

Jon was born in April 1970, not long before my 12th Birthday, I remember being really chuffed about having a brother. This new situation gave me great expectations, a new buddy, someone to play football or cricket with and someone to rough and tumble with. As you might expect the novelty soon wore off and I was less than pleased when I realised I'd have to share my room with him and even more unhappy that his main skill seemed to be the ability to spend every night crying, keeping us all awake.

Being the youngest, Jon was always the centre of attention. Ann spoilt him rotten, as she does all the youngsters. She reminded me recently of the hours that Dad spent pushing a laughing "Mr Bones" around the garden in the wheelbarrow, and every time he stopped Jon demanding more.

Jon loved the outdoors and many childhood nights were spent camping in the orchard of Mums large garden. He loved the peace he found there. Also at this time, nurtured by Mum, he became fascinated with animals and insects alike.

It was the uniform that defined Jon. He wasn't interested in a neckerchief and woggle, so joined the army cadets as soon as he could, aged 13. This was where he met two men who had a massive influence on him. Major Alf Croudy and Major Tony Mansell. They had a great deal of time for Jon, recognised his potential, and gave him every opportunity. They really helped open up his world, discovering the great outdoors beyond the village and extending his outdoor experience to the Brecon Beacons, a place he really loved. When they went on trips there, the army cadets would stop in a place called Birch Hall, and Jon, no doubt encouraged by Tony, convinced the other cadets that it was his family pile.

Jon never forgot the mentoring and support he received from Tony and Alf, and became good friends with them and their families in adult life.

When he left school, Jon was a bit uncertain but finally joined the Junior Regiment at Colerne in Wiltshire, this was where the real man emerged. During his first term in 1987 he won a prize, and it was a very proud day for all the family in February 1988 when we went to watch Junior Regimental Sergeant Major Jon Birch command his passing out parade.

From Colerne, Jon joined the regular Army and he saw an opportunity to further express his love for animals by quickly getting a transfer from the Royal Army Ordinance Corps, his initial posting, to the Royal Army Veterinary Corps at Melton Mowbray. Jon really enjoyed his time there, apart, I imagine, from the time he managed to get himself on the wrong end of a horse hypodermic which knocked him out for 2 days.

In his time in the Juniors, at Melton and various subsequent postings Birchy made some lifelong friends many of whom are here with us today.

Melton was also the place where he met Anita, but not during his posting as you may expect. It was during the years that Jon was stationed in Melton that Anita went on her travels.

Their paths finally crossed when Birchy came back to Melton for the traditional September reunion. The pair were introduced by a mutual friend at the infamous 'Tubes' nightclub and it was obvious to Anita from that first introduction that Jon was a 'cut above the rest'. The two exchanged addresses and began writing to one another while Jon served overseas in Cyprus. The rest, as they say, is history. They were clearly destined to be together and became soul mates. Their shared sense of humour laid the foundation of what was to become a very happy and loving marriage.

Jon never forgot his roots and when he left the Army he got involved with the Army Cadets again, attained the rank of 2nd lieutenant and ran his own detachment in Cranfield for about a year. He wanted to give something back.

Having left the army, the lure of the uniform remained and in 1995 he acquired two new uniforms. The first was in June of that year when he joined the Bedfordshire Constabulary. Mutley, as he was known in the force, really embraced his new career. He spent a short time at Dunstable and Leighton Buzzard. He also had a go in the CID, but that didn't suit him. Eventually he found his speciality, doing community police work in Mid Beds. He loved this, serving his public, dealing with the community, hands on, face to face.

He thought nothing of giving up his rest day to attend a council meeting or to be Father Christmas at one of the School Christmas Parties. His hard work earned him great respect, from both his fellow officers and the people in the community he served. This is confirmed by the following words which are an extract from a letter of condolence that Anita received last week

“Jon exemplified everything that is good and fine about the Police in our County. He was a quiet Hero.”

When the latest changes came and the new policing arrangements meant he had to stop his community based work, he was the consummate professional, didn't complain, he just got on with the job.

The second uniform of 1995 was when Jon confirmed his love of British tradition when he joined the Bedford Morris Men. George, as was his Morris name, loved his dancing and turned out whenever he could. He really enjoyed all aspects of Morris activity. George was always a very enthusiastic participant and was really frustrated when he had to stop for a while due to his dodgy knee. One Christmas, he introduced me and a few mates to the Plough Monday celebrations and this has since become a permanent fixture in our diaries.

It was also in 1995 that Jon and Anita set up home together in Stewartby and along came marriage and the boys, but not exactly in that order!

Jon was a man of broad interests and a dad of many talents. He loved to get involved with the boys school projects, and they were always in the prizes for creative modelling. He was great at baking and decorating cakes; we always looked forward to the boys' birthdays to see what cake had been created that year. One of the most memorable was a chocolate Tardis from one of his favourite TV programs, Dr. Who. He was also a bit of a Jamie Oliver in the kitchen, renowned for his mean Sunday roast.

Matt and **Jon** spent many happy hours together just drawing and doing arty things, usually while listening to some of the bad taste music that he was renowned for.

He had acquired a love of trains from his Dad, Arnie, and this was also shared with Matt. The highlight of their year came every October, when they had a long weekend in York together, visiting the National Railway museum and topping it with a visit to their favourite Chinese restaurant, Jumbos.

As **Joe** grew up, Jon nurtured his love of everything outdoors by taking him camping in Mums orchard, just like he had done as a boy. He and Joe also shared a fascination with space and the stars. When conditions were right, they would get his pride and joy, a proper star gazers telescope set up in the garden and just gaze. They also shared numerous days out at the National Space Centre near Leicester gleaning information and building their knowledge. Jon liked to play chess to stretch his grey cells and took great pleasure in teaching Joe to play as well. Interestingly when Joe had grasped the game, Jon could never beat him, apart from once which I believe was a gimmie because Joe had to get to school and was running late.

Jon loved everything British. He loved English Heritage sites and stately homes and Anita and he would often go visiting. He valued his days off and as soon as one day trip had finished, he was planning for the next.

He loved London. He loved the arts. He loved the Theatre, especially in the West End. He raved about Les Miserables, had seen it twice, was first on his feet to give an ovation, and much to the boys dismay, was planning a family trip to see it again in the summer.

Jon was a man of great capacity and I don't just mean Costa Coffee and chocolate shortbread.

He had the capacity to meet and treat everyone equally; he was never demanding and never judged anyone. He was very modest, rarely spoke about himself, but always had the capacity to remember what you had been doing and talk about it. He was an example to us all.

Jon was also a man of great courage. He faced his illness full on and showed massive determination in trying to overcome all the issues that came with it. I couldn't help but admire him. I was humbled by his bravery.

Before I finish, I'd just like to put a small issue to bed. I've heard a nasty rumour that my brother liked a drink. I think this is an outrageous slur on his character. Jon didn't like a drink.....He absolutely adored oneor even more if the time was right!

This seems an appropriate moment to remind you that are all invited to join us at the Horse and Groom after the service "to drink with Jon to days gone by".

Finally, whichever Jon you knew, Husband and soul mate, Dad and playmate, Son, Brother, Uncle, Nephew, Birchy the Soldier, Mutley the Copper or George the Morris Man, I'm sure you knew he loved life, and as part of his life it naturally follows that he loved you. I'm also sure that like me, you are eternally grateful that you were part of his life, but more importantly that his memory remains part of yours.