

# **Tribute to Matthew Dorchester Abbey March 13th 2024.**

## **Peter Husband**

It might be said that Matthew wasn't dealt the best of hands. He was only two years old when he developed an aggressive form of rheumatoid arthritis which led eventually to involvement of virtually all his joints causing a great deal of pain, diminishing mobility and a need for multiple joint replacements. Then to cap it all four years ago he was found to have motor neurone disease as well. Card players amongst you will know that these poor hands often contain two or three cards which if played well can do wonders. So it was with Matthew.

His first good card was that within a short time after becoming ill he was under the care of Dr Barbara Ansell and her team at the Canadian Red Cross Memorial Hospital in Taplow. I have no doubt at all that Matt would have fared much worse without the superb care and treatment he was given there throughout his childhood.

Matthew always laughed a lot and had a great sense of humour- ever so slightly evil but really benign. Janet and I became aware of this when he was five years old and he was referred to an eye specialist. The letter chart was put up and doing his best to put Matthew at ease the doctor pointed to the letters on the bottom line, the smallest and asked if he could tell him what any of the letters were as he didn't know. Silence so he went up the chart line by line to the very top but still not a word from Matt. In the car on the way home he said to us - that man, how can he be a doctor when he doesn't even know the alphabet

After leaving school Matthew started a business studies course in London but this was interrupted when he sustained a very severe head injury. It was 18 months before he was well enough to work and then he got a job with American Express in Brighton where he developed an interest in Sports for the Disabled. He took up competitive swimming reaching national level. After a couple of years he came back to London to work for the British Sports Association for the Disabled as membership secretary. This was his second good card- more than that - it was a very special card- it was April no less who was working there also. Thankfully Matt had the good sense to ask her to marry him and they married here in this Abbey 29 years ago.

Throughout his life Matthew has always showed immense courage coupled with a determination to live life as fully as possible in spite of all his problems. He never complained and his glass was always 'Half Full'.

April is a very special and amazing person. Her love, care and devotion enabled Matt to do things which otherwise would have been impossible. A good example being in 1993 when they gave up their jobs and travelled all around the world for a whole year.

When they got back they came to Dorchester having acquired the village post office and shop. They so enjoyed their time in the shop and of course quite soon they knew everyone in the village. This was Matthew's third good card. Dorchester is a glorious place in which to live. Over the years so many people have been kind and supportive to Matthew and his family thank you all for this. I had just retired when they came here so Matthew offered me a job as an assistant. There were two conditions - there would be no money flowing my way and under no circumstances was I to go anywhere near or do anything in the post office part of the business. I think he felt I would never achieve the level of competency required for that. It was one of the best jobs I ever did .

It was during this time that Kieran appeared and later on Katie bounced in just in time to be a millennium baby. In 2001 Matt and April took up new roles in the health sector. Matthew worked as a laboratory technician at the John Radcliffe hospital for 18 years eventually retiring 4 years ago when his mobility had become much worse. From then on the White Hart became increasingly important for Matthew. It was his second home - a place to meet his friends, a place where he was always welcomed and I want to say a special thank you to all the staff who have been so kind and supportive.

Matthew's children Kieran and Katie have always been a very important part of his life especially so during last few months. I know it gave Matthew great happiness to see them both settled in their marine careers and indeed his last holiday with April was a cruise on which Katie was a member of the crew as an officer cadet. He must have been very proud of her. At this morning's service at the crematorium we sang that great Naval Hymn, Eternal Father Strong to Save. This was chosen by Matthew specially for Kieran and Katie.

Matt's brothers Andy and Tim have been a great support during these difficult times; with Tim who lives in Toronto, frequently on Face Time and flying over whenever he could to be with Matt.

Special thanks go to Lydia who was Matthew's carer for the last year or so. Matt understandingly had become very anxious about his future but after Lydia came he was much calmer and started smiling again like his old self. Lydia had two little Belgian Bulldogs and at Matt's request they used to come with her. He loved those dogs as much as his own Fudgie and Rosie and one of them was often on his lap. Last but certainly not least I want to mention Liz, April's sister for helping Matt last year to formulate exactly what he wanted for the services today. Thank you Liz.

Janet and I have received many lovely cards and messages – one of our friends described Matthew as brave, funny, kind, clever and inspirational. Yes indeed he was all of these.

I want to finish with a favourite line of Matthew's- one he often used when he was asked how he was 'I live day by day, but I am still smiling' and then I have one for all of us.

'Don't cry because Matthew's life is over on earth, smile because it happened'