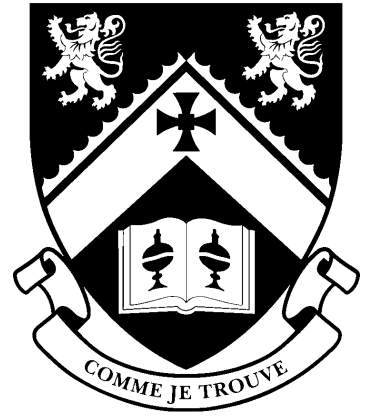


JCR Claims Form



Pay: Sam Stradling	The Sum Of: £4.34
Item: Some Item	
Budget: Some Budget	Budget Holder: Sam Stradling

Details:

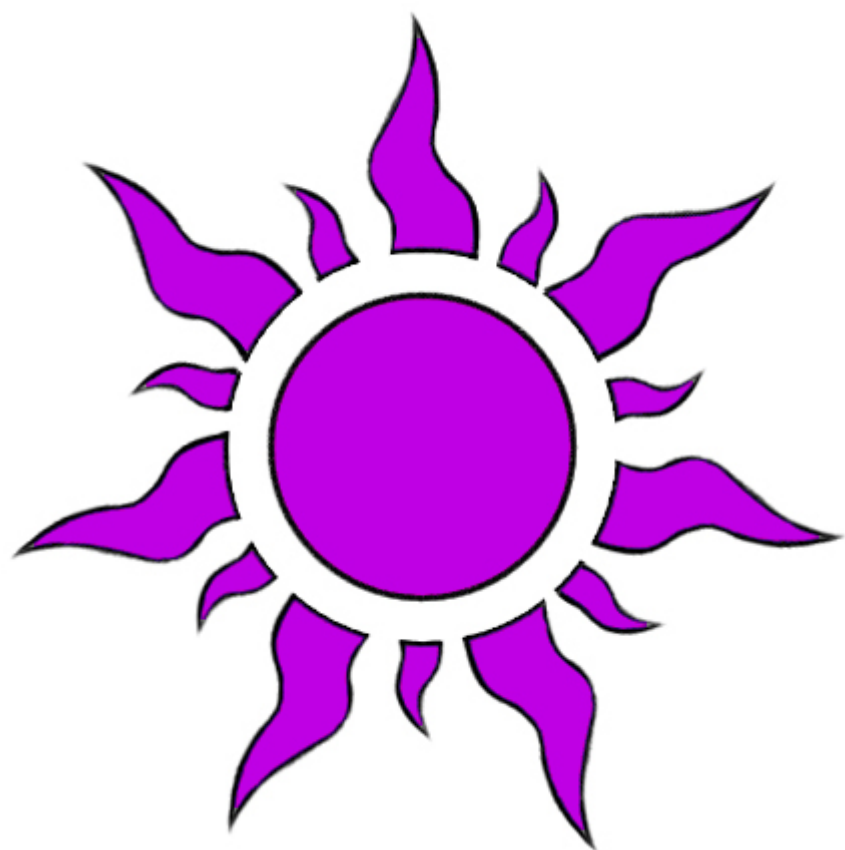
deets

For JCR Treasurer Use:

Paid On:

Cheque Number:

JCR President	JCR Treasurer	College Bursar



Simon John Richards 1959 -2014

'Simon Richards tall and lean, in habit pure, in thought quite clean.....'

This was the first line of humorous rhyme I penned as part of my speech when I had the privilege of being best man at Simon and Jane's wedding nearly 23 years ago.

But actually, Simon and I go back way further than that, to 1979 in fact when we both started at Queens' College, which I now realise is almost 35 years ago. We have known each other a long time....though not long enough.

Traditionally my job here should be to deliver a eulogy..... an oration in honor of the deceased, typically consisting of high praise and commendation.

On reflection, I'm not sure that Simon would want the airbrushed, sanitised highlights. He spent his working life giving feedback, good and bad and for a spell it even became his core role during a secondment as in inspector for Ofsted. He would want a fair and unbiased 'warts and all' report.

