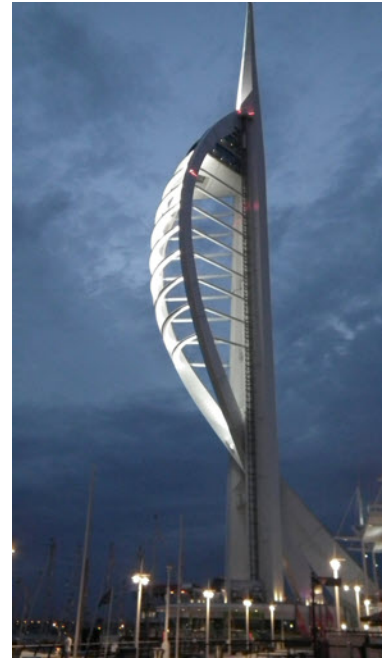


Pompey 2012 – Was it like Salmon?

It wasn't until the final lowering of the O.W. Ensign on Gunwharf Quay on Friday June 22 2012 that I noticed I wasn't the only one standing to rigid attention, I wasn't the only one with tears in his eyes and much to my delight, the admission from those around me that a 'lump in the throat' wasn't just mine! Since returning to Adelaide in South Australia on July 4 I have thought long and hard about these emotions and I want to share my thoughts with all the O.W.'s who were fortunate enough to be part of the 150th. re-union in Portsmouth. Looking around the room at the Guildhall Dinner and around the Cathedral during the Service, I realised (& I know we all did) that I was part of something very special. A film-maker or publisher would have given his eye teeth just to get 15% of the stories these men could tell. Romance, Bravery, Adventure, Knowledge, Foolhardiness, Desperate Times, Winning, Losing....the whole gamut of lives lived to the 'max'.



I'm sure my story is typical of many O.W.'s and it begins in an ordinary way. I was sent off to Boarding School at the tender age of eight. My parents, later divorced, were going through some difficult times and it was easier to move a frightened, worried eight year old to a boarding school than suffer his whimpering questions.

I always loved the sea and boats and becoming a Sea Scout at this first school prepared me for Worcester which became the focus and final objective for a troubled youngster.

When the divorce finally came and my mother returned to her native France, having custody of all us kids, I was encouraged to look at joining the French Navy. An incident during a history lesson with a pompous Frenchman who derided the British Navy, made me rebel. Luckily for me my mother allowed my father to bring me home to England and I was finally sent to HMS Worcester. I will be eternally grateful to her.

My first step aboard was thrilling and I remember Freddie King asking me how I knew to salute the mizzen and I proudly replied....."Sea Scouts Sir!" During the next few years, the routine, discipline, 'mateship' & 'brotherhood' became the very thing that was missing in my life. Worcester became 'family' and was the bedrock of who I was. It taught me self reliance, patience and made me understand the meaning of two important words....."consequences and accountability". 'Black Mac's' (Mr. McAllister) reply during Seamanship Classes to a question about why we always had to have lifeboat drills has been a major focus of my life. His reply was "On a ship or boat lads, it's too late when it's too late!!".



Like many of you reading this, HMS Worcester gave me a sense of belonging. Life- long friends were made here. Tom Sparks, George Pitttock and Dave Ramage who I bumped into quite by accident when we first emigrated to Australia in 1970.

I left Worcester in 1962 & even though I had failed my MOT eyesight test, I still went to sea with Cunard, my first ship being the old Queen Mary. I kept all my Leaving Cadet pictures, my belt buckle, my medal given to me by the Queen, ship's company photograph, and others, that

have been safely transported from continent to continent, house to house, box to box.....wistfully looked at from time to time with fond remembrance.

It was while living in Queensland that I formally joined the QLD O.W's and from my first meeting was treated as if I was an old mate. I knew then that my feelings were mutual. Loriot Williamson and his crew will always be counted as friends.



In South Australia I met with Keith Broderick (1963) and Mike Barnett (1952), who sadly died in June 2010. He so wanted to be there in Portsmouth. Mike and his wife Ann, Christine and I went on a sailing cruise in previous years with our boats 'Saracen' and 'Allegro', joining friends across Gulf St Vincent. We must have driven everyone mad with our 'Worcester antics'.....flag etiquette, knots, ropes and splices, even 'reveille' over the radio on VHF Ch. 72 at 6am. The endless discussions we had about Worcester and our shared experiences made for happy times. It was as if we were teenagers again. It's the same with Keith Broderick and his wife Toni, the only other OW in South Australia, who have become our life-long friends.



I have trouble explaining to my non Worcester friends what this all means and over the years I have whittled it down to simply, "belonging" and "shared experiences".

During the re-union in Portsmouth we were all frantically trying to find old friends.....looking at name badges, comparing old photos to now (hair loss was the most talked about!!). But what made me realise that my feelings were shared was when I caught up with Robin Russell (1962) who brought me a picture the very next day that he had kept for nearly 50 years. We were both in the photo, with others and he confided that over the years he had looked at this picture often, wondering where

I had gone. I wasn't alone, I wasn't a sentimental jerk!! I wasn't the only one who wondered "where are they now?"

During our time in Portsmouth I mentioned to Tom Sparks, Campbell 'Polly Pearson and Keith Broderick that the potential for abuse at Worcester was always there. I hadn't experienced it and neither did they. It may have happened to a 'tiny few', but the fact that so many OW's were present showed us all that Worcester had earned our respect and gratitude. This respect and gratitude is the same for all those wonderful men and women who organised our glorious three days in Pompey.



A passing remark made to Tom....."This reminds me of Salmon swimming back to the river they were born in.....swimming back to spawn and die". Tom's remark.....'Bugger the dying mate, give me spawning every time!!".

Good luck to you all and if you ever find yourself in South Australia, please don't hesitate to call. I'm in the White Pages. The password is "Old Worcester".

When you next see a flag coming down at sunset to the sound of a bugle, don't be surprised if the tears of the bloke next to you are the tears of another Old Worcester. Bless you all.

Stan Benjamin (1962) – July 18 2012 – Aldinga Beach, South Australia.