

A celebration of life

Garry Kevin Quinn

22nd October 1971 – 29th April 2021

7th June 2021 Wealden Crematorium

a personal goodbye

Humanist
Ceremonies

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The Tribute

Garry was born at Guy's hospital in 1971. He grew up near there, in the Tabard area of Southwark, with his four siblings. In his teens, he was apprenticed to a cabinet maker and joiner, and that was his trade for his whole working life. For many years he was project manager for an interior design company on the King's Road. When that came to an end, he moved on to do maintenance for a company in Vauxhall. He was great with his clients, and they would ask for him specifically when there were jobs to be done.

Garry and Angela were together for 27 years and had some great times. They lived in London for many years, but even then their favourite activity was heading out into the country, and in 2014 they bought the cottage in Five Ashes, so they could spend all their spare time in the country and had easy access to the sea. Garry loved the sea. Once, in Littlehampton, he decided to have an impromptu dip in his shorts, forgetting the three £20 notes in his pocket, which he had to watch floating away on the tide. He loved Ashdown Forest, too – he was never happier than sitting there, watching the world go by, while eating an ice-cream oyster.

He loved Angela's baking – whether it was intended for him or not. She would create special cakes for friends, or to take into work, but when she came to pack them up, there was always a bit missing.

Garry was brought up in the Catholic faith, and as a schoolboy was in the Army Cadets. Although he moved away from both of these, this early grounding gave him a sense of responsibility, a feeling that he should support others when they were in need. Angela remembers that he would intervene if staff on the train were being abused and would stop the traffic if there was a cat in the road.

This quote from David Attenborough seems particularly relevant for Garry the animal lover:

Although denying that we have a special position in the natural world might seem becomingly modest in the eye of eternity, it might also be used as an excuse for evading our responsibilities. The fact is that no species has ever had such wholesale control over everything on earth, living or dead, as we now have. That lays upon us, whether we like it or not, an awesome responsibility. In our hands now lies not only our own future, but that of all other living creatures with whom we share the earth.

Sometimes this helping-hand approach to life ran him in to trouble, like the time last year when he helped an elderly woman into her house, regardless of the fact he should not have been there during lockdown and ended up being reported to the police.

And he could run into trouble in other ways. At Christmas, he was passing through London Bridge Station with a rucksack of prescription drugs he had been given to last him over the holiday. There he attracted the attention of a sniffer dog, who grabbed the bag and ran off with it. Garry pursued him, shouting “That dog’s got my drugs!”, while the handler, his suspicions understandably aroused, pursued Garry. In the end, they all caught up with each other, and everything was sorted. Garry, animal lover that he was, insisted on having his picture taken with the dog.

Even when he became so ill, he couldn’t resist wanting to help people – sometimes the whole nation. He wrote to the Queen, asking her to dismiss Boris Johnson, who in his view was making such a mess of things. Alas, she was not persuaded – the reply from the Queen’s Deputy Correspondence Coordinator reads “Her Majesty has taken note of the views you express but I should explain that there is no question of the Queen dismissing the Prime Minister or dissolving Parliament as you suggest. Nonetheless, it was useful to the Queen to have your views and I am to thank you for writing”.

Garry’s drinking began to increase about two and a half years ago, and his final year was not a happy time. He was made redundant at the start of the first lockdown, and his drinking habits took over. Angela tried everything, being kind and supportive, being firm and prescriptive, but nothing worked. Garry was locked into a downward spiral, and his health rapidly deteriorated. He collapsed on April 29th, and despite every effort by Angela, supported by the handler on the 999 call, and by the paramedics, he could not be revived.

It was a sad way for Angela and Garry’s long relationship to end. The feeling of grief, though, is the price of love. What would you rather have? Would you rather never have any love in your life – or would you rather love, even though this means you would inevitably experience loss and grief as a result?

When we lose someone we love, we know they have not “gone to a better place”. They no longer exist in any physical sense. And yet, for us left behind, the traces of their lives persist in myriad ways, from the deeds they have done to our memories of them. We can still speak with them in our own minds and quite often – we know exactly how they would reply to us.

We carry their legacy forward in the human story – just as the people coming after us will do when we are gone.