

Tribute for Simon Byles

1998 - 2018

When Simon was born, in May 1998, he was Karen and Nigel's third child and had two older sisters – Perran and Amber. Two years later he was followed by his brother Ed, who was to become his close friend and confidant. In a loud and chatty family Simon stood out as "the quiet one". One of his teachers said that he was the quietest Byles he'd ever met. He was laid back and thoughtful, and always interested in how things worked. In fact, Karen remembers that his very first words were "don't work", pointing at a light bulb that had failed to switch on.

He made good friends, from primary school onwards, but enjoyed hanging out with his sisters and brother in the holidays. He loved family camping holidays at Polzeath and had a real passion for the sea. He learnt to body board and would happily spend all day in his wetsuit, riding the waves. He also enjoyed trips to London to see his Uncle Adrian and all the Tallett family. He loved spending time with his Auntie Jo and her animals and going to see his Grandma and eating her out of house and home!

Simon really enjoyed going to festivals with the family, crowding into Karen's van and helping out with parking or other jobs on site. He was great at getting people moving again when their vans and trucks got stuck in the mud, would dance when the music was right, enjoyed evenings hanging out round the campfire, and will be remembered for his collection of daft felt hats that he bought from Maggie at Chagstock Festival. Music was very important to Simon and he liked all sorts of music, much of which we are sharing as part of this ceremony and later this afternoon.

Simon made a number of close friends who were really important in his life. There was his brother Ed; Alex, Charlie, Dylan, Laura and Ash who spent mad, happy times with him but were also there to support him in darker times; Josh and Lee, and Ben and Grace who often tucked him up on their sofa when he needed to sleep off a migraine. Simon had friends of all ages, many from his festival 'tribe', especially Jo and Clair, kindred spirits. He had the knack of getting on with people, bonding with them about different things and sharing their interests. He was good at *being* a friend – always ready to listen to people's problems and talk things out. He liked to help out in practical ways when he could and was very patient, and good at explaining things.

Of course, Simon was no saint, and – like any teenager - he could be mad and reckless. He would phone his mum in the middle of the night to say that he was driving down to Lyme Regis, and once rang up at 3 am to say that he was stuck in the mud in a field at Starcross. He enjoyed going out drinking with his mates and would spend hours in the shower, and did everything he could to avoid taking his turn at the washing up.

Simon was very practical and, after he left school, began an apprenticeship training to be a mechanic. He loved tinkering with cars and became adept at fixing them; he had a much-loved little green van, which was well known in Bishop's Hull and was notorious for waking up the neighbourhood when he started it up in the mornings.

Simon left his apprenticeship after completing his level two NVQ. He felt that the apprenticeship wasn't working out and was cross and depressed by this. He worked nights for a while at the Argos distribution centre but began to be unwell with acute periods of mental illness. As he got worse he had to stop working, and would spend long periods of time in bed, not wanting to see anyone except his brother and Alex. In between, the old Simon would return and he would enjoy the companionship of his friends and family. He spent a month with his dad, Nigel, in Portugal over Christmas – which was a positive time and he seemed more peaceful there.

On his return, however, Simon became very unwell and it was while he was waiting for treatment that he decided to end his life. We can't know exactly what was in his mind that day but he was prepared - he made himself a bacon sandwich, showered before he left the house, gave his mum a hug as he went out of the door and took his driving licence with him to ensure that he could be identified. As Karen said to me, his death was "very Simon" and there is, I think, some comfort to be found in that, along with knowing that he is no longer in pain. Simon was brought up in a family where children were encouraged to make their own decisions and where respect was an important value. Simon made his own decision to leave us, taking back the control he felt his mental illness had eroded. Respecting our children's decisions can often be hard and to respect this decision is the hardest thing the people who love him will ever have to do, but it's what Simon deserves.

Simon was with you for just under 20 years. The last six months of his life were difficult and his death is a tragedy. But he was so much more than this. He was a loving and much-loved member of his family. He was a loyal and supportive friend. He was practical, funny and great company. Above all he was himself – he was Simon – and in those 19 years you were fortunate to have him, he made his own, unique contribution to the lives of all those who knew him.