

A CEREMONY TO CELEBRATE THE LIFE OF
STEPHEN “STEVE” PAUL WITHAM

23rd February 1954 – 2nd September 2017
held at
South Chapel,
Mid-Warwickshire Crematorium
on 20th September 2017



Humanist Celebrant

Ian Willox

01865 589 663

ian.willox@humanistceremonies.org.uk

Humanists UK

39 Moreland Street, London, EC1V 8BB

020 7324 3060

www.humanism.org.uk

Funeral Director

A.L. Sole & Son

Chipping Norton

ENTRANCE

Brothers in Arms – Dire Straits

OPENING WORDS

Good afternoon everyone. We're here to celebrate the life of Stephen Paul Witham who died on 2nd September aged only 63.

INTRODUCTION

My name is Ian Willox. I'm a celebrant for Humanists UK. Steve's family have asked for a non-religious funeral. That doesn't mean anti-religious. This is a ceremony for everyone – including those with a religious faith.

THOUGHTS ON LIFE AND DEATH

With or without religion, one of the important purposes of a funeral is to provide memories. So that Steve can live on – in our memories at least.

And it's clear that Steve left a lot of memories.

So let's remember...

TRIBUTE

Steve's brother Alan sat all the family down and compiled these memories – for which I'm very grateful. Steve's life has been anything but simple. Or dull.

Steve was born on 23rd February 1954 to Eric and Joyce Witham. He was the third of four brothers. The eldest was Eric – whom you probably know as Bill. Then Alan. Then Steve. And finally Neil.

The boys grew up in Cotswold Crescent – which Alan says was known in those days as “the Bronx of Chipping Norton”. The brothers had daily chores – chopping sticks, filling the coal scuttle, polishing the school shoes, collecting vegetables from the garden and tidying the house. Chores were rotated to stop anyone whining about a particular job. Although Neil managed to duck most of these chores because he was the youngest by quite a few years.

One of Steve's best friends and partners in crime when he was growing up was “Pinky” Paul Hicks who also lived in the Crescent. The Crescent had a reputation for breeding people of strong character. Steve was clearly one of them.

The Witham family always had an annual holiday which meant taking the four boys to the four points of the compass – camping, caravanning or staying in hotels. One year it could be Bed and Breakfasting in Scotland, the next going wherever the caravan ended up.

Sadly Eric died of cancer in 1967. Joyce married again – to Frank Sale. They had two daughters – Julie and Samantha – sisters for the boys.

Steve's first teenage passion was for bikes, cars and machinery in general. On his sixteenth birthday he was given Alan's old Ariel Arrow. It was soon hand painted black and thrashed until it

bled smoke. Unsurprisingly it didn't last long. But it was the first of many. A lot of them trail bikes. Steve seemed to take particular pleasure in falling off his trail bike, then getting back on and repeating the section where he had fallen off – only faster. Just to prove himself.

Just as he proved himself by displacing the Page 3 girl in the Sun...

Towards the end of Steve's motorcycle years he decided to invest in a car. Not a new one. He parked up in Chippy High Street one day to buy a newspaper. When he got back to the car a traffic warden was writing out a parking ticket. Steve had parked on double yellows.

Steve protested that only the front tyre touched the yellow lines. The traffic warden wasn't having it. He told Steve he was half on the lines – and triumphantly handed him the ticket.

An hour later there was half a car parked in exactly the same spot. They never did find out who was responsible. But it made page 3 of the Sun.

Of course teenage boys are not just interested in machinery. There are girls. In Steve's case it was Carol Underhill who lived in Milton Under Wychwood.

They were married at Witney Register Office. They had two daughters – Shenda and Louise. Sadly Shenda recently died of cancer.

This is probably a good moment to pause and listen to Steve's son Steven Junior – better known as Jimmy, and his daughter Layla supported by Steve's surviving daughter Louise.

Layla supported by Jimmy and Louise

But there is still time for a few more Steve stories...

