

Last summer when I was looking for a thank you card for my daughter's teacher, I came across one with a quote from historian Henry Adams. It said: "A teacher affects eternity. He can never tell where his influence stops." I smiled and immediately thought of one person... Mr Johnson.

To be a pupil at Linden School didn't just mean you gained an excellent education. It was so much more than that. The moment you stepped through those gates in Forest Hall you were part of an extended family with Mr Johnson at the helm.

Mr Johnson, or should I say Colonel Johnson, commanded respect. To this day I have never met anybody like him and I doubt I ever will. As children, we would be fascinated as he recalled his childhood and wartime stories but it's only now as an adult that I fully appreciate how privileged we were to have someone with such life experience guiding us in our formative years. Anyone can teach the two times table but who better to teach children about life skills such as teamwork, tenacity and leadership than someone who developed those skills in life or death situations whilst protecting our country?

Behind the immaculate suits often decorated with war medals, Mr Johnson was the kindest of souls. He had time for everybody, showering people with praise, encouragement and mojos at every opportunity. Linden was his home and he invited us in to be a part of that home, filling it with love, happiness and respect. He knew everybody's name (even recognising people decades after they left) and was genuinely interested in each and every one of us. He was like a grandfather to so many and like a true family, he was proud of each and every one of his teaching offspring.

I look back with such fondness at the years I spent there and the magical times which were had. Barlow, like many children, was my first experience of being parent-free overnight and the excitement of such "independence" was almost too much to bear. The indoor swings, rickety bunk beds and freezing cold showers were five star accommodation to us. I remember vividly sitting in a field at Barlow with a group of friends whilst Mr Johnson told us stories of how he used to walk across the same field as a boy. He then showed me how to make a daisy chain...this from a Colonel! I have recounted stories to my nearest and dearest and they look at me as though I am plagiarising some idyllic novel from yesteryear but it was true. He provided us with the most magical experiences and gave us an enchanted childhood.

So yes, at Linden I benefited from an outstanding education. In addition, I became disciplined at recalling times tables, doing the do-si-do in dance lessons, lining up as soon as I heard a bell ring and standing up whenever somebody entered a room. But more than any of those things, Mr Johnson taught me about respect, encouragement and trying to be the best that you can be.

He cared. He did it for the outcome not the income and everybody knew that. He didn't hide away in his office - quite the opposite. He would walk into the classroom and give Mrs Challand or Mrs Hodgson an hour off because he genuinely loved teaching us. He would spend weeks working on the school plays and then stand on the stage at the end so incredibly proud of what everyone had achieved, despite it all being down to him.

To conclude, Mr Johnson brought his dream to life by opening Linden School and I couldn't be more grateful to him. He championed all of us and allowed everyone to excel at being

themselves. In my eyes he was and always will be the greatest of showmen and his positive influence will undoubtedly affect the future indefinitely. Good night Sir.

Victoria Hastings (Linden school 1984-1991 and Dame Allans 1991-1998)