so.

Even back then, Tim already knew that practical business knowledge was required to get on in life, so he added a Masters in Management to his studies at Imperial College. It took me 10 years to follow Tim's lead on that one.

And even as we dispersed after college, we would find ways to reconnect across the globe. I remember an evening catching up with Tim in South Korea, at a casino outside Seoul. He was on some global shoe-sourcing expedition and I was on a stint at the Hyundai shipyard, overseeing the building of offshore oil rigs. We spent a splendid evening making our way through an enormous Korean barbeque dinner -- for when Tim and I got together, food was never too far away.

As would be expected for someone so solid and reliable, Tim found an equally constant and devoted life partner in Fiona and I know he was immensely proud of their boys, Cosmo and Tom. It was a true blessing that the whole family had the chance to spend this last year together, with Cosmo recently launching into financial services and Tom making movies, somewhat disturbing, but nonetheless compelling movies – I'm glad he's decided to move on from horror movies to focus on biographical pieces.

I remember being somewhat shocked by the casual manner in which Tim and his brothers would talk to their parents. Tim's dad seemed to take joy from provoking the most disrespectful of tirades from his sons. I would never have dared to speak to my father like that. But now that I have had four teenagers of my own, I find myself going out of my way to elicit similar reactions from them. For what's the point of having kids if you can't really embarrass them? And on a regular basis.

A couple of years ago, I went back to Bryanston for our class's 40th year reunion. Amazingly Ghassan Khoury, Patrick Slade, Jonathan Bowen, Tim and I all turned up, making up five of the seven in Peter Fale's first math A1 class at Bryanston and with the presence of Rob Adams, half of the Colts VIII rowing crew. This, 40 years on. Amazingly, I had forgotten the name of our math teacher -- who the hell forgets a math teacher called Mr. Fale?? Luckily, Tim was able to remind me, as Peter Fale was also at the reunion.

Tim was also a lifelong Liverpool fan. I remember him telling me about his trip with Cosmo 10 years ago to Istanbul for the 2005 UEFA Cup final against mighty AC Milan. Seared in the memory of all Liverpool fans, and the envy of all other football fans, in what was to be known as the Miracle of Istanbul, the lads from Liverpool came back from a 3-0 half time deficit, to win the European Cup. And Tim and Cosmo were both part of it. In my mind, no greater gift from a father to son – but that may be the soccer fan in me talking...

Late last year I caught an old documentary recalling the Miracle in Istanbul and emailed Tim the link. He emailed back that he really enjoyed the opportunity to relive that miraculous night, had just finished his last chemo and was looking forward to rebuilding his strength. As became his habit, he signed off his email with "Always keeping a #positive attitude 😊." That was Tim in a nutshell.

I last saw Tim late last year when Steve and I visited him, Fiona and Tom in Harpenden. We were served a delicious lunch by Fiona (as befits an expert caterer) and I was happy to see Tim still had his appetite. His fatherly pride in his sons and love for his wife were obvious. I was glad to see him still solid and steady, albeit somewhat tired. We did not exchange unrealistic hopes – we were just happy to be together. And when it was time to go, I looked forward to seeing him again on my next visit to England – all the while suspecting we might be saying our final goodbyes.

So if you ask me "Was it too soon?" my answer would be, "When is it not too soon?" It is always too soon to lose someone as constant as my buddy Tim. There is never a good time.

Thach Pham (OB)

I would like to say a few words about my friendship with Tim as a teenager at school.

I'd like to go back to 1969 when I, and some of you here today, arrived at Bryanston School in Dorset for our much anticipated start of the big Public School. I became aware of Tim as a one of a group of friendly buddies from Glencot Prep School and immediately recognised a person I could depend on and trust. Tim was, of course, young and keen and very well organised for school and, as with each of us, had his own particular style of wearing the school uniform. He quickly established himself as knowledgeable about whatever was happening (gossip is much too strong a word but his caring and inquisitive nature usually meant that he was the first to know about any developments in our closed and intense community). At this age we were battling with the demands of some scary teachers and the pressures on ego and friendship that adolescence provokes.

