A FEW WEEKS AGO, WHEN COLIN REALISED THAT HIS TIME WAS SHORT, HE SUGGESTED THAT IT WOULD BE A GOOD IDEA IF I SAID A FEW WORDS AT HIS FUNERAL. I DON’T THINK IT WAS THE BEST IDEA HE EVER CAME UP WITH………….BUT HOW COULD I REFUSE SUCH A REQUEST !!

MY LONG ASSOCIATION WITH COLIN BEGAN IN 1968 WHEN I ATTENDED PORTOBELLO HIGH SCHOOL AS A 1ST YEAR STUDENT. IT WAS MY GREAT GOOD FORTUNE TO HAVE COLIN AS MY GROUP TUTOR, AND WHAT STARTED AS A TEACHER PUPIL RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPED INTO A FIRM FRIENDSHIP WHICH ENDURED FOR OVER 55 YEARS.

COLIN WAS BY THAT TIME ASSISTANT HEAD OF THE TECHNICAL DEPT. AND, DURING THE NEXT 6 YEARS, WE WERE TO SEE A LOT OF EACH OTHER AS I SPENT QUITE A LOT OF TIME (PERHAPS TOO MUCH TIME) IN THE TECHNICAL DEPARTMENT. COLIN WAS A NATURAL TEACHER. HE HAD A RAPPORT WITH ALL OF HIS PUPILS, AND HIS KIND APPROACHABLE NATURE, COUPLED WITH HIS GREAT ABILITY TO CONNECT WITH THE MINDS OF THE YOUNG, ENDEARED HIM TO PUPILS AND STAFF ALIKE.

THIS, HOWEVER, WAS THE TIME OF CORPORAL PUNISHMENT, OR THE BELT AS WE KNEW IT, AND COLIN DID OCCASIONALLY HAVE TO ENFORCE IT.

ON ONE PARTICULAR DAY COLIN WAS FORCED TO ADMINISTER ‘SIX OF THE BEST’ TO A DISRUPTIVE ‘HULK’ OF A PUPIL WHO HAD A RATHER THREATENING REPUTATION. FOR THE PURPOSE OF THIS STORY, LET’S REFER TO HIM AS ‘BIG JOHN’. NOW, IT SO HAPPENED THAT, THAT EVENING, COLIN WAS OUT WALKING THE DOG ALONG A QUIET PATH, WHEN WHO SHOULD COME IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION BUT ‘BIG JOHN’. COLIN SUSPECTED THAT, IF HE WAS EVER GOING TO GET A ‘DOING’ OF ONE OF HIS PUPILS, NOW WAS THE TIME. AS THE TWO APPROACHED EACH OTHER HOWEVER ‘BIG JOHN’ THREW A BROAD SMILE IN COLIN’S DIRECTION AND BELLOWED ‘HELLO MR OSWALD, JUST OUT FOR A WALK WITH THE DOG ARE WE?’ THEY THEN PASSED EACH OTHER, MUCH TO COLIN’S GREAT RELIEF.

PRIOR TO COLIN’S TEACHING CAREER HOWEVER HE STARTED OFF HIS EMPLOYMENT AT SAI CHEMICALS, IN LEITH, AS A TRAINEE CHEMIST. HE QUITE ENJOYED THIS WORK, BUT THE SHIFT PATTERN WAS RATHER ONEROUS AND, MUCH TO THE CONSTERNATION OF HIS MOTHER AND FATHER, HE DECIDED TO LEAVE SAI AND HE TOOK EMPLOYMENT IN THE CO-OPERATIVE GARAGE IN SEMPLE STREET EDINBURGH.

COLIN’S STORIES OF THE ANTICS IN THE CO-OP GARAGE WERE LEGENDARY AND WE WERE AWAYS ENCOURAGING HIM TO PUT THEM DOWN ON PAPER WHICH, OF COURSE, HE NEVER DID. ON HIS FIRST DAY AT THE GARAGE THE FOREMAN WAS INTRODUCING HIM TO EVERYONE, AND THAT LED TO HIS FIRST MEETING WITH FRED GOUGH, A TIME SERVED JOURNEYMAN MECHANIC WHO WAS TO TAKE COLIN UNDER HIS WING.

AT THE TIME, FRED WAS LYING ON HIS BACK UNDER A SEDDON ATKINSON LORRY REPLACING THE DIFFERENTIAL GEAR. THE TWO STEEL HALF SHAFTS HAD BEEN REMOVED AND WERE STANDING VERTICALLY, BALANCED ON THEIR FLANGES, AT THE SIDE OF THE LORRY. AS COLIN LEANED FORWARD TO SHAKE FRED’S HAND HOWEVER HIS ARM BRUSHED ONE OF THE HALF SHAFTS, WHICH THAN STARTED TO TOPPLE. BY THIS POINT FRED, WHO WAS STILL LYING ON HIS BACK, HAD JUST TURNED TO LOOK UP AT COLIN WHEN THE HALF SHAFT SMACKED HIM RIGHT BETWEEN THE EYES AND KNOCKED HIM CLEAN OUT.

