

## **Tom Gresvig: a tribute**

The news came through from Haakon last weekend when we were on holiday in France and, for the next few days, I reflected on Tom's extraordinary contribution to UWC and gazed with pride into the kaleidoscope of our partnership.

Memories caught immortal; from an introductory tour of the city in the back seat of what must be one of Oslo's smallest cars to dining in style at 'Norske Selskap' to Tom sitting on the sofa at the rektor's house armed with a gin and tonic and reading a bedtime story in Norsk to Poppy, our four year old daughter, with Ibsen the dog resting his chin loyally on Tom's knee; from his idiosyncratic casual clothing colour choices to his proud sporting of a Sunnfjord bunad at Royal events on campus, from training Poppy on the beach at Jomfruland to help me with a proposal of marriage to delivering a fine speech in the Norwegian Ambassador's Residence in London on the history of UWC and Red Cross Nordic. Perhaps my favourite is the image of him arriving at Haakon and Zhe's wedding in a rather charred state after dousing the flames from his vintage car.

Vintage Gresvig.

Tom had the rare gift of being both genuinely interested and interesting - and we shared a mutual interest in each other's cultural heritages - he guided me sensitively on Norwegian etiquette and protocol and I delighted in introducing him to fly fishing for salmon in the Flekke River and all things British.

All of us here today will have our own personal and unique memories of Tom and we shall, I am certain, treasure them.

I visited Tom in hospital in early December en route to our quarterly Board Meeting in Stockholm - his voice was barely a whisper but his handshake was firm and his eyes simply sparkled as we discussed developments at the college between the main jubilee event (his last visit to the campus he loved) and the end of term.

I wrote to him via Haakon before Christmas to let him know that the College had been awarded the Fjaler Prize, for the first time in its twenty year history, for its commitment to innovation and inclusion and for its ongoing promotion of internationalism in our kommune. Magne Bjergene, one of RCN's founding team members and sparring partner for Tom, had previously been awarded the prize for his lifelong commitment to Fjaler and exciting and innovative projects such as the development of a college in the fjords.

On behalf of the students and staff at RCN, I would like to dedicate the 2015 Fjaler Prize to Tom. Without his immeasurable contribution, RCN would simply not exist.

I also sent Tom the Christmas slideshow of the term gone by, complemented by a recording of 'Silent Night' with each verse sung in a different language by some of our students. 'Silent Night' takes us back to the unofficial Christmas truce between German and British troops in December 1914. The German troops lit candles and sang this carol in an expression of peace and as an offering of humanity across no-man's land.

It was in the wreckage of post war Germany that Kurt Hahn, later to be the founder of Atlantic College and the UWC movement, and Imperial Chancellor Max Von Baden set about - as educational pioneers - establishing a values-based co-educational school called Salem in Southern Germany in response to the war and, most importantly, to contribute to shaping the next generation of Germans.

One of the most seminal and significant meetings of Tom's life was with Kurt Hahn at Salem. Tom, a student of German A-Level at Atlantic College in Wales in the mid-1960s, had secured a meeting with the retired Kurt Hahn in his rooms at Salem and I like to think it was this meeting, his formative experiences at Atlantic College and his belief in education as a force for peace that prompted him to set out on the road to establish a United World College in the Nordic region in the 1980s.

Lawyer by daytime, he set about building a committed team to establish a college - from educators to those with an adventurous spirit, from architects to the Norwegian Red Cross - and creating partnerships with the Royal Palace, with UWC International, with local, national and international politicians and civil servants, and with influential Norwegian supporters from Thor Heyerdahl to Her Majesty Queen Sonja.

Their vision was an educational Nordic cooperation - from westerly Greenland to Easterly Finland - with students drawn from all over the rest of the world. You simply have to read our timeless statutes to understand the vision of Tom and the founding team - articulate, inspiring, ambitious and enduring and underpinned by legal precision and pragmatism.

Our College was officially opened in 1995 by Her Majesty Queen Sonja, our patron, and Queen Noor of Jordan, President of UWC.

On Tom's fiftieth birthday, fifty students representing the geographic diversity of our campus, entered our auditorium and gave him a rose each to celebrate his birthday and to thank him for creating the educational pathway for RCN students, past, present and future.

Tom's commitment to the College and its development never wavered - even during the time when Ingrid fell ill. For a new Rektor, a founding figure can sometimes seem and sometimes

prove intrusive, bobbing menacingly on the horizon and handcuffed to the past but Tom understood the wisdom of Ben Okri, the Nigerian writer, that 'our future must be greater than our past'. His support was wholehearted and his capacity for new ideas, new projects unparalleled.

The only time I noticed that I had stretched his patience was when I unwittingly allowed the kommune to cut down the avenue of trees running down the hill to the College on health and safety grounds!

He deeply loved the educational vision of UWC, the development of RCN as the Nordic College, and Fjaler - and, as I discovered, those damned trees.

We shall miss him enormously.

Lawyer, educator, gentleman, international traveler, dreamer and friend.

Today the UWC and Norwegian flags are flying at half-mast on our campus - and today we honour and celebrate Tom's tremendous and extraordinary contribution to our future.

At RCN, we draw great comfort from the fact that Tom was strong enough to attend our two day Jubilee in mid-September in the company of his sons and their wives (one a Chinese alumna of our College). They undoubtedly must have been hugely proud of what he had achieved in a remote location in the fjords.

And Tom's commitment to UWC was not confined to our region - present in 2014 at the opening of our sister Colleges in Germany and Armenia and ever present in spirit at the opening of UWC Changshu China in November 2015 - a College he had worked so hard over the years to help come into creation.

Tom wrote to me and used gently to tease me that I was (to quote him) 'a man of action but not of haste'.

Perhaps Tom knew that time was precious, time was limited - and that to achieve what he hoped 'on the road' he needed to move with deft speed, powerful bursts and agility. After all, grandfather Gresvig was a famed Norwegian cyclist turned entrepreneur at the turn of the 20th century.

Tom continued to dream of the potential of RCN. He bought some land to the north of the campus some years ago and has been committed to developing it - a walkway along the fjord for patients and students and a renovated boat house. The project's working title became fittingly

'Miklagard' - the Viking's name for the great city Constantinople, the gateway from Europe to Asia.

In many ways, Tom was an explorer in the great Norwegian tradition - he was always 'Sailing to Byzantium' [Yeats] in search of his own Miklagard, a place of beauty, wisdom, curiosities and an intercultural meeting point.

I like to think he found it.

And, Tom, in the spirit of 'Silent Night', 'may you [now] sleep in heavenly peace'.

Richard D A Lamont  
Rektor  
UWC Red Cross Nordic

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