

John Howard ALEXANDER



ALEXANDER John Howard 8002 (1962–67)
LJ Alexander Engineer Epping; Bur, Bri,
Hm. Cdt. Medical Practitioner. 15/03/1978
[30.11]

Born 16 April 1950 Sydney
Died 15 March 1978 New Zealand

John Howard Alexander was the first born to Lennox James Alexander and Dorothy Estelle (nee Howard) on 16 April 1950. Lennox, a mechanical engineer, and Dorothy had married in 1947, she having previously served in the RAAF during WW2 as an Aircraftwoman. Lennox went on to establish his own engineering business – LJ Alexander Engineering. John's grandfather, Herbert James Alexander, was an optometrist. John also had a cousin at King's, Mike Howard, another '67er.

Fellow '67er Geoff Young lived not far from the Alexander family at Epping and has lasting memories of the numerous bus journeys to school with John during their six years at King's. Geoff recalls that John had a very enquiring mind even in Year 7, ranging from building old valve radio sets to blowing up ants' nests with '3-penny bungers' in the backyard. Some activities were decidedly dangerous, and they were lucky not to injure themselves. They were also both members of the local church fellowship, more to chase girls than from any religious leanings - as Geoff recalls. At that time, for three years in a row, John and Geoff ran the local Smith Family food drive before Christmas, collecting non-perishable food stuffs for Christmas hampers that were distributed to needy members of the community.

John, as a day boy, was in Burkitt then Britten House where he was a House Monitor in 1967. He was one of the more academically gifted students always coming near the top of all his classes with a strong leaning towards science and maths. He was an active member of the Faraday Club and, as the School Magazine put it:

'J.H. Alexander delivered a paper of a more practical nature on the two-stroke engine. He illustrated his subject with a boxful of used and damaged parts'.

John was also a lance corporal in the Cadet Corps and a strong supporter of school sport if not a gifted player.



In 1968, with a Commonwealth Scholarship, he with other '67ers Arch Morton, Jock Shumack and Geoff Watt commenced medical studies at the University of Sydney. Here he again did well, ending up with an excellent academic record. He took a year off to do a BSc (Med), a medical research degree in which he studied exocrine glands under Professor John Young, and he wrote his thesis on the rat extra-orbital lacrimal gland showing that it secreted tears of similar composition to other secretory glands.

While he was doing his internship, John met Shirley, a nurse, and they were married at The King's School Chapel in 1976, John then moved to Adelaide with Shirley and undertook the arduous FRACP programme, passing both the written and oral exams at first attempt – not a common feat.

In rare moments of spare time they attended chamber music concerts, went bushwalking, camping, and undertook many cross-country skiing trips, occasionally camping in the snow.

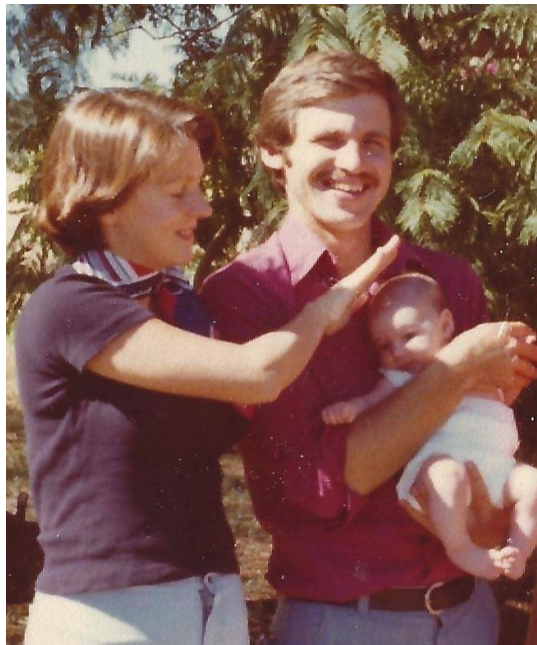
The first of their planned five children was born in 1978, a daughter Kate.

At the age of two weeks she was duly instructed (in a bouncinette) on the art of rotating car tyres to ensure even wear and tear. John proudly carried her around in a cardboard box, eschewing the regular baby carriage equipment as nothing more than commercial gimmickry. His reward for passing the FRACP was to join some friends for a guided walking tour over the Franz Josef Glacier in New Zealand.

Geoff Young clearly remembers the day when there was a knock on his front door. It was a mutual friend and neighbour of John's parents who had the unenviable task of informing John's friends that he had died in a crevasse fall on the Franz Josef Glacier. John was very thorough in all things and he had learned how you save yourself if you fell on the ice, which was to take out the ice pick quickly and swing it sideways to dig into the ice and stop the slide. Sadly however, he fell forwards and was not able to save himself.

John's loss was not just a tragedy for his family and friends, but it was a severe loss to the medical fraternity. Shirley re-married, studied various areas of technology, including computing, and became an academic, later being appointed Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the University of Technology Sydney. Their daughter, Kate, is now a mother herself and John has three grandchildren – Cooper, Lucas and Milla Coe. Cooper often plays school sport at King's and enjoys hearing about his grandfather's time there.

John was the boy and man most likely to go far in his career, but this was not to be



Contributors:

Geoff Young, Shirley Alexander, Malcolm Lamb, Arthur Chesterfield-Evans, Rodney Hammett, David Payne

Family photos – Shirley Alexander