Like the good teacher he was, I suspect Simon would always have given the positives first and only then focused on the areas which might be 'improved'.

In this case I'm going to make an exception, because it is always the 'idiosyncrasies' that tell us most about the real person.

So for Simon's leaver's report let's get the 'could do betters' out of the way first.

1. Unnecessarily tall -

6'5" most of which was leg, making it a long way from his brain to his feet.

This meant that coordination was always something of a challenge and as one who never learnt to ride a bike as a child, even in his adult life he really needed a team of outriders to be reasonably safe. Also led to a unique if inspired dancing style, even by the standards of middle aged Dad's

2. Mixed dress sense.

Well turned out when suited and booted for work or when dressed by Jane, but liable to major fashion gaffes particularly where sporting attire is concerned. At that height, with a Bambi on ice skiing style, a bright yellow one piece ski-suit was always going to attract attention engendering cries of "Look out it's the Big Banana!"

Wind back 20 years when he and Jane lived in Sheffield and Simon was a keen runner and then favoured a very skimpy pair of bright green Sheffield Striders running shorts, which in conjunction with a 36 inch inside leg, was certainly noticeable

It was wearing a pair of these fine but somewhat revealing garments, the first time I introduced him to my wife Jan, that he clearly demonstrated his third and final 'could do better quality', which we could charitably call 'Directness'.

I had told him a lot about this new love of my life and when we arrived at the campsite in northern France to join Simon and Jane for a week's holiday, he eagerly came to meet us, greeting Jan with the memorable opening line. "You know, you're not as glamorous as I thought you'd be!"

I could relate a host of other instances, but you will all have your own particular favorite.

It was this directness and his inability to help himself from organising people that caused us to become friends early on in our time at Queens'. I can distinctly remember our first meeting in the college bar.....Notable for his height, shock of brown curls, John Lennon glasses and trademark camouflage jacket.

.....Its funny how we associate individuals with particular garments, at various stages of their lives.....Sadly, after a time, the camouflage jacket was stolen in rather an unpleasant town vs. gown incident, to be replaced by an NCB donkey jacket (at the time the must have accessory for any right minded, left leaning student)

As the years went by, this gave way to Berghaus and eventually to Barbour, though I suspect that as a local product, the latter may not have quite the same middle class connotations up here as it does in the Home Counties, where Simon was brought up.

Within 5 minutes of our first meeting, it was pretty obvious that he was teacher material. Simon was organising everybody's evening. Initially I was resistant, but soon gave in to his persistence and sheer enthusiasm and the die was cast - Like sheep we followed and for much of the next 3 decades he organised a large tranche of my social life, travel and activities.

For many years he dragged me up mountains and across continents and I owe much of my love of the outdoors to those early trips. Latterly I returned the compliment and drew him somewhat foolhardily into cycle touring and whilst this wasn't without its challenges, he became a very enthusiastic cyclist, once Steel's Cycles had found tubing long enough to make a bike frame to fit him.

His willingness and sense of community made him very popular with all groups at Queens' and he ended up in the perfect role as the college's Entertainments Officer. His ability to infect people with his enthusiasm guaranteed that his tenure was a success, but his left wing credentials were severely tested when the University Feminist Society picketed the stag event, organised by him, to celebrate the transition of Queens' from an all male institution to a mixed college, at the start of our second year. It made the national press, but Simon took it all in his stride, never taking himself, his political views or life in general, too seriously.

Ironically both he and I had benefitted from Queens' all male status when we applied, as neither of us would even have made it to interview, once the admission of women drove the academic standards up to their current exalted state. Naturally though, he revelled in the next two years of co-ed status

Along with his Ents Officer role, he also ran the film club. In those days before dvds and online streaming, this was really quite something. He chose the monthly film and even then his knowledge of cinema was encyclopaedic. We, the select few, then got to enjoy a private viewing before it went on general release in the Old Hall.

