

Graham George Cullum 6 August 1946 — 17 August 2009.

Student BBHS 1959 (BBHS's first year) – 1961

(having obtained his Intermediate Certificate (see Boongarunby 1962 p35) he then transferred to Kingsgrove North High School).

Graham Cullum stood out academically, without doubt from my observation in Year 6 at Blacktown Primary School. In his first year at Blacktown Boys' High School, he showed a flair for leadership in setting up two fan clubs. We had a fair number of members in the Blacktown Elvis Presley Fan Club, and we invaded the movie theatre one time to watch Jailhouse Rock. The other one was the Blacktown Johnnie O'Keefe Fan Club. In his rounded but very mature handwriting, Graham wrote critiques of literature from I believe 1960 on. I think he wrote a review of everything he read--and he read voluminously. So he became a guru in English literature. After studying at the University of Sydney for four years he became a lecturer in the English Department of the Australian National University in Canberra. Graham's writing and speech showed the influence of the Latin and French that he learnt in the first three years of high school. Having definite abilities in the sciences, he chose literature and the arts as his field of study, and surveyed, assessed and developed various lines of thinking in English literature to a very considerable depth. Graham passed through Blacktown because his father worked in the local bank. His virtual footprint remains in a Blacktown Boys' High School which during Graham's junior high school years happened to be the scene of some intellectual ferment. Of those who read some of what he wrote and heard him in debate, who can forget Graham's power of argument and appeal to audience emotion from love to scorn? For him, the great authors lived, and for me there was undeniable power in Graham Cullum's expression of his views on literature and the arts.

Richard Johnson -fellow BBHS student.

Ed note: **Graham Cullum**, BA Hons (Sydney), MA Hons (La Trobe). ANU Philosophy and literature; the Renaissance; literary theory; the history of erotic representations. Publications include: *Renaissance Perspectives* (2005), co-edited with Jan Lloyd-Jones, the edited volume *Art and Reality: John Anderson on Literature and Aesthetics* (1983), and articles on literature and aesthetics.

See also:

<http://www.blacktownhighalumni.org.au/Info/BBBHS%20Academic%20Achievements%20gain%20points%201960.pdf>

and...

The longest-serving member of the English Department passed away on 17 August 2009 after falling ill in his office a few days before. He had been a teacher in the Department for 37 years. Graham Cullum was born in Sydney, the only son of Fred and Marge; his sister, Sue, was born four years later. The family, both immediate and extended, was happy and close-knit, and remained deeply important to Graham all his life. He excelled at his high schools (**Blacktown Boys'** and Kingsgrove North) and became the first member of his family to go to university, which he did on a scholarship. Reading English at Sydney in the mid-1960s, he felt the posthumous influence of John Anderson, the Scottish-born Sydney philosopher who was one of

Australia's greatest teachers. Anderson had died in 1962 but his libertarian ideas were still common currency within the Sydney intellectual and artistic sub-culture known as 'the Push'. Graham later edited two books

on him; his lifelong passion for Greek philosophy was derived partly from Anderson. A greater direct teaching influence, however, was that of the late and legendary Bill Maidment, of the Sydney English Department, who according to Graham 'showed him that art, history and human thought was vast, complex and worth engaging with'. It was during these years that Graham discovered his other lifelong scholarly centre, in Renaissance poetry, drama and philosophy. He took his interdisciplinary interests further during his MA studies at La Trobe in 1968-71, where his research was in contemporary literary theory. At Sydney, Graham had also cultivated interests in music, mainly classical and early Renaissance but also jazz and blues; he was an excellent pianist (and was pretty serious about snooker, too). In Melbourne he found a new extracurricular passion: for the Carlton Football Club. He was never happier than when watching the Blues demolish some hapless opponent (preferably Collingwood) at the MCG. Well, sometimes he was: for it was also in Melbourne that he met Marie Boag. They were married in 1970, and their long awaited son, Jonathan, was born in 1978. Graham and Marie moved to Canberra in 1972, when he began his long association with the ANU. With occasional research and teaching sorties to Edinburgh, Sussex, Iowa or Bologna, he was to remain a pillar of the English Department until the day when he was taken from it to hospital; he never retired.

Both the Department and the ANU were different places in those earlier days. Much of Graham's Socratic discussion of books and ideas, with students as well as colleagues in English and Philosophy, was carried on in the Union Bar and the Staff Centre at Old Canberra House, often with Kim Lycos from Philosophy. The life of the mind, as Graham's first students soon realised in his company, was a vocation in the true sense, not something pursued for career reasons during class hours. "The thinking man's thinking man" was what they called their apparently omniscient and carefully attentive teacher. By the end he was teaching the children of those earliest students. He passed on to thousands of students his enthusiasm for Shakespeare and Montaigne, Wyatt and Raleigh, Scottish literature and Tolstoy, Plato and Wordsworth (and of course the great Alex Jesaulenko). He was formidably well read with a remarkable memory and a wonderful sense of humour. His so-long occupied office was a den of books, always with a mysterious aroma of tobacco.

He supervised many PhDs and MAs, and contributed to the academic community in numerous other ways. He was immensely and justly proud of his long periods of service with the ANU Staff Association, the Federation of Australian University Staff Associations and the National Tertiary Education Union, and of his time as Head of English in 2003-6. But undergraduate teaching was always the core of his life, and there is no doubt that he was much saddened in recent years by what he saw as the diminished value placed by the modern managerial university on undergraduate teaching in the core Humanities. During his last eight years, however, Graham found much happiness and a new lease of life with the Korean academic and art historian Dr En Young Ahn. He became a mellower colleague, enjoyed his teaching more than ever and welcomed his Headship responsibilities.

Graham Cullum travelled a long, unique and memorable path down the corridors of the A. D. Hope building, where he had worked ever since they were built; they feel emptier for his passing. He leaves behind his father, Fred; his son, Jonathan; his partner En Young; and Jonathan's wife Veronica. 'I do not strain at the position— It is familiar—but at the author's drift.'

Simon Hain

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