

## **Christopher Child**

(Sh '53) 1935-2017

Port Regis prep school, Motcombe Park, Shaftesbury, Dorset. 74 years ago, two seven-year-old boys, first night at boarding school, in the bathroom preparing for bed. I was bending over my very full basin washing my face when this tall blond-headed fellow pushed my face into the water. Nothing much, but being homesick my fury kicked in and I pounced on him. There ensued a terrible scuffle, we both fell to the floor and rolled around, each attempting to strike the other. In a flash Matron appeared and we were dragged apart and told to shake hands. For days afterwards, each time we passed, we scowled and made horrible faces. Some days later we faced each other, ready for battle each trying to outdo the other by making a more aggressive face when we both just burst out laughing.

That was the beginning of a lifelong friendship.

Christopher became Jum, short for Jumbo, he did have rather large ears and I became Jane, because my name was Russell. Jane Russell, some may recall, was a popular film star. Jum remained Jum, but Jane ended when we left school. I wondered, from time to time, when running down the wing with a rugger ball under my arm, what the opposing side thought when they heard supporters yelling, "Go for it Jane."

It would take too long to recall the pranks we got up to but that was the time of Dick Barton, Snowy and Jock, Simon Templar and The Saint, heroes we emulated by climbing out over the school roofs late at night. There were basement access tunnels all around the building. On one occasion, Jum and I in a free class crawled our way to the library where a window seat had a grill to the floor giving excellent vision. A class was in progress, with accuracy we used our pea shooters to target backs of necks and scarpered. We did all the things boys do, rules were to be broken. We did get away with it sometimes.

Jum's home was Tanglewood, Oxted (actually – memory returns, Sandrock, Limpsfield, near Crockham Hill), visited by me from time to time. Jum's mother, Margaret, always gave me a warm welcome, her sleeves rolled up and her apron covered in flour. Her cakes were scrumptious. Elizabeth (Jum's sister), Jum and I, on bicycles, would explore the paths and tracks around farmer's fields. I recall we pinched corn cobs from one particular field.

Our favourite teacher was Bob Winnall, Winnie we called him, he taught Latin, English and Natural History. He ran the shooting club and the boys who were the best shots he would take rook shooting or rabbit hunting, Jum was particularly good at paunching and skinning the rabbits.

We both went on to Bryanston. We would bicycle home the 100 or so miles at the end of the summer term, sometimes camping one night or pushing on in one day, that way we received the train fare as pocket money. We made catapults to hunt rabbits, with little luck though, and for sheer fun we would mount the farmer's cart horses and ride around their field. We experimented with smoking and drink, sometimes getting more than a little worse for wear. We became familiar with the four-mile punishment run from the main gate past Middle Lodge to Durweston. We signed up for the Pioneer corps and learnt how to fell trees, a skill which stood Jum in good stead for his time in France. We also learnt to clear ground and put up fences, we even learnt to lay bricks and helped to build the open-air Greek Theatre.

We made quite a team, but where Jum shone was his way with the girls. I was just shy and hung back. It was he who suggested I joined him at the ballroom and folk-dance classes. It was he who helped me come out of that shell. Jum loved the river, rowing was his passion. One year at Henley he was a member of the winning eight at the Schools' Head of the River. One summer holiday, Jum's father, in the shipping business, arranged passages by cargo boat to the Channel Islands where we enjoyed bicycling around Jersey and Guernsey. On other occasions we did school trips to the Lake District which bred in us a love of mountains and climbing.

Towards the end of Bryanston, we were sitting in assembly watching the winners of the Pioneer Scholarship collect their prize. This was a parent-sponsored challenge for boys to travel. The challenge was to plan and prepare a holiday with purpose. He nudged me and said "We'll win that next year." As we left the hall he said, "Well, where shall we go, what will we do?" My immediate reaction was negative. "We'll never do that." "Why not" said he, "let's give it a go?"

