

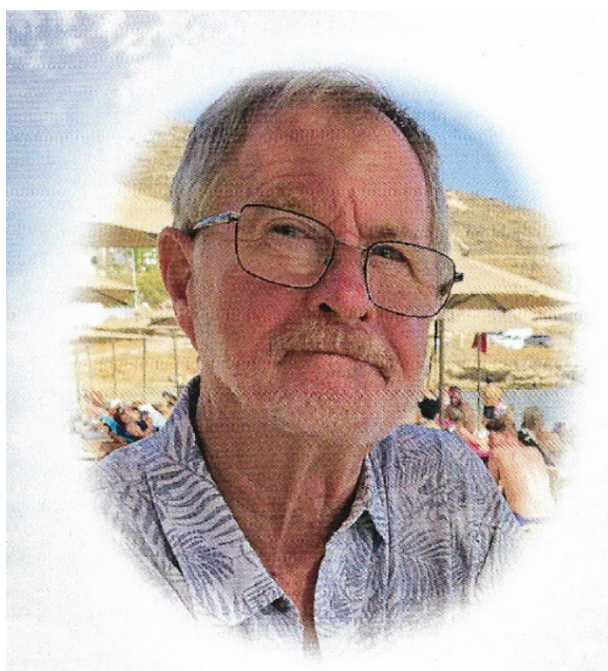
A Celebration of the Life of

Simon Kenneth May

13 February 1948 – 15 January 2025

17 February 2025, Rainsbrook Crematorium, Rugby

Celebrant: Steve Church



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Simon Kenneth May was born on 13th February 1948 in Reading, but his early years were spent in Kingsbridge, South Devon. His father, Kenneth, was a dentist, and his mother, Barbara, was devoted to bringing up Simon and his siblings—older brother Christopher, younger brother Bill, and younger sister Bernie.

Growing up by the sea gave Simon a childhood full of adventure. The beach and the estuary were his playgrounds, and holidays were often made even more special when cousins came to stay. Simon loved his school days—he started at Stanbrook Primary School before becoming a boarder at Crediton school. He was a mischievous schoolboy, full of fun and always ready with a prank. In his later school life, during the holidays, Simon worked in Salcombe, taking holidaymakers out on boats. His love of the sea and all things nautical was clear from an early age—boats, boats, and more boats. He also had a creative streak. He enjoyed art, music and loved playing the guitar.

Simon did well at school, and when it was time to embark on the world of work, his parents encouraged him to pursue accountancy. But a life stuck in an office, crunching numbers, didn't suit him—Simon was a people person. He needed the buzz of human contact. So, he left accountancy and took up a career in retail, training with Littlewoods, as a store manager. The training was excellent ... and enjoyable. Simon's time with the store chain took him all round the country to many different stores.

During his posting to Littlewoods Blackpool, for Simon a moment of serendipity occurred that was to be a major landmark in his life. His car broke down and he went to the nearest garage to get it fixed. The mechanic who looked after the car shared Simon's passion for all things cars. This was a chap by the name of Graham. From that moment on, Simon and Graham became inseparable—a real double act and a strong friendship for the rest of Simon's life.

It was while working for Littlewoods in the 1970s that Simon met Brenda. They married and had three children who he deeply loved and admired — William in 1974, James in 1977, and Anita in 1980. In the 1980s, Simon and Brenda went their separate ways.

Some years later, Simon's career took him to Asda. It was while working for them in Crewe that fate came knocking—literally. One day, while doing some DIY at home, Simon answered the door to a young lady fundraising for a cancer charity. He invited her in for a cuppa and to show off his decorating skills. The young lady was none other than his soon to be wife, Janet. Three years later, in 1994, they were married, celebrating with a beautiful and memorable garden wedding.

In 1995, to Simon's delight, Laura was born, followed by Catherine in 1997, both of which he was endlessly proud of, and he couldn't keep the smile off his face when he spoke about them. Work then took Simon and his family to Northallerton in Yorkshire, where he worked for KwikSave and then Somerfield. Simon loved the countryside there, and it was during this time that Simon discovered a new passion—shooting. He started out as a beater but soon got his own gun and became hooked on the hobby.