THIS RATHER UNFORTUNATE FIRST MEETING HAPPILY DIDN’T STOP COLIN AND FRED, AND FRED’S WIFE JEAN, FROM BECOMING LIFELONG FRIENDS.

COLIN AND FRED HAD MANY HILARIOUS EPISODES WORKING AT THE CO-OP GARAGE OVER THE NEXT FEW YEARS AND IT WAS PROBABLY ONE OF THE HAPPIEST TIMES OF COLIN’S LIFE.

ON ONE OCCASION HE WAS DRIVING A LORRY BACK TO THE GARAGE VIA FOUNTAINBRIDGE WHEN HE TRIED TO GET THROUGH A GAP BETWEEN A TRAFFIC ISLAND AND A BREAD VAN. UNFORTUNATELY HOWEVER, THE GAP WASN’T QUITE BIG ENOUGH AND THE RESULTING ACCIDENT CAUSED SUCH A TRAFFIC JAM IN THE CITY THAT IT REACHED THE FRONT PAGE OF THE EVENING NEWS.

THE LORRY ENDED UP IN THE CO-OP REPAIR SHOP AND, WITH THE PAINTWORK JUST COMPLETED, THE MANAGER ASKED COLIN TO REVERSE THE LORRY OUT INTO THE YARD, QUIPPING RATHER CRUELLY, ‘YOU CAN MANAGE THAT OKAY, CAN’T YOU’?

COLIN JUMPED INTO THE DRIVING SEAT AND PROCEEDED TO REVERSE OUT BUT, UNBEKNOWN TO HIM, THE PASSENGER DOOR WAS NOT CLOSED. AS HE REVERSED OUT, THE DOOR GENTLY SWUNG OPEN, CAUGHT ONE OF THE VERTICAL ROOF PILLARS, AND WAS RIPPED CLEAN OFF.

COLIN KNEW WITHIN HIMSELF HOWEVER THAT SOONER OR LATER THE FUN WOULD HAVE TO END AND HE WOULD HAVE TO KNUCKLE DOWN AND THINK SERIOUSLY ABOUT WHAT CAREER PATH HE WANTED TO TAKE. WITH HIS ENGINEERING BACKGROUND, TECHNICAL TEACHING SEEMED A NATURAL CHOICE, SO HE EMBARKED ON A TEACHING COURSE AT MORAY HOUSE.

AFTER ONE OR TWO YEARS TEACHING AT VARIOUS SCHOOLS, COLIN SECURED A POSITION AT PORTOBELLO SECONDARY SCHOOL, WHICH WAS AT THAT TIME THE LARGEST COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL IN EUROPE, WITH OVER 2000 PUPILS. COLIN APPLIED HIS USUAL LEVEL OF ENTHUSIASM TO HIS WORK AND ORGANISED A HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL AFTER SCHOOL TECHNICAL CLUB, WHICH ESSENTIALLY INVOLVED DOZENS OF YOUNG ENTHUSIASTIC BUDDING ENGINEERS BUSY BANGING, CUTTING, HACKING, DRILLING, SCREWING AND WELDING, WITH COLIN RUNNING FROM ROOM TO ROOM TRYING TO SUPERVISE ALL OF US. HOW NONE OF US DIED DURING THAT ENTERPRISE I REALLY DON’T KNOW.

COLIN ALSO HELPED RUN THE DUKE OF EDINBURGH AWARD SCHEME, WHICH INVOLVED TAKING GROUPS OF CHILDREN AWAY ON HILLWALKING ADVENTURES AND THE LIKE. ON ONE EXCURSION TO THE HILLS A GROUP OF BOYS CAME UPON AN ADDER BUT, BEFORE COLIN WAS AWARE OF IT, SOME URCHIN HAD HIT IT OVER THE HEAD AND PUT IT IN HIS KNAPSACK TO TAKE HOME AS A TROPHY.

ON THE ROAD BACK HOME HOWEVER, THE ADDER MIRACULOUSLY RECOVERED AND REAPPEARED ON THE FLOOR OF THE BUS, MUCH TO THE CONSTERNATION OF ALL.

WHEN MY SCHOOL YEARS ENDED, OUR FRIENDSHIP CONTINUED BECAUSE I WAS, BY THAT TIME, HELPING COLIN RUN THE 38TH MORNINGSIDE SCOUT TROOP, OF WHICH COLIN WAS THE SCOUTMASTER. THE SCOUTS WERE AN IMPORTANT PART OF COLIN’S LIFE AT THAT TIME, WITH WEEKEND HILLWALKING TRIPS AND THE FORTNIGHTLY SUMMER CAMP BEING THE ANNUAL HIGHLIGHT.

WHEN THE TROOP FOLDED IN THE EARLY 1980’S COLIN AND I CONTINUED IN THAT VEIN AND HE AND I WERE TO ENJOY MANY HOLIDAYS TOGETHER IN THE SCOTTISH HIGHLANDS.

DURING THE 1980’S, AND TO FURTHER THEIR INTEREST IN THE OUTDOOR LIFE, HE AND FRED AND JEAN BOUGHT A CARAVAN, WHICH WAS FIRST OF ALL LOCATED AT KINLOCH RANNOCH, AND THEN AVIEMORE. DURING THESE HAPPY YEARS THE CARAVAN ALLOWED COLIN AND FRED, AND I ON OCCASION, TO EXPLORE BOTH THESE AREAS EXTENSIVELY.

