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Graham Ross-My Memories

Stefan Pokorski^a

*^aFaculty of Physics, University of Warsaw,
5, Pasteura, Warsaw, Poland*

E-mail: pokorski@fuw.edu.pl

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Graham's sudden death shocked his friends and colleagues and is hard to accept. His contributions and accomplishments in the physics of fundamental interactions are enormous. He was one of the most influential theorists in the world, with profound views on the theory of elementary interactions. Graham's seminal papers are well known to all of us. His book "Grand Unified Theories" is an excellent monograph.

My memory will be very personal. It will be a memory about a man whom I admired for his sense of humor, a very special sense of humor, often full of mild irony, always reflective and deep in content. About a man who looked at the imperfections of this world with a certain distance and therefore could afford that special sense of humor.

I met Graham for the first time about 40 years ago. Later, he almost became our family member. That was for two reasons. One was that he happened to be my son's Witold PhD Thesis advisor in Oxford. **Another reason was that Graham was one of very few British physicists whose English I was able to understand well, in spite of him living in Oxford.**

I asked my son about his memories of the 3 year period (1996-1999) in Oxford as a Graham's PhD student. Their first encounter was quite promising. **Graham, slightly disappointed after learning that Witold did not play squash, declared "I'll be like a real father to you".** And indeed he was. . .

Apart from the exciting physics research in collaboration with Graham, he remembers Graham teaching him "life" according to the Latin maxim "Non scholae sed vitae discimus", often paraphrased to "Not just science but also teach life". Graham was doing it in his style, telling anecdotes and jokes or comments, always sharp and ironic, sometimes mean but mild and innocent. There were many opportunities to give those "life lessons" to my son. Witold would sometimes go to visit Graham, frustrated by the lack of progress on a project and full of self-criticism. Graham, before giving any research help, used to say: **as some clever man said long ago, never speak bad about yourself, your friends will always say enough.**



When my son happened to give a talk in Oxford, he eagerly expected some feedback from Graham, particularly after getting some criticism from the audience. Graham kind of comforted him, making him understand at the same time, in the Graham's soft way, that not all was perfect. **He said "Never use yellow on your slides. But don't worry about the audience.** You know- and here came his anecdote: god and devil meet on a daily session to discuss who has more merits in

the creation of the world. The god argues that he's created a man and a woman and food for them, etc etc and he also has created something really extraordinary: a physicist. But the devil is not impressed and says: I did something much more spectacular, for a physicist I created his colleagues.

My friendship with Graham was warm and exciting. We were meeting very often on many occasions. The physics discussions with Graham were very demanding. We happened to write together a few papers on flavour physics and grand unification. But beyond physics, he was always the same. A calm gentleman but tough in his judgements, often expressed in a light, acceptable, but still ironic or even mean way. I remember him sitting next to me at seminars at CERN and whispering: some have talent and others should work hard.

I think Graham was strongly attached to his Scottish origin. But nevertheless, once he asked me: Do you know that in Aberdeen (his home town) one day each week the streets are completely empty? And do you know which day is it? [It is the day when charities organize fundraising!](#)

It was all Graham! That was why I admired him and this is how he remains in my memory!

Planck 2012 in Warsaw

Graham at work



Graham chairing a session on string theory



Graham at work, discussing physics with Stuart



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