

Tribute to Hugo Yaxley (SU 2013-17)

I would love to share with you all exactly what it was like to be in the privileged position of being Hugo's best friend. Throughout his life, Hugo had many shining qualities that everyone saw, whether you were lucky enough to be very close to him or even if you had only met him for the first time. Hugo was kind, wise, clever, generous, the life and soul of any party and always so brave. These are a few of many of Hugo's qualities and it was beyond special to watch all of them blossom throughout his life. Today, I would like to focus on three of his qualities that stood out most for me; his cheekiness, his sense of adventure and his incredible empathy.

His cheek was always hilarious and something that stuck with him since he was very young and was the quality that stood out from the moment I met him, 13 years ago, right up until our last few years together. One of the first holidays that Hugo and I went on was to Italy with my parents and Hugo and I became obsessed with these t-shirts that had 'I Love Italia' on them. After wearing them for a few days, we both realised that we looked identical and Hugo suggested to me that we could easily pass as a chubby pair of young twins. So, when we got to the airport we did both pretend to be twins to our accompanying air hostess. Obviously, our story seemed much less credible once we arrived at the passport check point and our different surnames did not add up with the elaborate life story we had just created. Another story that summed up his cheek was a few years ago at a dinner party I hosted. My friend Alana wanted to go to bed and couldn't find me, so asked Hugo where she should sleep. Hugo, knowing full well that my Dad was sleeping in his bedroom, pointed her straight in the direction of that room, giving him the fright of his life, being in bed naked. Alana, furiously went back to Hugo explaining the situation leading him to then point her in the direction of the bedroom where Tessa, Gabe's mum was sleeping, giving her a similar surprise. It was this cheek that made him so special and gave us his unforgettable and contagious smile that seemed to charm every mother and teacher he met beyond belief.

His sense of adventure also truly stood out especially in our Gap Year where Hugo went travelling around Spain by himself and trekked for 10 days through the Pyrenees with no music or phone to leave the distractions of the modern world behind him and just be there in the moment with nature. This was the most Hugo thing to do, he was always completely true to himself and would never do anything he didn't want to, always creating and pursuing new and alternative paths throughout his life. His decision to move to Madrid and take a second Gap Year was the pinnacle of his sense of freedom and independence as he chose to do what he loved, in the place that he loved most whilst most of us

followed the beaten track. On our Gap Year, Hugo always pushed us to do things that were far out of our comfort zone and was constantly pushing his own boundaries himself. I remember him saying to me, for example, that the only way for him to conquer his fear of heights was to bungee jump off a 70-metre platform in Nepal, and of course, he did it. With his adventurous character came a surprising love for admin as well and so although we were always going from each adventurous activity to the next, the route to get there would be exactly mapped out, months before. We would all know the exact train time, platform and even roundabout exits to take to our destinations.

This sense of adventure was something that he carried with him throughout his life and bravely built as he overcame more and more hurdles which brings me onto my third and final outstanding Hugo quality; empathy. As many of you know, Hugo went through a huge amount at such a young age, battling depression. But his determination to overcome this hardship left behind this tremendous sense of empathy towards others and pearls of wisdom that made him far beyond his years in so many ways. A story that summed up his incredible empathy was one during his time at Marlborough. There was a boy, who was three years younger than us who was going through similar difficulties to Hugo came into our Housemaster, Mr Harrison's kitchen one evening when Hugo was there. Mr Harrison explained the situation and Hugo immediately offered to sit down with him, have a chat and talk it through. After his kindness had touched the boy so much, he agreed to meet with him weekly offering his unconditional support. As Tom mentioned, his bravery in standing up in front of the whole school to openly talk about his depression showed this and normalised a subject that was rarely talked about amongst students. After this, he actually became the celebrity of the school and all of our closest friends had to form his fans into orderly queues and wave off paparazzi. His wisdom and kindness touched me throughout all the 13 years that I knew him. If I ever needed any advice, was feeling low or even just wanted a friendly chat, Hugo would always be the man I would go to.

He was like a brother to me, the man I respected most, my hero and a man that I was so proud to call my best friend. He will live through us all and I hope that we can all make him so proud with the things we do in our lives. Something that will always make me so happy to know and is the reason I can speak to you all today with such optimism is that Hugo died at his absolute happiest, having had the year of his life, with Minna who he was truly and deeply in love with. His youthful image is preserved, and he will remain forever young in our hearts and in our lives.

Harry Heneage (SU 2014-19)