His next career move took him into the world of airports. First, he became commercial manager at Newcastle Airport, before moving south to take up the same, but much bigger, role at Luton Airport. It was here that Simon was arguably most happy in his working life. He loved the work, loved his teams, even loved his bosses and made so many lifelong friends. He so enjoyed every aspect of working in the lively, dynamic environment. In fact, Simon was so happy there that he worked well beyond retirement age.

Family holidays were a big part of Simon's life. While he enjoyed trips to the Spanish and Greek islands, Devon remained his favourite destination, a place he returned to year after year with his family. In retirement, he and Janet explored further afield, travelling to South Africa and New Zealand. They also had many memorable adventures in the company of Bill and Jean. But wherever he went, Simon was at his happiest somewhere warm, dressed in shorts and a jazzy shirt, with a cold beer in hand.

One of Simon's most memorable adventures was a road trip with Graham, fulfilling a lifelong dream by hiring an open-top Mustang and touring the West Coast of America. The pair also frequently enjoyed attending Goodwood — usually traveling in Graham's notoriously unreliable motor home, which always seemed to have something going wrong! Simon's passion for cars was lifelong—he took great pride in owning convertible Porsches and Mercedes, eagerly upgrading his car every 18 months. His love for motors even led him to build a Westfield kit car.

Simon also got into football—not because he was particularly passionate about the sport, but because it gave him the chance to join in the banter and tease Luke, Enrico or whoever he could mercilessly about the failings of their favourite teams.

As the years went by his grandchildren arrived. Billy, Daniel, Rosie, Harrison, Zara, Ben and Phoebe. He loved to see them whenever he could, following their progress and hearing about their achievements.

Simon was never one to sit still. Whether it was working, travelling, or keeping the garden in order, he always had something on the go. He loved being active, he loved people, and most of all, he loved life. His friends remember his enormous wit and sense of humour, but also his kindness. He may have been the first to tease you, the first to get stuck in with banter - but if you were in trouble, Simon was the first to be at your side, the first to offer a helping hand.

It was about a year ago that Simon was diagnosed with prostate cancer. Initially, the prognosis was that Simon would have several more years to enjoy life. Sadly, other cancers were discovered and soon after Christmas, he went into Coventry Hospital where, on January 15th, Simon died.

So ended the life of a truly remarkable man – a man who genuinely loved people; a man who was invariably fun, and witty, with an unforgettable booming, loud laugh; a man who was unwaveringly caring and generous – who would do anything for anyone; a man who was always optimistic in his outlook; a man who didn't care what people thought – he was too busy having fun; a man who was a proper gentleman, with a delightful sense of old-fashioned courtesy; a man who was so many things, but a man who, above all, was never happier than when in the company of his family and his friends. In short – Simon May was a thoroughly incredible man.

A tribute from Simon's brother, Bill

Simon started his fixation with transport at a very early age, tricycles around our yard and the next-door yard at maximum speed, with, surprisingly, few accidents which were sorted out by Mr Wellington. Mr Wellington seemed more enthusiastic about mending bikes than making dentures for Dad's patients. On one birthday I got a peddle jeep which, as you may guess, Simon took pretty quickly whilst he could fit in it.

His like of movement drew us to roller skating, especially down Fore Street hill to the quay, we managed several times to get some ladies to tow us back up the hill!!

Dad taught us how to row and sail a dinghy, though we taught ourselves how to push our dinghy over the mud flats at low water.....

We used to motor down the estuary to Salcombe where we kept our sailing dinghy on Mill Bay beach, across the river by East Portlemouth. One time, coming back from Salcombe after the odd pint in the Ferry Boat Inn, Dad was waiting to give us a lift home and he suggested we didn't sing the songs we had sung as they travelled well over the water and some people might be shocked and offended.

We went to Marlborough to ride, usually down to Soar Mill Cove for a gallop or trekking to Pony Club events and local shows, Simon went hunting. We also looked after various ponies at times the Joys and Burgoynes.

We were all over the fields at the bottom of the garden, occasionally we helped the farmer with various jobs. We certainly climbed all the trees we could and only one needed rescuing, a young lad from next door got stuck up a tree and it was quite odd to see Dad up a tree with his white dental coat on. I don't remember how long his patient had to wait for his return. One winter we managed to flood a field to get some ice to skate on.

