

Anne and Bill Barbour

A Tribute from

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Good afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen

It's a very special privilege to welcome you all to Erne Integrated College to celebrate the lives of Anne and Bill Barbour whose funerals took place in Belfast on the 30<sup>th</sup> November. I welcome especially Anne and Bill's immediate family, daughters Pauline and Charlotte, sons Tom and James, their spouses, and Bill and Anne's grandchildren. I also welcome Anne's brother, Peter Borrell and his wife, Patricia, who have travelled from Stoke on Trent to be with us today. We also welcome friends of Bill and Anne who, this morning, have travelled from Scotland and Cork. Bishop Michael Jackson, who was Bill's last Classics Scholar at Trinity sends his apologies, as does former Chairman of Fermanagh Council, Davy Kettyles, who 'phoned last night, stuck in snow in Limerick. And I welcome all the many friends of Anne and Bill, from so many diverse parts of civic, cultural, educational and political life in Fermanagh and beyond. I also wish to thank, in advance, those, who in a few minutes time, will make their personal contributions to this afternoon's ceremony; and I also wish to thank our musicians whose contributions will undoubtedly make this afternoon memorable. When the ceremony is over, the Barbour family extends a warm invitation to everyone to join them for some refreshments upstairs.

We gather in a spirit humility, dignity and sadness, and of thanksgiving, gratitude and joy, to celebrate the lives of two very special people whom we have known and loved, and whose lives have inspired all of us in so many unique ways. By remembering Anne and Bill's uniquely fine human qualities, by honoring the principles, values, and dreams which guided their live, we can all be enriched with memories that will endure in the years ahead.

No individual can sum up the life of another. Life is too precious, too complex, too multi-faceted to be passed over with mere words, which may ring empty. But the collective memories of those who loved and watched, shared and were touched by, the lives of Bill and Anne, as a brother, sister, son, daughter, grandchild, colleague or friend, are memories that are alive, unbound by events of birth or death. And as living memories we possess the greatest gift one person can give to another.

I have known Bill and Anne in a variety of contexts since 1962. Bill taught me Latin, coached me in rugby as a fourteen year old, and tried unsuccessfully to introduce me to the mysteries of cricket; I returned to teach alongside Bill at Portora from 1978 until 1983 when he retired. I was his election Agent twice during the '80's with the Alliance Party. Our paths re-joined when he played such a major role as a founder Governor of Enniskillen Integrated Primary School and as Chairman of the Western Area Trust for Integrated Education, which played a leading role in the establishment of this school in 1994. I recall a story he told me about a cold call he made to the Ulster Bank in Donegall Square in Belfast. He asked for the manager and said: 'I'd like to borrow £4 million to set up a new integrated school in Enniskillen' – to which the bemused manager said: 'Let's go out for lunch'. And while Bill

didn't quite come away with cash in his pocket, he certainly paved the way in negotiating a series of bank loans which enabled us to become established.

On another occasion I asked him for some advice on how best to handle a fairly influential lobby which was vehemently opposed to integrated education. His simple response was: 'Disarm them with charm' – something which came entirely naturally to Bill, but not such an easy strategy to implement for the less gifted.

On another occasion, as we drove home from a meeting in Belfast, our conversation included an update on the lives of our respective families, Bill and Anne's recent holiday to Spain, how I might get a disenchanted pupil back on track, the newly elected Prime Minister Tony Blair, Taoiseach Bertie Ahern, Ballinamallard Football Club, Afghanistan, Fermanagh Council's Area Plan, conservation, cross border trade, the price of oil, Trinity College, the Enniskillen Drama Festival, medicine as a career, his apparent and, unexplained, dislike for the game of golf, David Beckham and Posh Spice – a fairly potent cocktail of Bill's encyclopedic knowledge of the world around him.

Centuries ago the Roman philosopher Seneca wrote:

*"In the presence of death, we must continue to sing the song of life. We must be able to accept death and go from its presence better able to bear our burdens and to lighten the load of others. Out of our sorrows should come understanding. Through our sorrows, we join with all of those before who have had to suffer and all of those who will yet have to do so. Let us not be gripped by the fear of death. If another day be added to our lives, let us joyfully receive it, but let us not anxiously depend on our tomorrows. Though we grieve the deaths of our loved ones, we accept them and hold on to our memories as precious gifts. Let us make the best of our loved ones while they are with us, and let us not bury our love with death."*

And as written by another:

*For yesterday is but a dream, and tomorrow is only a vision; but today, well lived, makes every yesterday a dream of happiness and every tomorrow a vision of hope. Look well, therefore, to this day!*

Bill and Anne were both believers in intellectual hospitality, in the fair exchange of thought, argument and ideas, and that was not confined to the chessboard, a hand of cards in Bridge, or on the cricket field. They insisted that those who speak should hear; that those who question should answer; that each should strive not for a victory over others, but for the discovery of truth, fairness, social justice and the hand of friendship and support for the socially marginalized. They were not just thinkers but doers. And this sense of service extended to Anne's early career in Bletchly Park, Bill's career as a soldier and in the Foreign Office during World War 2, to raising four children, and later to education when they both carried out major innovative pastoral roles in Portora, Anne's work in Marriage Guidance Counselling, their joint contributions to the Citizens' Advice Bureau, to politics, to lobbying in the local press, to the Royal British Legion, and to integrated education.

When I think of Bill and Anne, I see their sunny dispositions and can hear Bill's melodic, booming, musical tones: "How wonderful! How splendid! How very interesting!"

Ladies and Gentlemen what a privilege it has been to know such a wonderful couple. May their memories be a permanent legacy and inspiration for the future.