As we progressed up through the school we had to deal with O levels. Tim was a very hard worker and could be relied upon to provide the results of an experiment or the answers to an assignment, which others of us hadn't bothered to find out and needed urgently at the last minute. Such cooperation over these challenges cemented strong friendships, particularly since Tim was one of the few people with a new-fangled electronic calculator, crucial for those long tedious calculations!

I remember that he also pulled a trump card by somehow finding out the extract from *Pride and Prejudice* that was to be in the English Lit exam and frantically going through the entire book until he had got the quotation. He then very nobly passed on the information to us all!

At the same time there was sport, particularly rowing. We started rowing tub fours and progressed to eights, eventually forming the Colts Team coached by Alan Shrimpton (who is with us today?). This was seriously physically demanding but brilliant team work. As Thach Pham recalls: "As Junior Colts (Under 15) at our first Head of the River on the Thames, our cox, Chris Allwright, took it upon himself to try and cut the corner, thus taking us out of the Thames mainstream and leaving us to slog in dead water as we watched umpteen boats zoom by us on the outside of the long bend. Tim was not pleased! I once caught a crab at the end of a hard 1500-metre stint on the Stour river at Bryanston, I was fiddling with my oar up at bow and not paying attention as usual, which flung me out of the boat. As I came up for air and bonked my head on a passing outrigger, I could hear Tim shouting "Stay down!" – a practical suggestion, or maybe he was channeling coach Shrimpton's sentiment that staying down would be a good way of getting rid of the least productive and most painful member of the crew!

Another time, at the Pangbourne Regatta, nerves started to get to all of us in the crew. To boost his energy Tim ate so many Dextrosol tablets that he threw up before we started! I am not sure what the outcome of the racing was on that occasion but I can picture Tim, about twice my size, looking immensely athletic in his rowing kit.

Tim loved music and used to save up to buy the latest albums by Bowie and Santana. *Virginia Plain* by Roxy Music was a great favourite of his and when I shared a study with Tim and two others, a small room furnished in as bohemian style as we could manage, we played these records at ludicrously loud volumes. Tim was very particular about his albums and forbid anyone else to play them, so it was impossible to resist having one of them on the turntable when he entered and seeing his livid expression as he dived to remove the needle and rescue it. Even better was his outrage when the song continued to play because we were actually listening to a tape recording of the same track!

One thing that was pretty foremost in our minds at that time was of course food. We used to get a delivery of bread and milk at break time. The bread was mostly white sliced but there were two uncut loaves much coveted

by Tim. He would wait for their arrival armed with the bread knife, which was chained to a bread board, much like a sword and shield and there were very few who dared to take him on.

Also in our minds at this time was the opposite sex. Or, in fact, the lack of girls at Bryanston! We were in the year that the first half dozen girls were admitted into the sixth form, very courageous girls if you think about it, and Tim took great interest in getting to know them. However, at the same time he was always very conscientious with his work, and like many of us, he would spend half the night on a Friday completing the assignments that were due in the following day at 1 pm. In fact getting up after 'lights out' either to work or listen to music was huge part of life at Bryanston and gave birth to many a creative mind. We were concerned that we would be successful enough to make it to university and would study together in a small room in the science block. This became known as the 'Loughborough Room' after the establishment that we considered at the time as our last resort (I believe it is very different now). To relieve the tension of academic pressures, Tim instigated a procedure called a 'paper jam'. This involved everyone jumping up and down to very loud music whilst tearing up bits of paper into tiny pieces and throwing them up into the air until a complete snowstorm developed. We certainly all managed to let off steam but it wasn't appreciated much by the long suffering teacher in the next room!

