Ian Forbes

The Eulogy by Clive Peckover, 7 November 2017

I am honoured to be asked to say a few words today about our friend, Ian Forbes.

As Pikey has said, the word legend is much over-used these days.

But no other word will do where Ian is concerned.

And the many, many fantastic tributes to Ian which the family have received – from people of all ages and who knew Ian in different ways – are testament to this.

He liked people – Ian was the greatest "people person" you could ever know.

And he enjoyed life – which was to be lived well – getting things done and having fun while doing so.

Above all, Ian was a great family man. Nothing meant more to him than his beloved Jill, and his children and grandchildren, of whom he was so proud.

Ian was also a great business man, a pioneer in the advertising industry.

And a great Club man, who embodied the values of sportsmanship and fellowship which he did so much to enable so many others to share.

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Ian was born on 11 April 1940 in Lambeth, and south London was home for most of his life, particularly Herne Hill and later Wallington.

But his family's Scottish roots were important to Ian and, later in life, regular family holidays in Scotland; terrific Burns' night celebrations; and the dash he cut in kilted evening dress were signs of this.

Ian left school at 16. The extent of his formal education at Wilson's may been limited – though he was very proud of his 'O' level, in maths.

But Ian never lacked confidence, and having started as a delivery boy at United Dairies, he became an office boy, at Lintas, an advertising agency owned by Unilever.

Ian rose through the ranks into management, where he took one of the big decisions of his career.

He decided that ITV were not doing a good enough job for the cost of advertising on their channel, and he took Unilever's business away from them.

This earned Ian a summons to see the great Lew Grade, one of the big bosses of ITV.

Ian received what he described as the biggest [the next word also began with b] of his life.

But Lew Grade clearly saw something in this ballsy young man, because Ian soon joined Alan, Brady and Marsh, one of the country's top advertising companies – on Mr Grade's personal recommendation.

Ian went on to become media director of ABM, and there met John Coombs, who, with his wife Margaret, became good friends of Ian and Jill, with much fun had in and outside the office.

Ian saw that changes in the advertising industry were creating new opportunities.

In 1975, Ian founded All Media Services, with John Evans and Barry Post. They bought air time and advertising space and sold it to the advertisers at a better price than could be obtained elsewhere.

The margins were big and the lunches were long, which suited Ian's work hard, play hard style to a tee.

Ian was pushy – hard to believe I know. But he also knew business was about trust and long-term relationships. And that's what gained and kept the big accounts, like Remy Martin.

So too did the kind of personal charm that saw Ian present the great Ella Fitzgerald with a rose from his table, from his teeth to her cleavage – which was so well received by her that another 40 guests felt moved to do the same.

Ian was with AMS for over 20 years and the company thrives to this day.

After that, Ian had a spell with Active Media, an international barter company. He put those with an excess commodity to trade – in one memorable case, of chocolate-flavoured toothpaste – in touch, to mutual benefit.

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Business may have been a way of life for Ian, but the centre of that life was his family.

Ian and Jill met in Herne Hill. Jill went to the Mary Datchelor school, nearby to Wilson's in Camberwell. And she first saw Ian on a number 68 bus.

Jill was not interested at first. She thought he wasn't tall enough.

Fortunately, Ian grew another six inches, and Jill agreed to go out with him.

Later, after Ian had asked Jill to marry him three times in one week, she agreed.

They got married on 9 September 1961.

Ian and Jill were life-long buddies and soul-mates.

They complemented each other in so many ways, and shared a dry sense of humour.

They each had their own activities – business and the Club for Ian; the 3rd Beddington Scouts, being a Church warden and bee-keeping for Jill – but they backed each other up in all things.

They shared an interest in – and a warmth for – people, and a quiet commitment to helping others.

And they had four wonderful children – Alex, Doug, Helen and Stuart.

Ian was very proud of his children – of the choices they made in life and of the people they became.

They were a close-knit family and a formidable unit.

One that was strengthened in time by the addition of Debbie and Gwen.

And then by the delight Ian took in his grandchildren – Philippa, Nicholas, Ellenor, Elizabeth, Francesca, Sammy, Anne Marie and Alfie.

They were all very special to Ian.

And family Sundays – when the Forbes clan would gather, usually around the lunch table – were a special time for Ian.

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Ian's friends were also part of his family.

In particular, Bob and Irene Dorey, who met Ian and Jill at the St Paul's Church youth club in Herne Hill in the late 50s, and who became firm friends.

Their families grew up together and had many happy times.

Particularly at Christmas, when a favourite game saw Ian and Bob ensconced at the top of the stairs, with a bottle of whisky, sending seven over-excited children up and down to the find the answer to increasingly muddled clues.

And on holiday, despite the occasional mishap.

Like climbing in the window of a hotel in Chipping Norton after being locked out, to be greeted by the landlady in her see-through negligee. Ian said she had worn it especially for Bob.

And stopping to picnic in a layby in Prague only to find it was the one used by the local prostitutes.

Ian was a loyal friend who brought much needed humour in tough times also – as when he appeared at Bob's bedside after his first heart operation, armed with brandy and cigars.

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For Ian, the Old Wilsonians were family too.

Ian was sent up the Club when he left school, by the deputy headmaster, Eric Massey, a man he greatly admired.

Ian soon became a key figure at Hayes, with friends and team-mates like Mac McAlister and Les Wilks.

For Ian, the Club was a community of friends and families.

Friends who played together, and whose families grew up together and holidayed together, particularly on the annual trip to Talybont.

And Saturdays – whether playing football or cricket, or later umpiring or supporting – revolved around the Club, where Ian's Eric Morecombe-style slap round both your cheeks and "what are you having, my boy?" were familiar to all.

Many of us will recall being packed into the Forbes car to be got up to Hayes and home again, after the proper post-match socialising.

Values of sportsmanship and hospitality mattered greatly to Ian.

He played the game hard but he entertained the opposition and the umpires and referees just as hard, with a large scotch and dry as the favoured accompaniment.

Having lost a match at Tonbridge and stayed late afterwards, the opposing captain asked Ian "What are you like when you win?"

In later years, it delighted Ian that the success of the junior sections in cricket, tennis and football brought more families to Hayes to enjoy the Club, and he made them all feel welcome and at home.

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This commitment to the Club and generosity of spirit made Ian a formidable fund-raiser and event organiser.

When in 1969 a campaign had to be launched to save the Old Wilsonians from financial difficulties, Ian was one of those who stepped forward to help.

A “500 Club” was one of the initiatives – offering the chance of winning a mini or £500. Ian probably sold 450 of the tickets.

Thereafter – from the donkey derby to the annual dinner and ladies’ night, from president’s days to Club Force – Ian was at the heart of it.

And the breezy charm with which Ian could part people from their money – it was never a question of whether you wanted whatever he was selling; it was simply how many – raised many, many thousands of pounds for the Club.

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Ian always had time for people who wanted to enjoy the Club and bring something to it. He did not like fuss or time-wasting. And he was very modest about his achievements, preferring just to get on with things in the background.

Ian would not have relished public tributes like this.

But tribute must be paid to a man who meant so much to so many people.

Ian gave 100 per cent to everything he did.

He carried people’s respect and affection, because he had respect and affection for them.

Ian’s strength of character brought out strengths in others.

And his gift for friendship brought people together and kept them together in ways we shall always remember.

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