

GRAHAM LEWIS HOPKINS – A TRIBUTE

With his customary blend of questioning and clarity, Graham had this to say about death: “I will perceive the white light and become one with it. The force of my spirit, the essence, will return to a central source. Though, how much will I continue as anything recognisable as me? Will my spirit return in reincarnated form - as a higher being or a lower being? Possible. But would that be me? So, I will cease to be... I will live on only in terms of where I am in the hearts and minds of other people.”

When Graham died, ordinary life abruptly halted. The most recent interactions with him (the forwarded song and article, the video chat, the mundane message and latest plan) suddenly became the last. He wasn't here anymore, and we were starkly reminded, again, how all must pass.

Pam, Ella, Laura, Niky: you know that Graham was proud of the bond and togetherness in your family, and he knew he was lucky to have known love. You are a family forging on, re-shaped by the revised horizons that have been forced upon you. Memories of experiences shared with this man imprinted within. Tears of love lost in days gone by. And ahead, a future forever coloured by losing him.

Graham – We walk our roads more alone now than when you were with us.

Yet mixed with our grief, there is much gratitude. There are lots of things we didn't get to do, but there was so much that we did. A back catalogue multitude of good and great times indelibly embedded inside us.

We didn't get to see the wholly fulfilled version of you, but your 63 years were characterised by a trademark taste for life. You had versatility and vitality, zest and radiance – in spades.

You were perpetually sharp in a spectrum of contexts – an astute aesthetic thinker, musing over the underlying extended metaphor, the phrasing of a solo, or the optimal way to re-cast a photoshopped image; an analyst, assessing the synergy of Tottenham's striker partnerships, or deconstructing design flaws in finance software systems; and an ever-adept and daring player - gauging an endgame sequence of chess moves, finessing your way to a borderline slam at the bridge table, and relentlessly calculating the spin technique required to make a pool ball submit to your intentions.

You were a lover of performance – at home amid the drama of the stadium, stage, pitch, pool hall; relishing the press of the crowd, the boost of a microphone dedication, the compelling call to dance, and the inventiveness, conviction, and panache summoned by those in the spotlight to pull off the reward applause and celebration.

And you were a performer too – that lithe surge through midfield in the Dulwich Park mud of your youth, the life-long fascination for clearing the table with an emphatic 8-ball sign-off, and your significant performance in the *Men About 50* documentary, when you spoke so lucidly and sincerely of the regrets and hopes, the pain and joy that come with the territory of living.

You were kind, and enjoyed a genial rapport with the family's procession of pet dogs, cats, and rabbits. Your compassion was uncompromising. You knew well the difficulties and sorrows of the impaired, the unprivileged, and those less favoured by fortune; you had time for the outlier voice. And you were ever-ready to call out heartlessness and ruthlessness, and the cronyism, cruelty, and corruption lying behind too many of the choices of the powerful.

You were an adventurer – freewheeling, hitch-hiking, always up for it. You had the traveller tenacity. You wanted to be out there, to walk, drive, ride the miles; to watch and engage and probe for meaning; to reach for an elusive essence. For you, what it was always about was not so much the destination as the journey along the way.

You were a friend - of the highest order. Always loyal and supportive, but equally ready to question a slack platitude or over-casual assertion. With you, there was generosity of spirit and listening depth. Roads we travelled together, places we stayed, people we met - humming over what had gone or was still to come. You were there to bear witness; alongside in the downtime and up-time; there when the possibilities of the world unfolded. And when the clamour had faded and the hour was late, you were still there as we stared at our self-doubt and traded our truths. With you, there was the assurance of being understood, being fully known.

Beyond growing your family with Pam, your ultimate legacy, perhaps, was/is as a catalyser. The last picture you uploaded to our WhatsApp group was a searing sunset, going down with flourishing layers. It was a fitting final symbol that echoed my favourite photo of you: at the wheel of that pale blue Mustang we drove in California four decades ago, with red-gold cirrus super-imposed

over your quiet gaze from behind the windscreen. Dusk was your favourite time, with its promise of the night ahead, the gathering, the togetherness, the possibilities of what might be drawn from others. You well knew how chance encounters and subtly-framed introductions could lead to warmth, involvement, fascination, and enduring union. You were ever alert to the nuances of inter-personal exchange, and always conscious of the importance of valuing people for what's inside of them, being honest to yourself and others, and building relationships on that honesty. For you, honouring fellowship was key. Across the span of the years, you were indeed a craftsman connector.

The closing verse is from T.S.Eliot. A few years back during a stroll around Salisbury Cathedral, we came across these lines and agreed that they would one day make a most suitable epitaph -

We die with the dying:

See, they depart, and we go with them.

We are born with the dead:

See, they return, and bring us with them.

The moment of the rose and the moment of the yew-tree

Are of equal duration.

Graham – You have been and always will be a totally unforgettable part of our lives - a mostly marvellous (I know you'd want that qualifier), vivid and reassuring presence. You gave yourself utterly. You were our laughing companion - so attuned, so close, so true. For all of this, and for all the times the memory of you will continue to inspire us ...Thank you.

Paul Green