Tim introduced me to his family on weekend trips out for pub lunches and the Cottons had a great influence on me as a young man. Phil's wonderful cooking and Martin's insatiable enthusiasm particularly impressed me and I marvelled at how different they were from my own family. It was a great pleasure to get to know all Tim's brothers and sisters and in due course spend some memorable holidays with them. They seemed to have lived in some extraordinary parts of the world and were always having exotic adventures.

In what we would now call his Gap Year, Tim spent some time in Vienna and afterwards joined me on a trip to the South of France with my parents. He arrived tanned and with hair down to his elbows and many adventures to recount. We explored the countryside on Solex mopeds, which were like a bicycle with a lawn mower engine driving the front tyre. Picture Tim, tall and slim, deeply tanned with hair streaming out behind him as he whizzed along the mountain roads.

Tim was at university in London and I didn't see him so regularly, but we got together for an incredible European tour with six lads in Benj Meuli's short-wheel-based Land Rover. Benj cannot be here today but three of us who were on that trip are. It was a mad venture and courted disaster, but our enthusiasm pulled us through appallingly cramped transport, excessive alcohol consumption, the accidental use of detergent instead of salt to spice up a rice dish and some very heated discussions about where to travel. At one point, after we had split up and three of us were travelling by train, we arrived late at night in Menton looking for somewhere to stay. Our plan was to fall upon the hospitality of some friends of my mother's whose house we knew, but by the time we got there it was past one in the morning and we daren't wake them at that hour completely unannounced. We were also absolutely desperately thirsty. Tim knew the location of the garden tap to quench his thirst but fearful of making a noise in the dead of night he resorted to enclosing the faucet completely with his mouth and then turning it on. Not a great idea as the water exploded everywhere causing him some considerable discomfort. However, we survived, being packed off the next morning by our somewhat astonished hosts and eventually ending up joining all the Cottons in a cottage they'd hired near St. Tropez. There the adventures continued with the family car, named 'Rosebud', in that delightful Cotton trait of giving cherished objects names, bursting into flames with Tim and his father in it. Tim jumped out of the passenger side while Martin struggled to squeeze out

of the driver's side where he had parked next to a wall. This was a fine opportunity to observe father and son cooperating as Martin gave vent to his temper with Tim blaming him for parking too close. I was deeply impressed at Tim's close and loving family and all the wonderful fun they had.

I have made a point of recalling some of these episodes from many decades ago to try to illustrate the bond that I felt with Tim, which I know many of us here today share. His loyalty and instinct to protect his friends came to the fore in an incident the following year on holiday in Menorca. We had all been in a night club and as we came out two of us were set upon, completely unexpectedly by some characters that we hadn't noticed, but had presumably somehow provoked. Tim and his brother Toby soon dealt with these guys and picked us up and dusted us off. Tim always seemed to have that ability to support and encourage others in a way that brought the best out of them. There are many people who can look back and say that if it wasn't for Tim they wouldn't have met. He was a great mentor and his networking skills and ability to bring people together has developed the careers of many. He combined a wonderful sense of humour with steadfast loyalty and amazing determination. In fact, he could be quite particular and he was hard to praise, always deflecting the credit he deserved by focussing on some slight deficiency. He was a supporter of the charity Medicine Sans Frontier and deeply concerned about injustice in the world. And as we all know, he and Fiona were the most amazing hosts.

To put it in a word, he was a good man and in the last few years he has been incredibly brave facing up to his illness and being so open with all of us, his friends and family. In this I know that we all want to express how incredibly Fiona, Tom and Cosmo have supported him. It is a beautiful testament to their long and happy relationship and the strength of their family.

A wonderful son, brother, husband, father, friend and colleague, Tim your life has enriched us all. Taken away from us much too soon, we will miss you dreadfully but are all deeply grateful for the friendship, love, enthusiasm and humour that you brought to our lives.

*Pat Slade (OB)
as read at Tim's funeral*