

A celebration of life

Martin John Smith

1 July 1959 – 14 June 2020

12 noon 9 July 2020, Grenoside Crematorium



a personal goodbye

Humanist
Ceremonies

Born in Wolverhampton on 1st July 1959, Martin was welcomed to the world by his mum, Jean, and his dad Bernard. He joined his big brother, Paul, and was followed by Sue and his little brother, Robin. There weren't more than a couple of years between each of the siblings, and Sue described herself and Martin as partners in crime on various escapades, from adventures in the woods and down by the stream, to some more involved manoeuvres. When they moved to Newport, the showground was just opposite where they grew up, and Sue said one year she and Martin hatched a plan to see all the exhibitors arrive with their stock. Like something out of the Famous Five, they were up at midnight, leaving a note pinned to their pillows and taking bread, cheese and a flask of tea for provisions, before climbing out of Sue's window onto the flat roof of the downstairs bathroom. Of course, they could have just used the door, but that wouldn't have been half so much fun! So there they were for the duration of the night, sitting on the fence, waving at all the farmers as they arrived for the show, and making it back home in time for breakfast.



Martin wasn't a big one for school, though was bright enough to pass his 11+ just before the family moved to Yorkshire, which earned him a place at Penistone Grammar. He was never really sure what he wanted to do career-wise, so improved on some of his qualifications at Huddersfield Tech, before getting a job at Shelley Textiles, but he had no real plan. So, when a friend inspired him with her tales of life in the south of France, he simply sold his record collection, and everything else, packed up and went back there with her. He did go initially on a British Visitor's Passport, valid for a year, but ended up staying for sixteen! Martin being Martin, though, he didn't do much about his documentation until it became rather urgent, by which point he was laid up in hospital after a car accident, and his mum and dad had to come and kit him out with a proper passport.

Martin worked at the campsite at Canet-Plage, camping himself, at first, before getting a caravan; Sue and her then boyfriend, now husband, David had an eventful trip to visit him down there. Martin did whatever needed doing on site, from barwork to DJing. He became a self-taught chef, was a popular fixture in the weekly cabaret, making a fabulous drag queen on occasion, and ended up as Head of Security. For the winter season he might come home, or find building or bar work locally, even acting as an estate agent at one point. And he would help out the local gendarmes when they had to deal with English-speakers, Martin being fluent in French, again self-taught. Certainly, the other ex-pats in the area knew who to turn to when they had complicated forms to fill in.



When Martin finally moved back to Yorkshire, he continued his success in the hospitality industry, starting out as night porter at The George Hotel in Huddersfield, site of the infamous 'Italian Incident', the details of which have been lost in the mists of time! He rapidly worked his way up to become Front of House Manager, and Master of Ceremonies when they had a wedding in. He loved that, but could not abide serving afternoon tea, though hopefully he would have approved of the Gentleman's Afternoon Tea that Sue has arranged for today! Martin also worked for a while at The Old Bridge in Holmfirth, enjoying the delights of a pint at The Nook and many gigs at the Picturedrome, often accompanied by his brother Robin.

Robin wrote a beautiful tribute to his brother, and it is my privilege to share it with you now:

This was one of the hardest things I have had to do, I have no more tears.

Martin was not just a brother but a great friend over the years, although this did not seem likely when we shared bedrooms during our teenage years, and I waited for him to roll in from the Star, or from his occasional turn as DJ in Cawthorne in the wee small hours. Later teens saw us organising house parties at the family home whenever mum and dad were on holiday, alternating days but no party on Wednesdays as this was a tidyup and check for damage day! Paul and Sue had already flown the nest at this point....

I was jealous of Martin when he had the courage to leave his steady job at the mill in search of adventure in the south of France, where he worked on campsites and holiday villages. I used to look forward to him coming home and share tales of many beach barbeques and trails into the Pyrenees. He seemed to have his life worked out without direction so to speak.

When he eventually returned to England, he started to plant roots in The Yorkshire Dales town of Hawes, and this is where he settled for many years. I remember some fantastic breaks up at Simonston Hall where he would 'borrow' wine from the stock, and later at Stonehouse Hotel, and would introduce us to his friends in the town usually at a pub or restaurant, but he was such a popular character and was always happy there. He considered this area as his spiritual home and would revisit whenever he could.

His generosity seemed boundless - there are many tales where he would organise hotel breaks for me and my family, including staying in the Royal Suite at the George in Huddersfield where he was duty manager, in exchange for a tenner and a bottle of Bowmore Malt Whisky!

