

IN CELEBRATION OF JOHN WORRALL'S LIFE

By Richard Worrall

In many ways, lots of you here today knew my big brother John much better than I did, and I look forward to hearing your stories about him and his life in British Columbia. But what I can do is tell you a little about his boyhood in rural Lincolnshire on the Humber Estuary.

John was born as I was, in Healing, a little village just outside the port of Grimsby, and while I arrived just as World War II was coming to an end, he was born in May 1938, the year before hostilities broke out.

As an East Coast port, Grimsby was a target for German bombing attacks and the story has it that our father, who had served in the First World War, and was a Home Guard during WW2, hurled a chamber pot at a low-flying German raider over our back garden. It is not clear whether the chamber pot was empty or full at the time.

This is also the garden where John's and my beloved "daily apple tree" grew (and still grows, 80-plus years on) and there is a story – I'm sure it is fiction! - that Dr. Worrall smuggled an apple from his beloved Lincolnshire tree past Canadian customs and grew another daily apple tree at a secret location somewhere in Vancouver!

And finally, Healing all those years ago was very rural, not too many cars around, and safe for us kids to wander across the fields to the watercress beds, or the Humber bank, and even, in season, pull loads of freshly-cut peas off lorries stopped at the Healing Station railway crossing on their way to Grimsby's new freezer factories.

My father, Ernest John (Jack) Worrall was an extremely talented artist, and those of you who ever visited my brother at 5818 Highbury Avenue will have seen some of his lovely watercolours there. Jack was also an art teacher for most of his career at Wintringham Grammar School in Grimsby. He was also a war artist and many of his wartime watercolours are with Grimsby Borough Council, and some more at the Royal Academy in London.

John, then I, would catch a (steam) train from Healing two stops to Grimsby Town Station, then a bus to Clee Grammar School in Clee-thorpes, then a bustling post-war seaside town next to Grimsby and,

oddly enough, when I and Judith were talking at a bus stop on our way back to Highbury Avenue last August, a woman, hearing our English accents, said she'd been in Vancouver for forty years, but – small world! – she said she was from Lincolnshire and in conversation, it turned out that as a girl she'd attended the girls' grammar school just half a mile down the road from John's and my boys' grammar school!

Our father, Jack, the son of a shoemaker in Sussex – and I feel that this may go back to his awful, horrific experiences as a young lad in World War 1 – was not always the best of fathers or the kindest of husbands and certainly there were tensions between him and my dear Mum, Molly (a village butcher's daughter from Sussex), and my brother, who, as soon as he had the opportunity to get away from Healing and up to the University of Newcastle-upon Tyne to read chemistry, he went.

He never really came back to the family home: first, on graduation, he went on a whaling ship to the South Atlantic – yes, whaling then was an acceptable thing to do, even for nature-loving young John! – and then he got a place at Yale where he studied forestry.

And the rest of the story, you know: John became a lecturer at UBC and spent over thirty years at the Faculty of Forestry.

Finally, a huge thank you to all those of you who have kept in touch with us and looked after us during our three stays in Vancouver since the spring: in March, we visited John at Highbury every day, met him, some of his friends and his super team of carers; then, at very short notice, early in August, we were able to get a flight to Vancouver when we learnt that John had just days, maybe even just hours, to live. We got there in time, visited him for four days, hoping he might recover enough to go home to die (as he had dearly wished), but on 8th August, he took a sudden turn for the worse, and he passed away peacefully in the presence of friends, carers, hospital staff and ourselves – a calm end to one beautiful, beautiful, life.

Bless you John, you will always be loved, and very much missed.

14th October 2023