That was the way Jum lived his life, full of confidence, determination, and energy and it rubbed off on those around him. He was a leader. We did win that scholarship and had a wonderful one-month adventure in the Austrian Dolomites. Between us we worked out what we planned to do, he concentrated on planning our route from Otz along the Otztal Valley to the Dolomites to cross over via the Shaufelnieder Gap down to the Stubai Valley and on to Innsbruck. He also meticulously researched our travel arrangements whilst I made a relief model out of papier mache of the area we planned to explore. Jum excelled at recording detail and description in his logbooks. He was a born journalist. The logbook of our Austrian adventure filled 128 type written pages of A4 paper.

Schooldays over, Jum volunteered for the Royal Marines. He did his officer training at Eaton Hall and was then seconded to the King's African Rifles. Now a Second Lieutenant he saw active service in Kenya against the Mau Mau. In the meantime, I was deferred to study at the London School of Printing and Graphic Arts, maintaining contact with him by letter. I know he has written about his adventures during his King's African Rifle days but one thing sticks in my mind. His platoon sergeant was Idi Amin, an excellent NCO, he told me, brilliant at carrying out orders but a total failure if left to use his own initiative.

Jum completed his two-year tour in Kenya, but before he left East Africa, he went to the Outward Bound Mountain School at Loitokitok, on the slopes of Kilimanjaro, where he worked as an instructor teaching students to master the five day expedition to the peak and back. This was in the 1950s, when the whole mountain was still a frozen world of snow and ice all year round.

At about the same time as I finished my studies, Jum returned to England and became an instructor at the Ullswater Outward Bound Mountain School. National Service for me, following Jum's example, was also in the Royal Marines.

Jum had loved his time in Kenya and applied to join the Colonial Service. At Cambridge he passed the necessary exams, his Swahili giving him a great boost, and went to live and work as a District Officer, in Tanganyika. On home leave after his first tour, with me standing as his best man, he married his beloved Angela, and they returned to Tanganyika together to begin married life. John was born in what had by then become Tanzania and after

independence the new Child family returned to England, where Jum's experience in Africa and his by now excellent Swahili, led him to his lifelong career in the BBC World and African Services. After a few years living in Richmond, where Francie was born, the Child family moved to Bourne Lane, Tonbridge, where Mary and Guy arrived to complete their family.

I recall Christmas times when we stayed at Bourne Lane. Particularly one special Christmas. Their young were little, well not so little and ours very little. There was snow outside, it was dark. Warm inside, everyone happy and the chat was chit chat mingled with laughter, lovely. Suddenly – well not so suddenly because, well it might have been suddenly because tinkling bells were heard, – they grew louder, quickly the chat subsided into silence and old and young, quite a gathering you see, looked at each other, the children's faces wide eyed and wondering. We all saw through a window a flash of red, a flash of red again, the tinkling bells now loud, at another window antlers passed by and red again and then they were gone, the tinkling of bells subsided. The silence was held momentarily, then babble and chatter started again. Father Christmas had, for a moment called on the Childs.

Jum was a brilliant husband and father, he and Angela amazing parents, just look at their children now, all happy, successful and with wonderful children of their own.

He was a loving and understanding godfather to our daughter Zara, I also had the privilege of being godfather to Mary.

There is so much to recall. Visits to Aux Menieux their magic place in France, canoeing down the Gironde, picnics, Angela's wonderful meals on that long table and clearing the storm-damaged oaks into firewood. Jum expert and a devil with a chainsaw.

In recent years we retraced our adventure in Austria and some of our favourite walks in the Lake District.

The last time I saw Jum, the day before he died, he was very poorly, but despite that his humour shone through, he smiled, squeezed my hand and winked at me.

Dear Jum/Christopher, exceptional man, husband, father, grandpa, godfather, friend, you have touched so many lives, we'll never forget you.

*Russell Polden (Sh '53)*