

Oliver (Olly) – Early Life

It is an enormous privilege to be asked by the Makower Family to say something about Oliver and our early years together. He was, without exception, my closest friend. We first met at Oakley Hall, a rather old-fashioned prep-school in Cirencester and we made instant friends. Oliver, or ‘Makower’ – surnames were obligatory – was academically very bright. In our final year Oliver joined a select group of pupils in a small elite class which learned Greek. Sport was an important part of Oakley Hall life, and though neither of us were in first teams, we took part with enthusiasm and adequate ability. Sometime in our final year I painted a small profile portrait of Oliver in oils. It was probably cringeworthy, but many years later he told me that he still had it.

In the summer of 1950, the Makower family rented the vicarage in Appledore for the summer holidays and asked me to stay. That time is amongst my most cherished childhood memories. Makower, of course, then became Oliver. It was a time of sun, sand, swimming, cycling and lots of laughter. Oliver always made everything fun. We bicycled along the estuary and across the dunes to swim at Westward Ho at dawn. We raced home for breakfast, trying to make it before the incoming tide stopped us. Our bikes got bogged down in wet sand, and we fell into the water. Rachel, Prue, and Charlotte were there and helped make the time very special. Prue took us across the estuary in a rowing boat to a pub where we drank lemonade outside, while she and a friend went into the bar. We thought we were very daring! Rachel organised a game of Murder. Oliver solved the crime because the murderer’s alibi was that she claimed to have been in the Loo at the time of the murder, but Oliver noticed that the loo seat was up when it should have been down. Everything was fun. This was the start of my close links with Oliver’s family.

In January 1951, we both went on from Oakley Hall to Haileybury. Our housemaster was a firm disciplinarian with a kindly soul but a hard exterior who had a habit of fixing you with a beady eye, making you feel guilty even if you had nothing to feel guilty about! Oliver seemed able to neutralise this with a broad smile and an open, confident manner. At first, we lived in a common room where we made toast and cooked baked beans over a single gas ring. We did prep there – and Oliver regularly helped me with my Latin prep. Here Oliver became Olly, and I became Lou, which we remained to each other. On arrival there we were submitted to all sorts of tests and indignities, including having to stand on a stone slab known as Moses’ Tomb and sing a song. Olly would readily admit that singing wasn’t his forte and had to repeat his song.

Later we moved into studies, and we shared a threesome with John Thurston. We three entered the school art competition, which included painting, model making and Illuminated script writing. Olly did the writing, produced a really beautiful italic script document, and we won the competition. We won the interhouse boxing competition by a

whisker because Olly won his fight with great bravery. Later, I came to realise what a courageous man he was, in matters of integrity, as well as physically.

We got up to our fair share of mischief. One Saturday evening, in order to watch a film, we decided to climb into the school's central quadrangle, the gates of which had already been locked. The gates were at least 8 feet tall. Olly got stuck on the top. His top half was inside the quad and his bottom half outside, and he sort of wobbled on the top. Despite the risk of being caught by a master at any moment, and the more serious danger of dropping on his head, he got uncontrollable giggles. It seemed to go on for ever, but he at last got down without being caught or hurt.

Oliver left Haileybury a year early in order to go to Australia with his father to learn the textile business. So, naturally, he passed his A levels in Latin and Greek in one rather than two years. At the same time as spending part of every Sunday learning Hebrew. If he hadn't left school early, he would have been a school prefect and Head of Hailey House.

We spent a lot of time together during the holidays. At the end of most terms, en-route for home in Wales, I remember breakfasts with Oliver's family in Devonshire Place where we found ten shilling notes under upturned cereal bowls; or visiting his father's offices in Ludgate Hill. Happy memories of days shooting when staying at Binfield House. Happy days punting on the Thames, again with gales of laughter. Going to Holmwood for dinner with his grandmother and being amazed at his mastery of Bridge. After Haileybury, we went camping in Brittany together on my motor bike.

Then National Service called, and Oliver went into the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry of which he was immensely proud. We were both at the Eaton Hall Officer Cadet School together, he was in a senior intake to me, very smart, efficient, and soldierly. I was on parade when he passed out. Later we both served in Cyprus where the EOKA campaign was in full swing, though in different areas.

After that, inevitably, we saw each other less often, occasional visits to Oliver and Pope in St Johns Wood and later to Bishopsland. He introduced me to Freemasonry, and, very special to me, when William was born, he asked me to be his Godfather. And what a useless godfather I have been. I am sorry William. The last time we met, sometime before Covid, we lunched together at the RAG. He arrived on his fold-up bike having cycled from Paddington to Pall Mall. We talked about everything. Although our faiths had different labels, on spiritual and similar matters our thoughts were very closely aligned. When we parted, he on his bike for Paddington, I realised what a wise, generous, tolerant, considerate, and steadfast friend I had, and how much better the world would be with more people like him in it. Oliver, thank you for everything.