Levitt John Hunt
26 August 1943 – 17 August 2008
Knox Student 1951 – 1960
Knox Staff 1978 - 2003

We mark the sad passing of John Hunt who was born 65 years ago. His parents, Levitt & Joan, had three children of whom John was the eldest; his sisters are Boo and Didi.

He was educated at Knox Grammar Prep and Senior Schools, at some early stage acquiring the nickname “Herb”. Academically he was very gifted and hard-working, winning several prizes during his school career, including Dux of his Year on more than one occasion, and in his final year in 1960 he won the prize for French and was Duce Proxime Accessit. He was also a very able sportsman: - fast bowler in the 1st XI, second-rower in 2nd XV (and a very accurate goal kicker); he was a CUO in the cadets, a School Senior in Adamson House, and he gave valuable service to House and School Plays.

John was absolutely smitten when he first saw his future wife, Kate Darnton, while watching the rugby one Saturday at Knox’s main oval. They were introduced and something took place that had much promise, for a romance soon flourished.

In 1961 he won a cadetship with Colonial Sugar Refining (CSR) and went on to complete a Science Degree at UNSW. He and Kate became engaged in 1965 before he was posted to a CSR sugar mill at Condong, NSW. They married in 1966 and returned to Condong for one year before returning to Sydney where he moved to Head Office working for the Staff Department, charged with finding new recruits for the company. CSR believed in giving their employees a broad knowledge of the different areas in the company, so he then undertook qualifications in industrial relations and the law. On completion he represented CSR in mediation with a broad spectrum of unions involved with the running of a large, multi-faceted organization, gaining a wonderful insight into company politics and mediation. He is known to have carried out his responsibilities with his customary understanding and compassion, and his fine sense of fair play.

He was offered a transfer to manage a CSR factory in Perth in 1977. He and Kate made a life-changing decision as their elder son, David, was booked into Knox for 1978 and younger son, Tim, was booked in as well. He had long thought about a career in teaching and talked about this with an old school friend who was teaching at Knox at that time. Luckily a position for a Science teacher was available starting in 1978. He applied and was appointed to the Knox Staff by Dr Ian Paterson.

His 25 years at Knox saw him in various roles. He was a very able teacher of Chemistry to senior years and Science (Chemistry and Biology) to years 7 – 10. He successfully coached Rugby and Cricket and was appointed as a Year 7 class tutor. In that role he distinguished himself as a most worthy choice to assume responsibility for the whole Year group as Yearmaster for the next ten years, leading a team of Class Tutors in nurturing these boys. He did the job superbly, and with that same patience and understanding that he had demonstrated at CSR. The boys not only respected him but also regarded him with deep affection. We know this from so many letters of appreciation and comments made about him by his boys at the time and by Old Boys at their reunions.

John was always interested in cameras and photography. However, computers then arrived on the world scene and at Knox. He soon made himself very knowledgeable about them. At that stage computers were mainly an administrative tool and not yet much used in the classroom. He left the classroom to accept the challenge of bringing computer technology deeper into the school. To this task he brought order, organization, sensible planning and purchasing. He was always a good strategic thinker. His service here was again outstanding until 2000, when a new administration at Knox brought change. Modest John Hunt, vocal in supporting the cause of others, was graciously quiet when it came to selling himself to retain his position. He returned to the classroom as Head of Computing Studies in 2001 which he relished as he genuinely loved teaching.

A new offer was made to John and Kate in the area of community relations at Knox. It was an offer too good to refuse and it meant he could work with one of his great loves, photography, and use his creative
gifts. John’s chief responsibilities came as Publications manager and editor of the weekly newsletter the “Knoxonian”, the quarterly “Thistle” magazine and much work on the annual “Knox Grammarian”. He brought “The Thistle” to such a high level that it was widely regarded as the best school magazine ever seen by many – drawing the admiration of other editors, school Principals, fund-raising officers of other schools, Knox’s past Headmaster, Dr Ian Paterson, as well as Knox Old Boy and past Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam. It was such a finely produced magazine that it was regularly issued to prospective Knox parents in lieu of the customary Prospectus. The magazine seemed to breathe real life into one’s view of Knox – celebrating the excitement, the verve, the colour and vitality that John & Kate wanted others to see in the School in which they had a deep interest. For both John and Kate this was a labour of love.

Prior to this he had spent years of painstaking work (with Kate) in establishing an up-to-date and accurate Old Boys list - a daunting task. Kate also brought warmth to the Old Knox Boys’ office, making former students, and particularly the more senior Old Boys, feel so very welcome and respected when they visited.

John was also a truly superb photographer whose images graced the pages of many, many publications and remain as a record of the visual history of Knox over some decades. This is one of his great legacies to Knox, as Jo Tait, the Knox Archivist, will readily confirm. His photographic and artistic talents continue in the work of their son, David, who is a professional photographer.

Physically Herb stood tall, and metaphorically even taller as a man, a husband, father, grandfather, and teacher. He was a well-furnished gentleman in all the best senses of these words – known for his intelligence, his integrity, his dependability, his loyalty, his generous and gentle nature. He was indeed a gentle man, loyal, deferential, gracious, imbued with complete integrity and a trusting nature.

He and Kate were a splendid couple – tall, elegant, gracious in their manner to all of us and so loving of one another and their sons, David and Tim, their daughter-in-law, Bridget, and the absolute joys of their lives, their little grand-daughters, Hannah and Phoebe, and John’s sisters, Boo and Didi.

John and Kate endured much suffering over the past three years as he battled cancer, and particularly during his last four months. Throughout John never complained once – which is remarkable in anyone and yet again no surprise to any of us who knew him well. He endured stoically the course that lay in front of him. It was a marathon test of endurance. We and his family can take comfort from the fact that his suffering is now over and he is at rest and has been granted peace.

His legacy to us is rich indeed. In the words of Tennyson, writing about the death of the heroic Ulysses,

“Though much is taken, much abides.”

We must allow the legacy of the much that abides to give us some measure of additional comfort.

We celebrate his life of giving to others and we salute him and Kate, his adoring and no less courageous wife, for their fortitude in the face of appalling adversity. John Hunt’s fine qualities continue in his sons and his much-loved little grand-daughters.

In the words of Hamlet, as he spoke of his late father,

“He was a man, take him for all in all;
I shall not look upon his like again”

John A Turnbull