

Vale! Roger Sharp

A large, big hearted, sensitive man who conducted his life in a remarkably discrete fashion. So discrete, in fact, that one did not notice him being discrete. Myriad quiet acts of kindness trailed in his wake, often unremarked except by those whom they touched.

William Wordsworth put it succinctly,

Thanks to the human heart by which we live,
Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,
To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.¹

Roger was not always quiet, however; not in my ken at any rate. A complex, capable man, he had, amongst other things, an astonishing vocal range. By that I do not mean singing. Oddly enough, I have no memory of hearing him sing. I mean his astonishingly wide spectrum *Gruff*. Roger's gruff ranged from the pianissimo of a somewhat quizzical and kindly favourite uncle, to a stentorian fortissimo bark that could bring the Alinga Street traffic to an abrupt halt. A joy to behold.

It seems to me that nothing ever escaped Roger's notice. I am not a very noticing person, quite the opposite, and to walk in Roger's company opened up for me a treasure trove of experience through his eyes and ears.

He had an unmatched sense of duty, again exercised without fanfare, which one of my other heroes, Gandalf by name, described in these words:

... it is not our part to master all the tides of the world, but to do what is in us for the succour of those years wherein we are set, uprooting the evil in the fields that we know, so that those who live after may have clean earth to till.²

Defies description, really.

Truth teller. Tender. Did not suffer fools gladly. A keen and sometimes deliciously vulgar sense of humour. Kindness itself. Opinionated. Generous. Meticulous. Lover of orchids and fine glass. Reader of crime novels and non-fiction military literature [I will be forever in Roger's debt for his gift of John Cantwell's *Exit Wounds*, which opened my eyes to the horrifying realities of the first Gulf War.] A knack of stopping one from ignoring things. Attentive. Best plain class cook in the territory. (That is a compliment, by the way. Plain class cookery is a sadly misunderstood term.) Elegant. Impeccably polished shoes. And one felt safe with him.

All of that, together with his knuckle crunching hand shake, often brought to mind Alan Lansdown's poem, Mr James.

When I was a boy
and needed birds, Mr James

built a cage for me
from large pine-wood cable-reels.

And at church on Sundays
he stood at the door,
crushed my knuckles
in the vice of his hand,

Handed me a hymn book
from his brick-like stack
and banged me with the hammer
of his voice.

Of all the kind people
I have known in my life
this man is set apart,
having raised a cathedral in my heart.³

So, fare thee well, dear Roger; and for us

... let the time for the parting be sweet.
Let it not be a death but completeness.
Let love melt into memory and pain into songs.
Let the flight through the sky end
 in the folding of the wings over the nest.
Let the last touch of your hands be gentle
 like the flower of the night.
Stand still, O Beautiful End, for a moment,
 and say your last words in silence.
I bow to you and hold up my lamp to light you on the way.⁴

¹ William Wordsworth "Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood"

² J R R Tolkien *The Return of the King* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd 1966) p155

³ Alan Lansdown "Mr James", in Les Murray *Anthology of Australian Religious Poetry* (Australia: Collins Dove 1991) pp5,6

⁴ Sir Rabindranath Tagore *The Gardener* (London: Macmillan & Co., Limited 1920) stanza 61, p102