

Neil Michael James Faraday

29th January 1968 – 11th June 2018

We are all here today to remember, and to say our final goodbyes to ...
a well-loved man - who has died too soon, cut off in his prime ...
50 years of life.

– a much-loved husband ...

– a skilled computer wizard and analyst ...

– a biker, who came to the hobby perhaps rather later than most ...

but also ... as Neil summed himself up on his twitter-feed ...

“Gay ... listener ... thinker ... liberal ... humanist”

Tribute

Neil Faraday was born, Neil Redhead, on 29th January 1968 in March, Cambridgeshire, to parents Margaret and John. He was the middle of 3 children, with brothers Martin and Andrew.

He was brought up in that fenland market town

He went to Dartford Road Infants and Westwood Primary School and then on to Hereward School for his secondary education.

His mother remembers him, returning from a junior school trip, aged 7 or 8,

bursting with enthusiasm ... “I’d like a mountain and I want a horse” – he had been abseiling and horse-riding during the trip and had loved it. Well, as far as we know he never rode a horse again – his favoured mount in later years had 2 wheels and a large engine – and he never owned that mountain – although he successfully climbed several metaphorical ones with his illness in recent years.

At school he was quite a loner – although he was to become the gregarious one in later life. School life probably wasn’t the happiest – kids can be cruel to someone who could struggle with his weight and who had needed lots of operations on his right foot. He wasn’t a sporty person – but give him a computer and he was in his element – he would build and rebuild them and do some programming.

As a teenager, he sometimes worked to help his dad who fitted double glazing. On one occasion, Neil slipped on the steps while holding a new window panel – “Are you OK?” his worried father asked – “Yes - and I haven’t broken the glass” replied Neil – as always more concerned about others than himself.

He did well in his A Levels and after school went on to work for the Department of Employment at the local Job Centre. This work eventually led him to Leicester with a job transfer in his late 20’s. After that, he worked in a Contact Centre – for Viking – where he eventually became a team manager.

In his mid 30’s he decided on a complete career change and trained to become a lorry driver – 7 1/2 tonne trucks, the real thing. Perhaps he was influenced by Mike’s job as a career driver. It certainly seems that he wanted to do something completely different from his previous indoor, sedentary job in a contact centre – changing to a role which was outdoors, manual, and

sometimes pretty dirty. He would pick up everything and anything, and drive it anywhere you wanted.

His driving career ended when he was made redundant and he then changed to work at British Gas – as a customer service advisor, at their main call centre, in Alyestone Road.

At British Gas he became the LGBT workplace organiser for his GMB union. Union work fed into his character of listening to and then helping people – especially those unable to help themselves. He loved that role – he could shout at those responsible for prejudice and discrimination, and he enjoyed nothing better than “taking the management down”. His official role gave him the advantage that he could do this to his heart’s content without losing his job!

Six years ago – he changed his role at British Gas to work for directly for Max as a “real-time analyst”. This meant that he was part of the team trying to ensure that every customer in the phone queue was answered as quickly as possible and answered by the best person to deal with their enquiry. I am sure that we are all too familiar with the this sort of telephone system - “Press 1 for sales, 2 for complaints, ... 9 if you’ve already lost the will to live”. Well, Neil used his computer skills and analysis to manipulate the system and ensure that people arrived as quickly as possible in the correct place - deciding not only what “1,2,3,4” should be, but ensuring that whoever sat on the phone behind each number had the most appropriate skills and ability to act. He provided data based on this for business analysis and to help improve the service. He created and maintained the database which sent out the “Alert System” messages to the leadership team if things began to go wrong. It was a 24h role – and he could, and would, log in remotely to work from home as well as from the office on any day of the week or even the weekend. He loved his work and he became very close to the team which shared this work – Max, Matt and Kelly.

Max told me, he was really responsible for all the data which lay behind the team’s work – when he was first ill “they were scuppered”.

Neil met Mike nearly 20 years ago when he was 30 years old. It was at the Dover Castle in Leicester. I asked Mike how they met – “it shouldn’t have happened” he told me.

Mike was house-sitting for the weekend for friends – he should have gone back home on Sunday but his friends were delayed so he stayed on for another night. It was the August Bank Holiday Sunday – so Mike wasn’t driving the next day and he decided to go out for a drink. The Dover Castle was where he used to drink with those same friends.

In the pub, Neil and Mike were introduced by a mutual friend – instantly there was a spark – the first handshake was perhaps a little longer than you would expect. They got talking. ... and talking ... and talking.

Mike eventually looked at his watch and saw that he was about to miss the last train home. After that, Mike says it was “like a 1940’s black and white movie – a chance meeting, a train station ... just without the steam”. They ran down the road to the station hand in hand – Neil asked for a contact number – but Mike had just changed phone provider – more haste and confusion. Mike leapt onto the train with seconds to spare. He lowered the window as the train was pulling out. They shared their first kiss. Sounds like it was “Love at first sight”.

