

**A TIME TO REMEMBER - Michael Ian Douglas Sturrock
Saturday 20 October 2007 – 10.45 for 11 am
at Mayfield Salisbury Parish Church, Edinburgh**

Tribute by Neil Sinclair, Rannoch School contemporary

Today I am going to speak about Mike at Rannoch School in Perthshire. He and I were among the first 80 pupils in 1959 and Mike spent the next five years there. They were years which Mike felt were among the most important in his life.

Beforehand I should mention that Mike was in fact a man of triple identity. In addition to Jock and Mike, as Frances has mentioned, he was known as MIDS from the initials of Michael Ian Douglas Sturrock. For years afterwards Christmas cards arrived signed MIDS – a cause of some puzzlement to my wife, Helen, after we were first married. Today I am going to call him Mike as that is how I knew him in the last few years when happily we met up again.

Rannoch School was founded by Dougal Greig, John Fleming and Pat Whitworth – three former Gordonstoun schoolmasters of remarkable vision. It was the first secondary boarding school to be established in Scotland after the Second World War. Rannoch was remarkable in being founded without any of the marketing and fundraising campaigns that would be essential today. In their place was a combination of idealism and practicality – qualities I would suggest that are also those many of us would also associate with Mike.

So in September 1959 Mike and I found ourselves at the new Rannoch School which then consisted of a Victorian Scottish Baronial mansion around which new or second hand wooden buildings were being erected. The School was quite astute in that they had a 'construction' afternoon which involved boys helping with projects such as digging drains, but also later converting the School Chapel from farm buildings. This was obviously good training for Mike as later in life he helped to build the squash courts at Dean Tennis Club.

The early years of Rannoch could be described as pioneering. In spite of the fact that there was a hydro-electric station on the opposite side of Loch Rannoch there was no mains electricity until 1963. I recently found a school notice of December 1962 saying that because there had not been any 'major breakdowns of our aged and temperamental generating plant we were being led into a false feeling of confidence and security'. There then followed a list of 'suggestions', such as replacing light bulbs close to working space by those of 30 to 40 watts. It also expressed concern about personal heating devices. The personal heating devices were probably due to the inadequacy of the school's calor gas heaters.

The experience at Rannoch perhaps influenced Mike who always turned off unnecessary lights and would put on an extra jumper rather than turn up the heating. It possibly also encouraged his later interest in green issues. Looking back one could say that with its emphasis on conserving light and heating and because boys used bicycles for any local journeys that Rannoch was the first 'eco school', long before its time.

If the pioneering atmosphere was one element of Rannoch that Mike remembered, another was marvellous setting of the School. It was situated on the shore of Loch Rannoch and surrounded by hills and the mountain of Schiehallion. Rannoch had the most beautiful location of any educational institution in Britain. The school backed onto the Black Wood of Rannoch with wildlife such as capercaillies. It was obviously a joy for someone like Mike who loved the Highlands and wild places.

At Rannoch there was also the opportunity to enjoy a wider area of the Highlands through weekend expeditions to Loch Ericht, Ben Alder, Corroul and beyond. Not only did Mike take part enthusiastically in these Expeditions, but he was also able to develop his skills in skiing at Rannoch. I can remember his excitement when he was able to go on a school skiing trip to Norway.

What are people's memories of Mike at Rannoch? He certainly made an immediate impression on Dougal Greig, the headmaster, during one of Rannoch's early rugby matches with another school – between a junior 15 and Croftinloan Preparatory School. At one point Mike kicked the ball ahead, ran and caught it and then scored one of Rannoch's first tries.

That is, however, not a typical memory of Mike. He was someone who did well in his academic work and took part enthusiastically in sport, expeditions and all the other school activities, but was rarely in the limelight and certainly did not seek it. Speaking to both Rannoch pupils and staff about Mike one always gets a very positive view of him. Just as importantly he is remembered as a person who never had a bad word to say about anybody else.

On Rannoch's very first day I can remember Mike Haines, one of the masters, saying that this was a new school without any traditions and it was up to us, the first pupils to establish them. Those traditions and the atmosphere created by Mike and the other first pupils did indeed help to establish the school successfully and it survived until the changed circumstances of the 21st century led to its closure five years ago.

Although Rannoch School no longer exists its influence lives on in its former pupils. I know that Mike felt that influence and looked back on his schooldays with very many happy memories.

Mike left Rannoch for Edinburgh University in 1964. I had left the school a year earlier. We were able to meet during the next few years until I moved to England when our contact for the next 35 years was by the annual Christmas card on which we used to write 'we must meet up again'. Two years ago, when we both had the advantage of time that retirement had given us, we did indeed meet up.

Speaking to Mike in recent years one thing that always came through was his continuing interest in and concern for other people. Nowhere was this more obvious than in all the support and friendship that he has given to his old headmaster, Dougal Greig who has been housebound for the past seven years and who Mike used to visit every week. I know that Dougal Greig has felt Mike's death very deeply. He has said to me that Mike embodied everything that Rannoch School could hope a pupil to be. That is something that all of us who know knew Mike during his schooldays would echo.

We will shortly be singing *Father hear the prayer we offer*. This is a most appropriate hymn for remembering Mike for several reasons. It was chosen by Anne for her wedding with Mike because it had been sung at her parents' wedding. Although Anne only found this out fairly recently, it was also the Rannoch School hymn sung at the beginning and end of each term. The words are particularly appropriate. Mike certainly always chose the steep and rugged pathway and, above all, he was someone who always lived his life courageously.