He would always visit our house armed with gifts for the kids and the occasional bottle with flowers for us. He was an extremely deep thinker who had views on most subjects.....and of course was always right.....and I am sure Paul and Susan well remember his interpretation of the rules of Monopoly!!!!

His most amazing decision was after recognising Mum's deteriorating health he decided to give up his job and dedicate his life to looking after Mum - a decision which we as a family were truly humbled by. Martin was definitely a 100% or nothing man in whatever he put his mind to and looking after Mum was no different. Very seldom he would ask for help but always tried to sort himself out, a characteristic which he carried on into his final months.

We shared the same sense of humour and had many a long night into the small hours chatting away about nothing in particular, whilst listening to music and downing a few whiskies. We used to have the same chats in the latter years during our regular video calls where we would offer our critique to each other and recommend recently discovered films or music...I will miss these calls dearly. Music was a huge part of Martin's life and the depth of his knowledge was recently described as "encyclopaedic". I draw great comfort from the fact I can usually recall a 'Martin memory' whatever I am listening to, through whatever media and at any random place, be it local Omani radio or from my personal collection, restaurant background music, supermarket tannoy music and yes, even some lift music, where sometimes I raise a smile or even stifle a giggle or two....and recently shed a tear.

I have many more special memories to recall and these few words are a small fraction of a lifetime, but Martin, you were a one off - a special and rare person - and someone I am proud to have called not just a brother, but a best friend.

So goodbye "Martinman".....you very special guy.

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As Robin said, wherever Martin went he formed the centre of a large circle of friends, all of whom valued his company greatly. Many who entered the hospitality trade under his tutelage have paid tribute to his generosity and patience; he may have been a tough boss, but he was a hugely respected one. Martin was still missed and talked of often up in Hawes, by colleagues and returning guests alike, even years after he moved back here to care for his mum.

As Robin said, all Martin's family were so grateful to him for moving back to look after Jean, an admiration also expressed by Paul and Sue. And they loved him dearly, as a son, brother, brother-in-law, uncle and cousin. Robin's wife, Kathryn, wrote down the things she thought of when she thought of Martin:

His absolute and unwavering love for his mum, his family and his nieces and nephews.

His love of good food and a decent pint.

The way he would down a pint while the round was being served

His hatred of afternoon tea - the people who had it and the food which was served.

His free spirit, his sense of occasion

Being so proud to walk his sister down the aisle.

He always brought flowers for all the ladies at a meal at my house

He accepted me and loved me as his second sister, not just a sister in law.

Night night, Martin, fly high and free

Kathryn also wrote, 'I needed a gin after accepting a lift in his car from the car garage'. Martin only learned to drive in his fifties, and getting in the passenger seat beside him was an experience, to say the least!

He was a very proud uncle to Callum, Michael, Jennifer, Emily, Ashley and George, his bedroom full of their pictures and other family mementoes. Though certain of Martin's attributes seem to have made a bigger impression on Ash than others; he wrote of him simply, 'Don't give him any gin, and if you are off to the bar, always order an extra pint!' George expanded a little, saying:



He was always a gentleman to everybody (unless it involved a board game!). The meals he put on for us whenever he was hosting were top quality and inventive, which was an eye-opener for me in particular, as I'm limited in the kitchen! And finally, the best reflection of how he was as a person is the superb work he's done in looking after Grandma for a number of years, as well as in the early years of school holidays where he would keep me and Ash occupied with games on the Sega Megadrive and PlayStation; both jobs will have taken a certain degree of patience and discipline to do!

Martin enjoyed happy times at home with his mum, settling down for their regular quiz shows; Martin's challenge to himself was to answer before the subtitles that Jean needed on gave the game away. He did everything around the house, and not just for Jean, also helping neighbours like Joan up the road.



He set up his own garden business to fit round his caring role, as well as doing odd shifts for his good mate Aaron down at the gym in Shelley. Coming home had given Martin the chance to reconnect with several old friends, like Stephen Whitehead, and Garvey, who, though living overseas, became a regular correspondent.

Martin has been described by so many as great company, and a lovely guy, with a huge heart, and it is obvious how much he is missed.

With friends and family, he shared his deep and abiding passion for music, and was always open to new sounds; he loved to hear what his nieces had been listening to, and always appreciated the vinyl George and Ash would get him for birthdays and Christmases. So it seemed only right to have one of his favourite tunes today. As you sit back and enjoy a bit of Lynyrd Skynryd, enjoy too the happy memories you have of Martin, or picture him as Sue does:

I like to think of him now sitting with Dad and a bottle of good whiskey, keeping an eye on all of us, opinions on our activities being expressed as loudly as ever, should we choose to listen. Night, night, Martinman, sleep tight. Xx