

Stephen Frederick Riches : 11th July, 1958 – 22nd April 2019

Stephen's Story

Stephen Frederick Riches was born on 11th July 1958, to Ruth and John Riches, youngest brother to Robert, David and Colin. When I met with Stephen's family last week, it was clear to me that they were a loving family with many happy and wonderful stories of their time with him. We would like to take this opportunity to share some of these stories with you all now. Firstly, Stephen's Dad, John, would like to share his thoughts of Stephen with you all.

"Stephen, Steve, Stevie, Step, Nip Cheese.

That was Stephen's nicknames. Nip Cheese was his nickname as a small boy. Nobody ever knew the meaning of the name, so I looked it up as it could have been quite rude! Nip Cheese was the name of the ships Bursar who sometimes fiddled the Sailors wages in the 18 Hundreds, sometimes jumping ship at the end of the voyage with the lot. Stephen was not like that.

Stephen was born in Farmborough Hospital, Kent, when we were living at Keston on a Dairy Farm. We then, in 1960, moved to Lound in Lincolnshire, once again on a farm, where in those days the boys could run freely in the fields, and above all the "Railway Line" thanks to Dr Beeching.

Stephen started school at a local primary school (Witham on the Hill) where there was 1 Headmaster and his wife who taught children from 5 to 11 years old, achieving a very good standard of education.

In 1968 we moved to Ringshall and Stephen attended Stowmarket Grammer School.

On leaving school, he started work in a bank in Stowmarket for a short while, but found there was no money in it, "boom boom".

Stephen then went to work at Taylor Barnard at Mendlesham as we had then moved to Mickfield. Here Stephen worked in the office with, amongst others, Kevin, Stephen's best friend to this day. Then Stephen suffered Kidney Failure at the age of 17, attending Addenbrookes Hospital 3 times a week for dialysis.

Then came the kidney transplant, the lifesaver. He never looked back it transformed his life. He left Taylor Barnard in 1980 and went to work at the Co-op Dairy until he retired in 2008.

During Stephen and Kevin's wild days, they went on holidays abroad and all over, then along came Yvonne and Marion, which made a wonderful foursome. Holidays again all over the place, gradually settling down to camping, then caravans. Favourite pitch, Shottisham, with a pub 200 yds away. And lovely walking.

We, as a family and friends, would like to thank the one person who unfortunately lost his life, but saved another, that was the Kidney Donor and family, also to the Consultants, Surgeons, Doctors and Nurses of all the Hospitals involved, Addenbrookes, Papworth and Ipswich, for their care and kindness and dedication."

Thank you John for those heartfelt words.

Stephen's brother, Dave, and Sister in Law, Eileen, have written some of their favourite memories of their time with Stephen, and they would like me to share those memories with you all now.

"Eileen (gesture) first met Steve when he was a cheeky little ten year old, so he was more like a little brother than an in law!

When Steve was older, he spent many weekends staying with us, endlessly teasing Wayne and Dawn, as any good uncle does! He wasn't the one who had to scrape them off the ceiling and try to put them to bed still buzzing! He loved going fishing, and to the pub, with Dave on those weekends, finishing it off with Sunday dinner, and his all-time favourite, Lemon Meringue Pie. Eileen always had to make two, and guess who ate a whole one?

We loved the canal holidays, with Steve, Marion, Kevin and Yvonne. The last one included his 9-year-old nephew, Luke. Luke was desperate to steer the boat and Steve wanted him to earn it, so we set him the task of polishing the brasses and swabbing the deck, which tickled Steve. He did a brilliant job, but wasn't quite tall enough to see over the roof, so we had to stand him on a box.

Talking of boxes, the first time we went on the canal boats, as novice skippers, we took a box of the co-op's delicious broken biscuits, supplied by Steve. It was open, and sitting on the roof, on our first morning, as we prepared to

enjoy our very first tea and biscuits. We went too close to the bank and floated under an overhanging Willow tree. We all ducked, and forgot the biscuits, which were swept off the roof and into the canal to the eagerly awaiting ducks. Poor Steve didn't even get the chance to have one, and all we heard as we sailed away was "quack, quack, quack" – translated as "ha, ha, ha!".

We all had several caravan and camping holidays in Norfolk and Suffolk.

On one camping holiday in Tunstall forest, we celebrated Steve's 40th. Uncle Steve, Luke, Leanne and Louise, went off for a bike ride, and when they came back, Steve was covered in scratches. He claimed he had fought off a bear in the woods to save the children, which they still laugh about now. His CB radio handle was Running Bear, so he obviously thought he was an expert on bears. Truth was he'd had one too many sherberts, and fallen off his bike into the brambles. We laughed until we cried.

He didn't want a fuss on that birthday, but we felt we had to have a cake. All we had in the caravan at that time was a Battenberg and some sparklers, so we poked the sparklers into the cake, lit them and all sang Happy Birthday.

