

A celebration of the life of Mark Broster

19 August 1986 – 10 September 2023

12 noon, 4 October 2023, Paynes Funeral Directors, Eastbourne



a personal goodbye

Humanist
Ceremonies

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You all knew Mark so well, so you may find few surprises in his story, but hopefully a lot of fond memories. He was born in Brighton Hospital on 19th August 1986, and Maralyn has many happy memories of his childhood. There were water parties in the garden, picnics with Jill and her children Pippa, Becky and Lee, and the family Christmases with Mark's uncle Keith and Auntie Jan and Mark's cousins Chris and Alex.

Later, there was the weekend which Jane and Roger treated Mark and Maralyn to at The Grand in Eastbourne, which he loved – particularly the buffet breakfasts – and where the waiters loved him. And of course there was Woodie the cockateel – Maralyn had to brace herself to let Woodie take up residence in the house, as she was not fond of birds, and the fact he took to imitating the telephone became something of an issue.

From an early age, Mark wrote letters, particularly when he didn't approve of what was going on. He particularly didn't approve when the neighbour's cat got into the house and stole his goldfish. As Mark chased the cat down the hall, there came a dreadful swallowing sound. The neighbours got a very stiff letter. On another occasion he wrote to a judge:

To Judge, in Lewes.

Can you write the England's Law for me, please? If you have any spare time from saying "Your in Prison" you can come to my house for tea and biscuits and play courts.

He even wrote to the Queen and received a very polite letter back from a Lady in Waiting.

He flourished at primary school, being in the top reading set, but by the time he was due to go to secondary school, his autism was diagnosed and he went first to St Anne's School in Lewes, and then was a weekly boarder for seven years at St John's College in Brighton. When he left, the Head of College wrote "You have always tried your best with us, Mark – and your quiet, intelligent, reflective nature and dry sense of humour will be much missed".

Not that his time there was without incident. When he was 14 or 15, he absconded from school, taking another student with him, and they managed to get as far as Lancing. For him it was an adventure, for everyone else, though, it was very alarming and the emergency services were called out to find them. On another occasion, later on, he got himself to London, intending to visit Isabelle, but had a panic attack on the tube and had to be rescued by station staff who put him in a taxi. But again, it was an adventure, and Mark liked adventures. You'll hear later about his trip to New York with Ray – what an adventure that must have been.

After St John's, Mark moved to Lewes Road. It took him a while to settle in, but the older he got, the more content he got and the more responsibility he took, including checking the fire alarms every Monday and even, from time to time, tidying his room. The untidiness caused one serious problem, when he tripped over some out-of-place item and fractured his knee. That was just before lockdown, and fortunately the staff at Lewes Road were able to take him back there to convalesce. Otherwise, give how self-contained Mark could be, Covid was not a problem for him, as the only things it prevented were his regular drinks with Ray or Maralyn at the Lamb in Eastbourne, where he became very well known. He would arrive early and settle down with a pint, before ordering one of his favourite burgers and being provided with extra condiments so he could indulge his love of tomato sauce.

He rather overdid the burgers, and had to be told to cut back on them on health grounds, but before that he had a time when he was very keen on ordering exotic burgers online – zebra, ostrich, whatever.

The sense of justice which we heard about in his early correspondence, informed his whole life, and recently he particularly espoused the cause of Ukraine, frequently quoting Volodymyr Zelensky's response to the US's offer to fly him out: "I need ammunition, not a ride". Ukraine's sunflowers are on his coffin today, and you will be given sunflower seeds as you leave, to sow next year in his memory.

He loved his computer, both for gaming, and for feeding his constantly curious mind with information about the world. And he loved gadgets – he'd buy fly zappers, air conditioning units, anything, as Maralyn said, which put extra demand on the National Grid.

Ray will now talk to us about Mark:

These are a few of my most precious memories of Mark.

My first fond memory was when he was younger. I took him to Longleat Center Parcs in the middle of February. He loved the rapids within the swimming pool complex. We would spend hours every day enjoying the tropical weather inside, then challenging each other to go down the outside slides into a blizzard. In the holiday home, he liked to prepare his fried breakfast. One morning, I left to get a paper and returned to a kitchen fire! Luckily, his cooking skills improved!

My second fondest memory is in 2004 I took Mark to New York to celebrate his 18th birthday. He enjoyed the flight to the Big Apple. He chatted happily in the pubs and restaurants we visited for our meals.

My third precious memory, which I will share with you today, is spending an hour with Mark on the 6th of September this year in Eastbourne for our fortnightly catch-up. He was happy and smiling, talking over a pint with me. Like father like son! Sadly, this was our very last time together.

I will miss you every day. Love You.

And now Jane

I met Mark when he was 15 years old, we immediately got on well. He always treated me respectfully and courteously. I never heard him swear once. When Ray was working, we would take Mark for a meal once a month to Pizza Express. On these occasions, Mark and I would relentlessly tease and share jokes at Ray's expense. Ray never minded as he loved seeing Mark happy. He enjoyed seeing him doubled up red faced and crying with laughter.