Like the time he was turned away from the village hall because he was wearing a leather jacket. He protested. "I'm shutting this door and if you can get in you're welcome" he was told as the thick oak door was slammed in his face. Steve retreated. To his Velocette. Popped home. Came back with a chainsaw. Job done.

True, he could be quite impetuous. A few years back, just after he'd returned to Chippy, he had an upstairs flat over Corbett's Electrical in West Street. There were some rowdy youths in the street making a noise. Steve leant out the window and told them to clear off. They just got nosier. So Steve did what any sane person would do – he jumped out of the window trying to land on one of the noisemakers. He missed. And broke both legs.

Though he did have a quieter side. He loved dogs for example. He once took the family puppy with him to Witney. He was gone for a long time. When he did return the first thing he asked is if he could take the dog out again. Apparently he'd received the most female attention he'd ever had.

And he was a trendsetter. There was a recent barbecue. Steve, as usual, wore sunglasses. He kept complaining they were rubbish. It turned out they were 3D glasses.

He was clearly a memorable man. I'm going to round out this tribute with a couple of messages sent to Alan to be read out today. The first is from Steve's daughter Louise. Here's what she says:

"Dad. The builder of the best go-karts, the destroyer of the biggest spiders, and the man who could drink tea faster than it could be made.

I'm so glad our final words were "I love you".

I hope you knew I meant it and I always will. Wait for me with Shenda. It's your turn to get the kettle on.

I love you. Marmite."

Marmite was Louise's nickname when she was little.

And finally some words from Jimmy. Here's what he says:

"These are my fondest memories of Dad.

I remember one day when we went to West Beach as a family, when I was maybe eight or nine, and we took my first motorbike over the cliffs and fields. My Dad was riding and I was on the back. It was great for me as Dad was the one who got me into motorbikes when I was very young. The sun was shining and we were alone and both doing something we loved.

I only wish this was me and him now and that I as well as everyone else had a chance to have said goodbye. It's only a shame that my fondest memory was the same thing that took him from us all. I loved him to bits like most people even though I think we all had our ups and downs with him. He loved his music as well as I do. I can remember the times we would sit and listen to music. And we both loved having a beer to two. Love forever. Your one and only son Steven Junior."

QUIET REFLECTION

With Jimmy and Louise's memories we're coming to the end of this celebration of Steve's life. But before we do we're going to pause for a moment of reflection. A chance for you to digest all you've heard. A chance for you to recall your own memories of him. A chance, if you wish, to pray silently.

***Layla* – Eric Clapton**

COMMITTAL

Just as we welcome a child into our lives we must say goodbye to those who leave us. This celebration of Steve's life is complete. It's time to say farewell to him. This may be difficult but it is important. I hope the memories we've talked about here may give you some comfort.

FINAL FAREWELL

Our atoms and molecules come from the earth;
Are ordered by ancestry;
Are fired into life by union;
Are sustained by the earth and powered by the sun;
And return to the earth when life ends.

John Stiffin

Stephen Paul Witham. Son of Eric and Joyce. Brother to Bill, Alan, Neil, Julie and Samantha. Husband to Carol. Father to Shenda, Marmite and Jimmy. Grandfather to Alex, Ethan, Cole, Hope, Isla, Liana, Lee, Chelsea, Kayleigh, Ellie, Amelia, Jay and Nevaeh.

We commit your body to be cremated. Rest in the hearts and minds of all you love and all who love you.

CLOSING WORDS

We've celebrated Steve's life. We've said our goodbyes. But we have our memories. And the rest of our lives to remember.

If you want to share those memories – or just some refreshment – you're warmly invited to join the family at the Chipping Norton Rugby Club. You'll find details in your order of service.

As you leave you'll see that you can make a donation in Steve's memory to Thames Valley Air Ambulance. Again you'll find details in your order of service.

Please take good care of yourselves and each other.

Thank you for coming.

EXIT

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