

IAN WHITTINGHAM

1967 – 2009

Ian Whittingham born 22 September 1967 to Elizabeth and Eric Whittingham. One of three children, an elder brother Derek and younger sister Cheryl.

Today is true testament to how many of us were touched by Ian's kindness. We decided it best to deliver this eulogy between myself, Tommo, Pam and Neil, in the hope we do justice to covering Ian's lifetime from various perspectives.

Whilst I was not fortunate enough to know Ian in his younger days, I have had the opportunity to speak with his mum Beth, brother and sister, Derek and Cheryl. It was through their immense kindness and generosity during this difficult time that they shared their memories of Ian's childhood and life experiences with me so I can share them with you.

It is clear to see where Ian gained his sense of humour, because when I was recently discussing matters with Beth, and she gave her full name, Cecilia Elizabeth Dorothy Whittingham, she added, "mum must have been drunk when naming me". Also when Beth used to fill in application forms, they always issued her with an extra page, so she could fit her full name on the form.

From the age of three, Ian always liked construction toys, and at Christmas and birthday times, the living room looked much like a building site. Probably, like the one Ian must have imagined working on. Beth told me he was always interested in construction as his dad was a JCB driver and a very successful one at that.

Ian never considered himself academic, and therefore school did not rate highly on his list of priorities as a child. However, his zest for life and enthusiasm to work found him taking his first job at the age of 11, working on a local farm, helping with the animals and bailing hay. I think part of him that wanted to be a farmer, but fortunately for the construction industry, when Ian left school, he had already secured a job, roofing with a local builder to start the same afternoon.

Ian was never out of work and toiled extremely hard making sure he did his fair share, as this was what he considered the norm. Even though Ian chose the construction industry as his vocation, he was still a keen gardener and at an early age had 17 chickens in the back garden at Gilroy Road. He even trained them to chase his mum up and down the garden.

Ian was great with his people skills and you know had a brilliant persuasive nature. So it will come as no surprise to learn that along with his 17 chickens he almost persuaded his mum to buy a goat. His justification for this was Derek had asthma and goats' milk was great for asthma. The purchase was almost complete when Beth asked Ian, who was going to milk the goat? He quickly replied, 'you are mum'. This was the downfall of his plan for the new addition to the family.

There was a time when Paul, a neighbour, used to give tips and assistance to Ian with his gardening. On one occasion when Paul came round to see Ian, Ian had a leek in the kitchen. Paul was also growing leeks at that time and enquired where Ian had got his from. He was astounded to hear that Ian had grown it himself, and in fact did not believe him, and thought it was from a supermarket.

In his later working life as a qualified roofer, Ian suffered his tragic accident, which had catastrophic consequences. However, Ian never complained and continued to be a brilliant son to Beth and Eric and a fantastic brother to Derek and Cheryl. He certainly overcame all obstacles and led an active life, achieving more in a short time than many of us can hope to.

I met Ian through the Spinal Injuries Association, and I always found him to be open, honest and trustworthy. He did absolutely loads for charity and I recently asked Helen Shaw, his close friend, for her thoughts about Ian. She quoted "Ian found his perfect niche with health and safety issues and he was absolutely dedicated to reaching as many people he could to prevent them from facing the same catastrophic injuries he suffered. He studied hard and achieved so much in such a short lifetime. You will know about his MBE! He didn't boast about it. Kept it in his drawer at home!

He had a generous spirit and a wicked sense of humour! He loved to take the Mickey out of the Lawyers too! I sometimes saw a gentler side to Ian that revealed a deep love for his family and those close to him. I suspect that he saved many lives along the way with his forthright/pragmatic down to earth/no nonsense approach.

Although Ian has passed on, his drive/determination motivated others in a way that touched their hearts and minds and will last throughout their lifetimes.

Ian was always up to mischief, and was always winding me up. Beth tells me Ian only came home for his meals, so Beth really did not know the half of what Ian achieved or did away from home.

Ian was also a keen gambler and spent time at local casino's and regularly visiting Las Vegas. Ian was great at communicating and was always grabbing the attention of celebrities.

On one occasion, in Las Vegas, Mike Tyson was walking by, with two of his security associates, and Ian called "Hi Mike, how are you doing....". Mike Tyson came over and spent some twenty minutes chatting to Ian. That was just the sort of effect Ian had on everyone. Ian also gave his time to others without question. On one occasion, he set up a radio interview for himself and Tommo, who will be speaking next. When Tommo got to the radio station it was Saga Radio. Whilst Tommo has a few grey hairs, he does not consider himself a prime candidate for Saga just yet.

I will now hand over to him so he can tell you more and give another aspect of Ian's brilliant life.

A radio station in Birmingham had rang Ian enquiring about a campaign he was heading up for Bluestone called Work Safe - Home Safe it was only when we pulled up outside did he scream with laughter as we were interviewed live on Saga.

Other memories include the government summit in 2001 "turning concerns into action" of which I an played a major part, during the reception it took him just a few minutes to engage John Prescott in debate by explaining that if it was two politicians a week losing their lives things would change very quickly!!

Ian gave me the honour of accompanying to pick up the MBE the whole thing was timed with military precision and each person got their 30 seconds with the Queen as she gave them their award – all except ---- you guessed it..... After the ceremony Ian was more concerned with how scruffy Jamie Oliver was (never even wore a bloody tie) than the fact he had just been recognised by the nation.

Strikes me that we are often requested on such occasions as today, to not mourn the passing of a much loved friend, an inspiration and a true legend but to join together in a "celebration of life". In the case of Ian Whittingham MBE there is never a more fitting tribute or a more poignant time to do just that and take time to remember Ian as he would want us to. By thinking and reflecting on the enormous impact that he had upon each and every one of us here today in so many different ways and also very importantly reflect on the impact he had upon the literally thousands upon thousands of people who are not.

Like so many people I met Ian through the world of health and safety and his great friend Neil Jamieson, his powerful story telling coupled with the extensive knowledge he developed over the years made him without doubt the most influential person I have ever met. When told, as he often was (by me) that he has "saved more lives" than anyone in the field of health and safety he would shrug this off, swiftly change the subject and move on.

This was the measure of the man, a man of amazing strength, an absolute tireless worker, a compassionate man, that sense of humour was also coupled with a sense of devilment - that "cat amongst the pigeons" saying was perfect for Ian as he regularly challenged people at the very highest levels in so many different organisations across the country. All for one true and constant aim, to make people's working lives safer, healthier and ultimately longer.

Perhaps his one small failing was his ability to say "no" as he tried to give a piece of himself to everyone who was introducing a campaign, making a video, holding a seminar - anything he could do to help he duly did with heart and soul.

I am sure that like so many people I feel privileged to have met Ian and proud to have him as a close friend. His passing leaves us all with an empty space that will never be filled he was and always will be a personal inspiration his legacy will live on and his "life saving" duties are by no means over.