AT THIS TIME COLIN WAS MADE AN OFFER BY EX-SCOUT AND LONG-TIME FRIEND DAVID DIXON TO MOVE THE CARAVAN TO DAVID’S CROFT NEAR ARDVASER ON SKYE, AND THIS WAS ULTIMATELY DONE, OPENING UP A WHOLE NEW AREA TO EXPLORE. COLIN ENJOYED MANY YEARS HERE AND, ALTHOUGH HIS HILLWALKING DAYS WERE ENDING, COLIN LIKED NOTHING BETTER THAN TO POTTER AROUND ON THE CROFT, HELPING DAVID WITH MANY OF HIS PROJECTS. COLIN’S BROTHER DONALD JOINED HIM ON MANY OF THESE OCCASIONS, ENJOYING THE PEACE AND QUIET OF THE CROFT.

WHEN DAVID SADLY AND UNEXPECTEDLY PASSED A FEW YEARS BACK, DAVID’S WIFE PAT CONTINUED OWNERSHIP OF THE CROFT, ALLOWING COLIN TO CONTINUE HIS RELATIONSHIP THERE WITH THAT BEAUTIFUL PART OF SCOTLAND.

BOTH COLIN AND DONALD WERE RIGHTLY PROUD OF THEIR PARENTS, WITH TOM OSWALD BECOMING MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR CENTRAL EDINBURGH AND THEIR MOTHER COLINA McALPIN, BORN IN BALLACHULISH IN 1903, GIVING THEM A STRONG CONNECTION WITH THE WEST HIGHLANDS.

100 YEARS OR SO AFTER COLINA’S BIRTH, COLIN AND I WERE ENJOYING A FEW DAYS HOLIDAY IN APPIN AND WE SET OFF ONE DAY TO WALK OVER THE HIGH PASS ABOVE GLEN CRERAN AND DOWN INTO BALLACHULISH, WITH THE INTENTION OF GETTING THE EVENING BUS BACK TO APPIN. FINDING OURSELVES WITH TIME TO SPARE, WE STOPPED FOR A DRINK AT THE INN AT BALLACHULISH. THERE WE FELL INTO CONVERSATION WITH THE BAR LADY AND COLIN WAS ELATED WHEN SHE TOLD HIM THAT SHE REMEMBERED HER GRANDMOTHER TALKING ABOUT THE McALPIN’S OF BALLACHULISH, AND HOW THEY HAD ALL PLAYED TOGETHER AS CHILDREN. THE THOUGHT THAT HIS MOTHER’S FAMILY WAS STILL REMEMBERED BY THE LOCAL PEOPLE OF BALLACHULISH PLEASED COLIN GREATLY.

I CAN’T TALK ABOUT COLIN’S LIFE WITHOUT MENTIONING HIS LOVE OF SHOOTING. THERE’S NOT MUCH I CAN TAKE CREDIT FOR REGARDING COLIN’S ACTIVITIES, BUT I CAN TAKE CREDIT FOR INTRODUCING HIM TO SHOOTING, AS IT WAS I WHO INVITED HIM TO JOIN ME ONE NIGHT TO SHOOT AT REDCRAIG RIFLE AND PISTOL CLUB. COLIN TOOK TO THE SPORT IMMEDIATELY AND BECAME A VERY COMPETENT TARGET SHOOTER, WINNING MANY MEDALS OVER THE YEARS AT BISLEY AND OTHER SHOOTING EVENTS.

COLIN WAS FOR MANY YEARS AN OFFICER IN THE JOINT SERVICES PISTOL CLUB AND HE SELDOM MISSED A SUNDAY SHOOT AT THE RANGE AT COLMSLIEHILL IN THE SCOTTISH BORDERS. PARTICULARLY SINCE HIS RETIREMENT FROM TEACHING OVER 25 YEARS AGO, SHOOTING AND HELPING TO RUN THE JSPC, BECAME A VERY IMPORTANT AND ENJOYABLE PART OF HIS LIFE.

IT SAYS A GREAT DEAL OF COLIN WHEN YOU SEE THAT THERE ARE FORMER COLLEAGUES HERE TODAY, AND PUPILS WHOM COLIN TAUGHT OVER 50 YEARS AGO.

IT SAYS A GREAT DEAL OF COLIN WHEN YOU SEE THAT THERE ARE SCOUTS HERE TODAY FROM THE TROOP WHICH COLIN RAN OVER 50 YEARS AGO.

IT SAYS A GREAT DEAL OF COLIN WHEN YOU SEE HERE TODAY SO MANY OF HIS SHOOTING COLLEAGUES, WITH WHOM HE SHARED GREAT FRIENDSHIP AND MANY HAPPY TIMES.

COLIN WAS AS GOOD A FRIEND AS YOU COULD HAVE WISHED FOR. HE WAS FAITHFUL, CONSIDERATE, KIND AND HONEST.

HOW BETTER COULD ANY MAN BE REMEMBERED.