The railway line from Kingsbridge to South Brent ran across the fields not far from our garden. We used to put some vegetables from the allotments along the track to make the train wheels spin, the drivers soon were ready for us and we had to dodge whatever they threw at us. The guy who worked the allotment was OK, Mr Wonnacott, he got us to climb into the Old Grammar School garden to get him some eating apples.

When Simon got his driving license, we got a job at a boat building place in Salcombe. We looked after the motor and sailing boats, hiring them out and showing people how to drive and sail them. We then became regulars of the Start Bay Inn at Torcross where we celebrated Simon and Alwyn's 18th birthdays before having my own there.

Simon was a talented musician. He learnt the piano at home and then learnt the guitar before going to boarding school in Crediton, where he learned to play Cello and, in the Cadet Force Band he played the Bugle. He and our older brother, Christopher, used to play duets, which started off beautifully but they always ended up as a race to see who could play the fastest.

Simon wanted to go to Art School when he finished his A levels but somehow Mum and Dad managed to dissuade him and he trained as an accountant in Newton Abbot.

After this time I was away at sea and managed to miss all that went on but more recently Jean and I have been away with Simon and Janet to Norfolk, Suffolk, around Honiton and Mothercombe, as well as Sicily, Croatia and the Greek Islands, of Tinos and Andros, and of course in the summer he was always down in Dartmouth, which he loved.

A tribute from Simon's daughter, Laura

For those who don't know me, I am the fourth of Simon's children and maybe the most alike him in humour and personality, something I've only come to admit in recent years. Fortunately for you that means I've had this speech checked by an independent source to make sure it's deemed appropriate.

To give you an idea of what it was like growing up with Simon, he told me the only C word banned in our household was Corbyn, because he was a 'scruffy bugger who didn't know how to wear a tie.' It's safe to say we clashed a little on politics, but I think he secretly liked the debates it created. He also hid bars of galaxy chocolate like a naughty child in his bedside drawer, because he said he had to have something for himself in a household of women. He always walked on the outside of the pavement with us or Mum, no matter what, and he had a memory so sharp that he recalled full names of people he went to boarding school with and what pets they had, often regaling tales of mischief he'd caused in classes with great fondness.

He continued this streak of trouble into adulthood. The first time he met Luke, my partner, he cleaned his car because he said it was 'an embarrassment to have on the drive', which we still laugh about all those years later, undeterred by the fact that I was the one extremely embarrassed by that. Another example is when he refused to accept the changing rooms were shut during the M&S sale and tried on a suit in the corner of the store to our collective horror, which didn't take long for security to cotton onto.

Some of our favourite times with Dad were sitting round our fire pit, making toast as he loudly sang the lyrics to 'My Boomerang Won't Come Back' in all the character voices. Dad loved music and my older siblings say some of the fondest times for them were with Dad blaring the Eagles in the car or taking them with him to see Status Quo in the 80s. The thing about myself and Catherine growing up with a slightly older dad meant we were well educated in artists such as Simon & Garfunkel and Dire Straits and his world knowledge was second to none. He'd never just explain a word we didn't understand, he'd make us get the dictionary out, or a world map to figure out where a country was. When Cath recently moved into a new house, instead of buying a side gate he insisted on making one to measure whilst trying to educate her on DIY (largely unsuccessfully on Catherine's part). He helped to make us more resilient and independent which I'm grateful for now as an adult.

All five of us were lucky to have a second home in his home of South Devon also. Our childhood was filled with beaches, BBQs, crabbing and arguing over the order of jam versus cream on scones (it's cream first if anyone's wondering). It's a place that's really special to all of us because of Dad, which is another gift he gave us along the way.

The thing about Simon was that no matter which walk of life you were from, as long as you were up for a pint and a conversation with which you could hold your own against him, you were considered a friend. It's hard to sum up a man who was so spirited, wise, deeply infuriating and generous into such a short speech. Simon fitted in no boxes, not that he wanted to, and I think it's a lesson we can all take forward with us.

A Life Well Lived

*A life well lived is a precious gift
Of hope and strength and grace,
From someone who has made our world
A brighter, better place
It's filled with moments, sweet and sad
With smiles and sometimes tears,
With friendships formed and good times shared
And laughter through the years.
A life well lived is a legacy
Of joy and pride and pleasure,
A living, lasting memory
Our grateful hearts will treasure*