

Obituary for Brendan Doolan – by Antony Clark



Brendan Doolan died on 24 May 2012 after a long struggle with cancer which he bore with courage, good humour and an appreciation for the support of his devoted wife, Brank, and his sons Christopher and Mark and their families.

He was a man of wide-ranging talents and catholic interests whose contribution to education both at St Andrew's and in his three headships had a significant impact on the lives of many young people. He had a big heart, he was principled and fun-loving, and he had strong views on a range of topics: these he articulated with a forcefulness which was a hallmark of his character. Not everybody always agreed with him, and he loved discussion and debate on issues of education, politics, art, rugby, literature, leadership and any other topic of the day. He was intensely loyal and possessed a fine sense of humour inasmuch as he could laugh at himself as well as situations that developed: for example, on one very hot March day at the beginning of the rugby season on Lower Field at College he found himself refereeing a House match. A movement began in the in-goal area near the Cullinan Pavilion and, after some silky running, was halted near the corner flag close to the Highlander Club House. The defending House then passed the ball wide and a second movement broke down only inches short of the goal line whence the flow of play had begun. The sequence was repeated three times and the referee, weighing in at over 110 kilograms, found himself hard pressed to complete his fifth hundred metre sprint of the afternoon. With a try almost certain and somewhat behind play, Brendan blew the whistle in a manner usually reserved for the conclusion of the World Cup Final and announced, *'Okay, you chaps can have a water break ...'*. His colleagues in the Common Room did not let him forget such moments easily.

Born in Livingstone, Zambia, in 1954, Brendan's education began in Bulawayo, first at St Thomas Aquinas' Boys' Preparatory School and then at Christian Brothers' College. This was interrupted by an 18 months spell at the Christian Brothers Seminary in Stellenbosch. He returned to CBC Bulawayo to complete his A levels. A successful school career culminated in the award of a scholarship from the Bulawayo City Council to the University of Natal where, in Pietermaritzburg, he took a Bachelor of Commerce degree and was a member of the Students' Representative Council. A period of National Service in the then Rhodesian Army followed, before he married Brank Šegulja, along with a time in agricultural management services in Malawi. They moved to Johannesburg in 1980 and Brendan edited magazines for the plant and construction industries with Brooke Patrick Publishers. He then started Monitor Communications, his own public relations and marketing company, in 1982.

Brendan came to St Andrew's College in 1988 and, over the next decade, was variously Head of the Accounting Department, Housemaster of Armstrong, Officer Commanding of the Cadet Detachment, Master-in-Charge of Rowing, 2nd XV Rugby Coach and an Examiner of Accounting for the Independent Examinations Board (IEB). During this time he completed a Bachelor of Education degree part time at Rhodes University. He was a dedicated and loyal schoolmaster, determined that everything which he undertook should be a success. He was one to 'go the extra mile' for his pupils and colleagues; he was loyal and, on occasion when he was carried away by an enthusiasm for a particular project or by a specific point of view, he was sufficiently intelligent to reflect on situations which might have been handled differently. St Andrew's College, and all it stands for, meant everything to Brendan.

It was a natural consequence of his success as a Housemaster of Armstrong House that he should seek promotion and he proceeded to Bishop Bavin School in Johannesburg as Head of College and Deputy Rector. After three years there, he became Headmaster of St Dominic's College in Welkom, a school on which he was able to make his own important

mark over the period 2002 – 2008: a school which ranged from Pre-Primary to Grade 12 pupils grew to house 870 pupils. On the back of this, with typical entrepreneurial and missionary zeal, he became the Headmaster of Chesterhouse School in Durbanville. There he set up the Gryphon Trust which provided underprivileged children with scholarships to Chesterhouse. It was from here that he had to take early retirement, but he retained his enthusiasm for political and social debate and discourse (Gandalph blog) as he came to terms with his illness.

Brendan became a member of SAHISA (South African Heads of Independent Schools) in 1999. He served with great gusto and zeal on the SAHISA Council and was Chair of the Central Region until his move to Cape Town. He made lifelong friends through this organization which meant a great deal to him and was granted honorary membership in 2011 at the last conference he attended.

Brendan's life was underpinned by a strong Christian intent and he was a lay minister and lay preacher in the Diocese of Grahamstown, Johannesburg and Bloemfontein. During his life he was very supportive of charities and contributed many man hours to The Lighthouse Club, Lions International, Rotary and many smaller appeals. His wife, Brank, found this poem amongst his papers; it is reflective of his thoughts in the College Chapel:

In St Andrew's College Chapel

*Outside, Outside
The peach trees bloom
The Upper Close is alive with colour
A laughing boy runs by
The sky is electric
And the hum
Of the springtime worker bees
Invades the brown stone of this peace drenched chapel.*

*There is a sepia tone here.
The electric lamps hang in the cool gloom.
And atop it all the saints and angels gaze at us
From their glazed and coloured niches.*

*We are surrounded by the dead here
Amid these many bow headed boys
We are informed by the dead.
Inside us is and nearby us is
The peace of the cemetery.
The souls on the brass tablets and on the panels
They have gone.*

Brendan was a keen artist: on my departure from College, he presented me with a painting of an Eastern Cape scene. He had been working on this for six years. I do not think it is a very good painting, but it speaks of a life lived for others. For that reason, I value it highly. Most people who knew Brendan will have had a similar experience in their relationship with him: his impact would have been felt in a similar way.

Brendan's family, Brank, Mark and Christopher have now taken his ashes to his final resting place at St Andrew's College: an Honorary Old Andean has come home.

Antony Clark