Several times Mark would surprise me and Ray with unexpected gifts. Once he left the table in a restaurant, ran across the road and came back to give me a bottle of my favourite wine.

My mother in her later years was disabled and needed aids or support while walking. Mark was always the first person to hop out of the car and open the door for her. He'd lend his arm and they'd go walking off together. She'd always say, "You're such a gentleman Mark."

He was a gentle, kind young man. I was lucky to have him as a stepson.

Now Isabelle:

I first met Mark when we were teenagers. I was around 17 and Mark 15 nearly 16. It was our first meeting and it was Christmas Day. At the time I was a typical antisocial stroppy teenager and I had a stash of vodka, Red Bull and Marlboro gold cigarettes in my bedroom.

I asked him if he wanted to hang out and we spent hours getting to know each other and I believe we made a special bond that day. I didn't realise at the time but it was Mark's first experience of drinking to excess and he ended up being carried home by his dad. I was later credited and thanked by Mark for making him realise he never wanted to drink excessively again - and he never did!

I will really miss having conversations with Mark and knowing that every word he said and the time he gave you was from a place of complete truth and honesty. In a world where most people you talk to have an agenda or are presenting a version of themselves - Mark was so pure in that, you knew that everything he said was just exactly what he felt and truthful. And that he was spending time with you because he wanted to.

The conversation always flowed when we were together and it never stopped amazing me at how knowledgeable Mark was on a range of subjects. He was an incredibly intelligent man and I never left a conversation without learning a thing or two!

Since his passing, I have found myself thinking "What would Mark say or think about this?" It's been helpful in navigating stressful situations, so I will be thinking more "Mark" in the future.

I will always treasure our time together and am grateful that I got call him my brother.

And now Will:

Mark and I first met when we were teenagers. I remember both of us being shy when we first met. We didn't know what to say to each other, but it wasn't a problem as I showed him a game on my PC – an army game called Delta Force. I couldn't get him off it. He loved it.

We only saw each other at Xmas or the occasional meal out after that. But over the years, I noticed Mark seemed like he was enjoying himself with us a little bit more each year. He talked more, made more jokes, and was always kind enough to buy Izzy and me a gift card every Xmas. And he was always very sweet to our mum.

It was so interesting to hear how much Mark knew about all kinds of things when he came over for dinner – some were quite random! He was much more curious about the world than I knew.

Sadly, Mark and I didn't see each other for long last Xmas but all I heard for weeks on end was how great he was that day. The few times our family has met up since then, someone has reminded us of how funny he was when they went out for dinner on Boxing Day. "Mark was on form that day" – that must have been said at least ten times since Christmas.

It was so sad to hear the news that Mark had passed away so suddenly. It was always lovely to see him and our Christmases won't be the same without him.

You were such a sweet person, Mark. We're going to miss you.

Everyone had something to remember from that last Christmas. For Maralyn, it was the black lab she was looking after, Alfie, who created the memories. Alfie farted constantly, and as Maralyn puts it, "It made Mark's Christmas"

I'm now going to read a message from Cathy Goodman, Jane's sister, and her husband Simon. Cathy and Simon live in Canada now, so can't be here today, but will be thinking of Mark.

Simon and I always found Mark to be polite, kind and helpful. He was very good with technology and was always willing to share his knowledge. I remember he tried to help me get to grips with my new iPhone by showing me how to use my thumb print to access it instead of a passcode. Whenever we sent him a card, present or money for his birthday or Christmas, he was sure to thank us either by text or email. We have his last lovely little email from August to keep and treasure.

Whenever we went out with Mark he was good company. He loved making me and Jane laugh, usually at Ray's expense. Ray took this in good part as he enjoyed seeing Mark having a good time. One little scene that became a familiar ritual was when we dropped Mark off at his flat. He would always kiss Jane and me goodbye. Ray would call out plaintively, 'Where's my kiss Mark?' Mark would call out, 'No!' Which made Ray pretend to sob and made all of us laugh. We could laugh because we knew that Mark was able to say whatever he wanted to his father as he felt completely secure and safe in his presence.

My mother, Edith, could go head-to-head at times with Mark. They probably developed a deeper understanding because of this and formed a good relationship based on mutual respect. She would have been so sad to learn of Mark's death.

We welcomed Mark as part of our family. He was one of us and his loss is keenly felt. Here are some words borrowed from the First Nations of Canada to wish someone well on their journey into the afterlife.

*Go now!
You have earned your rest!
Go straight!
You have left us.
Go and be with the ancestors.
In time we will all meet again.
Go now.*

Those tributes show how fully Mark was accepted into Ray and Jane's family, and Maralyn is enormously grateful for that. She was immensely proud of Mark, and how as an adult he dealt with his difficulties and succeeded in living his life on his own terms.