Two years ago, Steve, unfortunately, spent his birthday in hospital, so we again presented him with a Battenberg, this time with battery operated candles on top, and, along with the nurses, who had put up balloons for him, we all sang Happy Birthday.

All of these memories, along with so many others, will always be cherished."

Stephen's brother, Colin has also sent me some memories about Stephen, and talks about him being the "blue eyed boy with the brown eyes!" When they were younger, and playing on the disused railway line that John mentioned earlier, Colin talked about the day when the brothers decided to experiment with lighting a fire on a scrap piece of slate. Stephen decided, quite literally, to play with fire, and before the boys knew it, the whole of the grass bank they were playing on was ablaze!

Colin saved the day, sacrificing his brand new jumper, lovingly made over the course of a year by his mum, and using it as a beater. Sadly, it's role as fire extinguisher (followed by a hasty bath in a cattle trough) meant it was beyond salvation, and Colin hid the forlorn jumper under a hedge on the way home,

telling his mum he'd lost it while out playing (and never admitting what really happened to it!)

He talks of Stephen being a spirited little boy, and of how that will always be how he will remember him, with great love and respect.

Stephen's best friend, Kevin, has also written his thoughts on Stephen, which he has asked me to share with you all.

“On my first days work at Mendlesham in 1976 I was introduced to a chap wearing a purple jacket and yellow kipper tie carrying a clipboard. This was Steve and we became firm friends from that day. We even went on a lads holiday to Corfu where on learning we had been entered into the fancy dress competition Steve grabbed a hotel bedsheet, threw it over his head cut two holes for the eyes, plonked a Panama hat and sunglasses on and went as the invisible man, genius!

Eventually we both met our respective wives and we all carried on with the holidays for the next 35 years, travelling abroad and having stay cations including canal boats, cottages, caravans and tents.

Steve also introduced us to all his family who treated us like one of their own.

We will always remember the good times we shared and Steve will never be forgotten, god bless.”

In the early 1980's, Stephen was working for the co-op dairy when he was set up on a blind date with the friend of a girlfriend of one of his workmates. He'd seen her a few times, having gone to watch her while she played football, but this was a “proper date”. Clearly, they hit it off, because on the 13th May, 1985, Marion, the subject of that blind date, and Stephen, were married, at Ipswich Registry Office.

Stephen loved the outdoors. He was a keen walker, both on holidays to Austria and Europe, but also more locally, as a member of “The Plodders”, the BT rambling group. He also loved his garden, and could often be found outside weeding and watering his flowerbeds. He even turned his hand to growing his own veg, although Marion tells me that was mostly just some runner beans and a few tomatoes!

Music played a huge part in Stephens's life, and we'll listen to some of his favourite artists during today's ceremony. Marion told me about their trips to the Gaumont, sometimes with Dave and Eileen, other times on their own, to see the local tribute versions of acts such as Roy Orbison and Gene Vincent, something which they all really enjoyed, but Stephen's taste in music was wide ranging indeed, from Dr Feelgood to the Mavericks, who you heard as we entered the chapel, Status Quo to Jules Holland, and even Shakin Stevens, Stephen loved them all.

And there were his bikes. Stephen loved to ride and would often be found on the back of one of his beloved motorbikes, often with Marion on the pillion. After he retired, in 2008, Stephen and Marion would roar off for a visit to somewhere like Aldeburgh or Woodbridge and do a spot of Antiquing, really it was more of a mooch, round the shops (and more importantly the tea rooms!) for the afternoon.

Holidays were really important to Stephen, and we've already heard from Dave and Eileen about some of the wonderful trips they had together. I'm told that originally, Stephen and Marion started out with a good old fashioned canvas tent, but soon they upgraded to a "tin tent" (also known as a caravan) and would use that for all their camping expeditions in Norfolk and Suffolk.

They didn't just stay at home however. Holidays together were taken to Europe, Austria, Norway and Yugoslavia, then to Spain in the summer with Kevin and Yvonne, as well as a memorable trip to Canada with them to see Kevin's sister. Marion tells me that they continued to travel to Spain to stay with friends Carl and Rosie until recently, when Steve wasn't up to the journey any more.

Stephen was a quiet, taciturn man, who kept a close circle of friends, but he had a wonderful sense of humour to go with it. Marion tells me that Stephen used to tell her that every time he would decorate a room, he would paint his name in big letters on the wall before wallpapering over the top, so when the next person came to decorate, he would have left his mark. He certainly left his mark on all those he came into contact with and will be very sadly missed.

I'd like to close this section of the ceremony by reading the comments from a card which Marion received from an old work colleague. The family all feel they do a wonderful job of summing up Stephen.

Marion's friends, Sean and Shelly wrote to Marion to say:

"Dear Marion

We were deeply saddened to hear that Stephen had passed away. Shelly and I were unaware that Stephen had been unwell. I remember with great affection a wonderful, quietly spoken and unassuming man.

Please accept our deepest condolences and we are both thinking of you at this sad time."