

John Ridd was born in Bristol in 1945.

He spent his first two years in a children's home before being adopted by Phyllis Ridd. Before the war, Phyllis had been working for a famous blind Reader in History at Bristol University, but at the time of his adoption she was running the dairy she'd inherited from her late parents. Together with her sisters Mary and Gladys, they made sure that John had a happy childhood and a good education.

John rarely asked about his start in life. He didn't want to hurt his mum, and he used to get conflicting stories anyway. He was far more interested in Phyllis's family history; the Ridds from Devon and the Tangyes from Cornwall. He was in his late 60s when he contacted an adoption agency to find out about his parents and was delighted when he was told that Phyllis actually really was his natural mother!

This revelation explained a lot. John knew that his mum had become great friends with the matron at the children's home. Phyllis must have been a frequent visitor to see him. When it looked like a couple wanted to adopt him, she was able to adopt him first herself rather than lose him.

When John was in his late teens, he went to Sandhurst, then joined the Royal Military Police in 1965.

Only a year later, he was involved in maintaining the cordon when a Russian plane crashed in the British part of Berlin. No doubt his A level Russian helped him "vigorously deter" at least one Russian soldier from getting any closer!

It was during his posting to Minden in West Germany where he met Ebbi, who was working as an English translator for the army. There had been a parade earlier that day. He was a dashing young soldier with a courteous manner, she was beautiful and vivacious. It was love at first sight! They talked all through the night and in the morning she invited him to her mother's house for breakfast. He quickly became part of the Siebe family.

Their courtship did have its obstacles. Some of the community resented an Englishman having a relationship with a local girl. There was also an army directive for soldiers not to fraternise with Germans. They needed permission to marry, and were forever grateful to his superior officer, Jack Thomas, for all the help he gave to make this possible. They managed to win everyone over. When Ebbi and John later married in 1967, their wedding received the endorsement of the army when Lieutenant General Sir John and Lady Mogg attended their ceremony.

Christopher was born in Germany, Michael in England. After postings to Northern Ireland and Berlin and while the boys were young, they lived in America for a few years. They immersed themselves in American life, and the family have lots of stories about their time there. This was where they had the first of a series of cats called Mickey. It was given to them as a kitten by one of the Generals, but that Mickey had to stay behind with the next exchange officer's family when the Ridds moved back to the UK.

With his family settled in Chichester, John continued his military career which included postings and exercises in the Falklands, Norway, Greece, Italy and Germany again. When he returned from Italy, he managed to bring with him a lovely present for Ebbi - a door for her old Fiat 500 car!

He retired from the Regular Army in around 1984. This was followed by a few years working for an airport security company contracted by PanAm, then a few years working for Allied Dunbar. During this time he carried on as a member of the Territorial Army.

In the 1990s, John joined the Emergency Planning Team at West Sussex County Council and was the Emergency Planning Officer for Chichester District and Crawley Borough Councils. He had a good sense of humour and we're told he could make the office laugh out loud. His ability to look on the bright side helped when they had to deal with the huge floods in Chichester in 1994.

In his spare time he was involved with the Parish Council in Donnington. This led to him being encouraged to stand as a candidate for Chichester District Council. He won his seat for the Ward of Donnington, and in 2005 he became the Chairman of the District Council for six years. There are a quite few photos of him wearing a ceremonial chain, or as he called it his “dingle dangle”!

During his time at the Council, he was keen to promote local youth organisations like the Lodge Hill Centre in Waterside. Afterwards, he went on to join the board of directors of the Boys’ Club in Chichester. He was very conscious of all the advantages he himself had been given as a child, so was only too pleased to help.

When he retired, he wrote a novel about a medieval civil servant in Chichester called “Farewell, My Sussex”. It was set at the time when the Anglo Saxons were being displaced by the invading Normans. All the historical details were carefully researched, although he used some artistic licence to give the protagonist a voice and tone that could have been from a thousand years ago. He dedicated the book to his mother because they shared such an interest in history.

He did like words and enjoyed doing crossword puzzles with Ebbi. Michael recently found a notebook in which there were clippings and quotations which he’d been collecting, including some Ken Dodd and Kenneth Williams jokes converted into Latin.

The family house on Lange Straße in Lübbecke still belongs to Ebbi. Until COVID, they were able to go there a couple of times a year. John collected post-World War II German stamps and they were able to visit his favourite stamp shop in nearby Bielefeld, but mostly they would work on maintaining the house, going on trips, and seeing family and friends there.

They also went on some interesting holidays. A memorable one was crossing the Atlantic on the QE2 and coming back via Concorde. They also enjoyed a journey on the Orient Express. Other great experiences were their tours of China, Hong Kong and Russia.

Most importantly, John was a family man. He was very proud of his sons and grandchildren, and was a kind and supportive father-in-law.

His last thoughts and concerns were for Ebbi. Over the years, she has been amazing, adjusting to all the challenges of being an army wife, taking on the role of mother and father when he was away. He appreciated how she made a home for him wherever they went and in whatever circumstances. When he joined the Council, he had her full support. Whilst he was in hospital they often held hands and he repeatedly told her that she was a good wife.

Ebbi was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s a few years ago. Since then, John had been her carer, which he carried out with patience and love. His sons promised him that they would continue to give her all of the help and support that she needs.

John was buried in the Siebe/Ridd family plot in Lübbecke on the 15th December. It was a beautiful service and everything went well despite it being a bitterly cold day. John’s mother is interred in Chichester Crematorium and the plaque on her memorial stone will be updated to include his name. The stone is in front of a single rose plant.

John is being sorely missed by us all.