

Hugh Francis Crail (Espin 1961 - 1965)

Hugh Crail passed away on 15th March 2011.

Even before starting at College it was quite apparent that he was an exceptional person. Being awarded a scholarship to St Andrew's was no mean feat and it must have been very clear to our parents then that he was due to achieve great things. He was one of those chaps who took every opportunity given to him with both hands. He was a smart, thoughtful, caring, selfless and generous man who quite simply knew what his duty was and then just got on with it.

Hugh was a prefect of Espin house in 1964 and head of Espin in 1965. Not only that but he was captain of rowing, as well as the senior student officer of the cadet corps. Not the best ball player around, he still played rugby and boxed for his house. To a great extent his character – and he was a character – was moulded during his time here at College. It was a time of his life that he thoroughly enjoyed and made sure that he got the very most out of.

The year after leaving St Andrew's he was conscripted into the Navy where he became student of the year at the Naval Gym in Gordons Bay – very much to our ex-Royal Navy father's pride. An extraordinarily focused man in all he did, he was awarded an MSc in Civil Engineering from UCT and later an MBA (cum laude) from the very first part time MBA class at Wits University. Not only an academic (and intellectual I may add), Hugh was also a sportsman of note. After school, he continued rowing at UCT where he was selected to row for SA Universities and Western Province. He was also selected for the final trials for the Tridents Rowing Club.

And then of course there was running and golf. He completed numerous marathons as well as 3 Comrades Marathons. In addition, although with perhaps one of the shortest backswings around, he was nevertheless still a highly competent golfer. He continued playing right up until probably 3 months before his death. Once diagnosed with cancer, Hugh was determined to give as much back to his roots as possible. As a result he involved himself in a number of initiatives including the Red Cross, small business development in the Eastern Cape, and assisting in the development of a museum at College. It is such a pity that he was not able to see the fruits of his endeavours.

Eulogy by his brother, Brian Crail:

Hugh Crail was my big brother, a very special friend and important part of my family and life. I shall miss him enormously. We have lost a man who I am proud to have called my brother.

I'm sure that he probably meant something special to each and every one of you. To me he was a man who I looked up to and admired hugely. He was highly intelligent, principled, ethical and an all-round decent man. He never judged me and was always quite happy to give me advice when asked for it.

It was almost exactly 9 years ago that he was first diagnosed with cancer. And during the past 9 years I never once heard him complain about his illness. He bore it with courage and humour – something which I was always in admiration of. Perhaps it is a testimony to his strength, both physical and mental, that so few people realised how ill he actually was until the end.

In addition to his many attributes Hugh was also a sportsman of note. Not only were rowing and golf two of his passions but he was also a genuine marathon man.

As a young man he was selected for the final trials for the South African rowing team, having rowed for SA Universities and Western Province. I remember one year when we were at university in Cape Town going to watch him row in the annual inter-varsity rowing

championships when his boat sank as a result of the filthy weather. At the time the boat went down his crew was so far ahead of their competition that they tried (but sadly failed) to swim the boat across the finishing line. Had it happened to me I know I would have found it more than a little distressing. He, however, saw the humour in the whole fiasco.

And then of course there was golf. In our school holidays our Dad used to drop Hugh and me at the golf course in Port Elizabeth where we used to, shall we say, compete vigorously against each other. Between you and me I always thought I was a better golfer than him, but inexplicably he almost always managed to beat me. All the trophies in his lounge at home bear testimony to his prowess at the sport. Success at golf requires a high degree of mental toughness, something which Hugh had loads of.

And speaking of mental toughness, Hugh was also a marathon man. Not only did he run marathons, he also completed the Comrades Marathon (that's 90 kilometres long) three times. But perhaps the accomplishment that I am most in awe of is the fact that he completed a marathon in his 60th year – 6 years after he had been diagnosed with cancer. The fact that he ran it with his son and son-in-law, and that his whole family was there to support him, I know was very special to him.

But like most sportsman, Hugh also knew how to party – something of which perhaps some you were not aware.

And it was only 2 years ago that he came out to South Africa and he and I went to the battlefields in Natal where our grandfather had fought for the Brits against the Boers at Ladysmith. We arrived in Ladysmith quite late in the afternoon and decided to visit the battlefields the next day - after a fortifying dinner suitably washed down with liquid refreshments. This, as I recall, was not a great decision. Tramping up Spioenkop (a hill where our grandfather fought) I remember as being quite hellish. It was a blazing hot day and I had a pounding headache. But it didn't seem to bother Hugh in the slightest.

Since the onset of his illness Hugh took an interest in many things that time had previously restricted him from. He became an avid and highly competent backgammon player (with enough patience to still play with me) and a very enthusiastic amateur photographer. I know that he valued very highly the time spent with and the guidance he received from his friend Jil Orpen.

But first and foremost Hugh was a family man. Without doubt the most important aspect of Hugh's life was his family; he loved his family profoundly. He was a devoted husband / father / uncle / brother and friend.

Isabelle, I know that you meant everything to him. And from me, thank you for all you did for Hugh during the time of his illness. You have my deepest respect and admiration for your strength and courage during the time of Hugh's illness.

To Tina, Claudia, Kirstie and Shug: he was extremely proud of you. In you, my brother has left an amazing legacy behind: four beautiful, handsome and brilliant children. You are his legacy! Through you he has left this world a better place than when he found it and for that you have to be very proud.

You can all stand tall in the knowledge that your husband and father was a very special person indeed. Hugh was a kind, loyal and loving father and friend. I'm sure we will all remember Hugh through the many people still left behind whose lives he touched so positively.

I am enormously thankful for all the special moments that Hugh has left me. I deeply mourn his passing.

A Tribute to Hugh by Mrs Penny Tyson - St Andrew's College Archivist:

Hugh Crail OA 1961-1965

A Tribute

I first met Hugh one day when I was visiting Marguerite Poland in her flat in Grahamstown. We were discussing research for *The Boy in You*. He was so enthusiastic about the book and immediately offered to do whatever he could to help. From then on he visited the Archives often, always ready to do what he could to help both in the Archives itself and with the research needed for *The Boy in You*.

Hugh was at College from 1961 to 1965. During this time he was a monitor, College prefect and Head of Espin House. He was awarded a Proficiency Tie and won the Prep School and Greathead prize for Science. He was also Senior Officer in the Cadet Corps and Captain of Rowing. After school he continued his interest in Rowing while studying Civil Engineering at UCT and in 1972 he was part of the South African Universities Rowing Crew.

Passionate about his old school, Hugh's involvement in the Archive and Andean Resource Centre (ARC) projects was steadfast. Every time he visited Grahamstown he would come with new ideas to make the projects work. He visited schools in the UK such as Harrow and was able to get me on the UK School Archivist Group's mailing list, resulting in helpful information filtering through to me. He was an active member of the Committee formed to run the Archive and ARC projects, specialising in the electronic recording of the school's history.

Not only was Hugh passionate about St Andrew's but he was also heavily involved in philanthropic activities in Grahamstown - "looking to give something back to the Eastern Cape".

St Andrew's salutes you, Hugh!

Penny Tyson
Archivist