There is no doubt that his strong sense of Social Justice drove him towards a career in teaching and it was a given that this would be within the state sector. I imagine that as well as his enthusiasm and passion for his subject, the fact that he was not an academic high flyer (and was, I suspect, an undiagnosed dyslexic) and that he had to work hard to achieve what he did, made him an even more effective teacher and pupil advocate.

Simon was always a great favorite with my family and my mother often remarked that he was the nearest thing I had to a brother.....occasionally, others less charitably described us as 'like an old married couple'...either way it was important that like a good brother, I selected his wife for him, carefully - so Jane, an old medical school friend of mine made the perfect match.

Simon threw himself into marriage and parenthood with characteristic zeal, determined to be the best Husband and Dad he could be. It is a measure of the man that even as his illness began to get the upper hand, this remained his key priority. I know that in years to come Ben and William will always regret that the time they had with him was so short, but they will know that their Dad was special and did his level best, to give them the best possible start in life.

Ten years ago, I found out about Simon's cancer the day before we were due to go off for a boys' cycle weekend (already a tradition, but in those days just the two of us) Instead, I came up to see him in hospital after he had come out of surgery, to witness his usual positivity even though he looked as though he had just come off the set from jaws.

Some months later on the rescheduled trip, he was on fine form and we spent 3 glorious days cycling round Northumberland with Simon extolling his good fortune....compiling between us the list of the 10 best things about having cancer:

- Heightened appreciation of life
- Loads of attention
- Wife extra nice to you
- etc, etc.

That was Simon...if ever anyone's glass was always half full, it was his.

You will all be aware of what a roller coaster ride the next 10 years became with hopes raised, dashed and raised again. Amazing treatment, amazing support, amazing resilience. At times he seemed bemused by the level of support and affection from those around him, unaware that this was clearly a case of, "As you sow, so shall you reap"

Simon always managed to maintain an impressive balance of openness and realism about his condition, whilst never allowing it to interfere with his appetite for what life might remain. While many of us might have turned our attention to a few months of hedonistic pursuit, Simon's only persistent regret apart from the impact on his family, was that he had unfinished business as a teacher and had never had the opportunity to be take up a headship.

His care at St Oswald's was impeccable, but the main bonus for Simon was the proximity to The High School, the frequent visits and the opportunity to feel part of it. When I came to see him only a few weeks ago and took the metro from the airport, he was still keen to know if I'd seen any of his pupils in uniform, smoking or messing around in the Regent's Centre....As the saying goes: 'You can take the teacher out of the school.....'

When I sat down to gather my thoughts for today, I came across a letter I wrote to family and friends at Christmas, which sums up his positivity and the impact that he always had on others.....

“.....I write this letter, sitting at Newcastle Airport having just seen my dear friend Simon, who has been wrestling with kidney cancer for ten years now. The timing is particularly poignant, as Jane found out she was pregnant with William, the younger of their two sons shortly after Simon was first diagnosed and William has just celebrated his tenth birthday.

Simon's battle against and latterly 'life with' this cancer has been quite extraordinary; particularly his determination to carry on being the best father, husband, teacher and friend he could be, albeit against the odds.

When I spent time with him a few weeks ago, his condition had accelerated and it looked as though, it might have been the last time I was to see him. Yesterday, we joked about the 'Groundhog Day' aspect to his illness, as once again he has bounced back with the help of the fantastic care and support he has received.

This might seem a rather morbid tale, to describe in such detail, in what is supposed to be a festive letter, but there has been much about this story which has been inspiring and uplifting. When his time comes, we will all miss him immensely, but there has been something both humbling and uplifting about the calm, dignified and generous manner in which he has dealt with his illness and its inevitable consequences.

As a friend, teacher and father he has been an inspiration to many throughout his life and through his openness, courage, and humour, he remains an inspiration as he approaches its conclusion....”

Simon's life has now reached its conclusion....He packed as much into his 54 years as many do into much longer lives, but it is still way too soon.

Simon, we will miss your quiet uncomplicated confidence, your openness and your warmth. We certainly miss your eclectic dress sense and even your 'directness'.

You will always have a place in our hearts and remain an inspiration to all of us, who knew and loved you.

Jamie Brosch

31 October 2014