

Anne and Bill Barbour

A Tribute from

John Maxwell

Enniskillen Integrated Schools

I first met Bill Barbour when I was a pupil at Portora Royal School and I have a particular memory of a certain rugby match when Bill was the referee. These house matches often tended to be bad tempered, somewhat vicious affairs and this one was no different. At one point a fight broke out among the forwards in a ruck, followed by a shout :” For God's sake get off me or I'll\*\*\*\*\*” -more profanity which I'll not repeat. Thereupon there was a very loud blast on a whistle, followed by complete silence while we waited to see what Bill would do -and expecting at the very least to be severely reprimanded. After a pause which seemed to go on forever, Bill said very quietly, ”I'm afraid the Lord cannot be much help to you in this situation.“ Both teams dissolved in laughter and a potentially difficult situation was diffused. This was typical of Bill's way of handling difficulties and I learnt a lesson that day.

When the Remembrance Day bomb occurred in Enniskillen in 1987, a group called Enniskillen Together was formed, whose aim was to try and bridge the political and religious divide in a way which, we hoped, would help in some way to improve a situation which we feared could get worse.

A sub committee was formed to examine the possibility of developing an integrated education sector as part of the education system here. Bill was an enthusiastic member of this group. In a sense, the Enniskillen bomb was a catalyst for this integrated movement in Fermanagh.

This school we are in today and the Integrated Primary School are both testament to Bill's interest in and hard work for the Integrated sector.

Integrated education in the early days had a major problem with raising finance because the Department of Education only supported integrated schools after they had proven their viability. So in their first year integrated schools had to raise all the money needed, eg for buildings, equipment, salaries for teachers, etc.

In order to attract funds, trusts were set up to provided finance. Here the Western Area Charitable Trust for Integrated Education (WACTIE) fulfilled this need and Bill was chairman of this body for quite a number of years. This trust raised most of the money required through working closely with the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education in Northern Ireland. Bill's work for the Western Trust was phenomenal and involved frequent travel to Belfast for N. I. Council meetings.

In the first years the new Enniskillen Integrated Primary School which I was involved with (Bill was also on the Board of Governors) seemed about to run short of money- during one month we were unable to raise enough money to pay our teachers until the very last minute, thanks to Bill's efforts and coolness in a very difficult situation.

Bill was a man of many parts and I know that he contributed a great deal to many aspects of life in Fermanagh, not just in Integrated Education. He was, in fact, the most un-materialistic person I have ever known – he put huge efforts into making life better for others, with relatively little attention to his own needs.

He had a first class mind and could suggest solutions to problems which to some of us seemed intractable. There was no 'side' to Bill and he mixed effortlessly with all, regardless of class or

creed. He had a self-deprecating, subtle sense of humour which was one of the reasons he was much loved by those who knew him.

Thinking about Bill the other day, it occurred to me that it is a mistake to think of him on his own, because he was clearly a part of a loving, supportive family. He and Anne were a very close couple for many years and there was a very close bond between them.

One of my abiding memories of them over the last few years is seeing them cycling along the Sligo Road, with Bill always slightly in front of Anne in what seemed like a protective position.

I remember them with great fondness and miss them greatly and I am absolutely sure many others do also, especially James, Charlotte, Pauline and Tom.