I asked Mike ‘what did you see in Neil?’ – “I don’t know – a spark – a look in his eye” – ‘and what did he see in you?’ – “a strapping 6 foot scotsman!”.

They moved in together 5 weeks later – and never looked back. Initially it was a house-share, then rented places just as a couple. Eight years ago they moved into Cornwall Road. They found it and moved in within 11 days. They had seen the place and applied but were already driving up to Scotland for a break when the agent’s call was received – they stopped the car, turned around, drove back to arrange to sign the papers, transfer money and organise things – then drove off back to Scotland for their holiday. They moved in as soon as they returned, and Neil lived there for the rest of his life.

They were a devoted couple – Neil was the gregarious one, Mike more reserved and cautious. Neil always said that Mike “made him short, made him fat and made him old!”. Well, he was 20 years older by the time he died this month, and he had always had a bit of a tendency to put on weight – but why was he shorter? Mike was of course taller, but Neil had always claimed to be 5’8” or even 5’9”, until one day Mike insisted on measuring him properly ... it turned out that the real answer was 5’7”!

Their Civil Partnership, on 4th February 2006, was a quiet affair – just the two of them and a couple of friends.

They decided to get married in October 2015. Neil was secretly arranging a surprise 50th birthday party for Mike when Mike asked him to marry. They decided to have a combined celebration for the marriage and the birthday. They were married in Leicester Town Hall – a simple affair with parents, family and friends. Pictures show the happy couple – but Neil joked that he looked like Colonel Saunders – his hair and beard had turned pure white due to his cancer treatment and he had a suit to match.

Outside work, they developed a shared interest in motor cycling. Mike had been riding since his teens, so Neil joked that he was “dating a biker” – but he soon came to love riding himself. Mike said “no” to a big bike until he had properly passed his test – but bought him his first real bike – a Suzuki GSF 600. His last bike was his pride and joy – a Suzuki GSX 1250 – a picture was proudly tweeted as “my new toy”. Neil identified as a biker once he got started, and he rode well – like someone who had been riding much longer. They went on regular rides with the “GBMCC” - right up to when Neil had to give up his licence because of his illness.

They enjoyed eating out together - The Case, Stones, Dinos, The Opera House – and whenever they were in Scotland they would make a point of booking a meal at their favourite restaurant – the “Ubiquitous Chip” in Glasgow.

One year they had a big holiday visiting Provincetown in the USA – quite a trip since Mike doesn’t much like flying. Now, Provincetown is at the very tip of Cape Cod and a long drive by road – so they decided to fly in from Boston. Mike didn’t realise quite how small that plane would be – it was a tiny twin- engined Cessna with seats one behind the other. Mike sat behind terrified, with clenched knuckles holding onto the seat ahead for dear life – Neil, in front, thought he was just having an affectionate hug.

His main hobby was his PC – he enjoyed programming and online games – but he was also a real sci-fi fan – Star Trek, Star Wars, Dr Who, Babylon 5. He also described himself online as a “budding sci-fi author” – apparently he

wrote several stories – but he never quite felt that they were ready (and never got them published). He had been thinking of self-publishing on Amazon when time ran out. Even Mike hasn't read them yet – perhaps when he does they will finally see the light of day.

His musical tastes were eclectic – Classical – Country & Western – Modern pop – Rock. He would have liked to dance – but never felt that he could (in contrast to Mike whose ability on the dance floor was known to all).

He was a thinker, a humanist who retweeted the “Daily Atheism”, a liberal (with a small l) and latterly a member of the Labour party. He was proud to be gay – he supported organisations like Stonewall and would not stand for intolerance from any quarter - but it wasn't what defined him.

Four years ago, his illness began. He was diagnosed with aggressive kidney cancer. Surgery followed to remove the tumour and the kidney.

To keep Neil occupied and active during his enforced breaks from work during recovery they got “the boy” – “Jay” a German Shepherd/ Rottweiler cross. Neil said Jay was one of the few things that kept him sane through those years. He was an RSPCA rescue dog – but initially their garden failed the RSPCA inspection due to the state of the fencing. Mike soon fixed that – still in his work clothes – a quick trip to B&Q, some 4x2 and chicken wire – job done – and Jay became an essential part of the family.

Neil blogged about important events during his illness – if you want the gory details it's all still there online. But set-backs followed each improvement, and treatment followed treatment, again and again – spread to the lungs – then to the head causing fits and the loss of his licence – then to the shoulder. This March he was told he only had a few weeks to live, and they decided to spend their final weeks together without the constant visits to hospital for nasty treatments.

With increasing deterioration and immobility, he spent his final days and weeks at home, nursed by Mike and the Marie-Curie nurses who were fantastic.

He died peacefully on 11th June with Mike, Dave and nurse Tammy at his side.

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