

“Matthew” by Kate & Andy Smith, read by Andy

Matthew came into this world on 12th February 1986, Kate’s birthday. I nearly lost them both then as a 30 hour labour was followed by an emergency Caesarian. Matthew required resuscitation but happily was perfectly OK, all 10lb of him. Kate took a little longer to recover.

As with many proud fathers I had images of him becoming an international sportsman of some kind. Matthew had other ideas. His early progress was rapid, and when sister Abigail came along I think the consultant obstetrician was quite surprised to be engaged in conversation by someone so young. His early fascinations were with machines, in particular washing machines. He would stand in the front of ours for ages, and was quite happy pretending to *be* one.

Like many children Matthew went through a solar system phase. What set him apart was the detail with which he went into this subject, being able to name not just the planets, but all the moons of all the planets, and a fair few asteroids to boot.

As we approached the end of his first GCSE year the school that Matthew and Abigail attended closed unexpectedly. Bloxham came to our rescue. By this time Matthew had been given the name “Smithers”, I’m not sure by whom originally. Anyway, the name stuck at Bloxham and afterwards, and Smithers soon became known as the man to see when you were having difficulty with your prep.

Matthew always had time for others, and would often set aside his own work to help with somebody else’s. He was kind and considerate to all, except perhaps to wasps. He didn’t much care for wasps. He could engage almost anyone in conversation and with subtlety turn the subject to science. He was perhaps the only person ever to be able to hold his own in a conversation with John, his grandpa. More importantly Matt knew how to listen, and how to understand a different point of view.

Matthew shared my passion for prog rock, along with many other genres. Much of my CD collection migrated to his room to be copied to his iPod. In June 2004 Matt and I went together to the NEC to see the group Yes on their 35th anniversary tour. I don’t think I have ever seen Matt as ecstatic as he was during that concert.

On leaving Bloxham Matt began his masters in Physics at Imperial College. His first year was not his happiest time. However, towards the end of the year he had made friends with Jo and Kayleigh who were also looking for second year accommodation, and so came the era of Winders Road, Battersea - aka “The House of Smithers”. He had found soul mates - people who shared his passion for science fiction and Japanese anime. So good was his social life in the second year that a few weeks before his finals Kate & I received a panic phone call at 2:30am alerting us to the fact that he had not studied enough for his exams. Calmly creating a revision schedule at that time of the morning with an agitated son on the end of the phone line is without doubt the pinnacle of our parental achievement. Matt could do that to us sometimes, but we didn’t mind.

By his third year Matt was in the swing of things, and late night counselling had become a thing of the past. New faces at Winders Road brought new friends with a shared passion for role playing games and similar activities. His degree was completed with a great deal of hard work but refreshingly little drama. Matthew was truly happy.

After university the general idea is to get a job. Matthew had been so focussed on his degree that he forgot about this bit. Brushing up his CV and sending in applications late in the day he initially found many graduate intake opportunities full already. He had already identified Areva as the company he would like to work for and serendipitously a vacancy on their graduate intake scheme became available, which he was offered, much to his delight. Matt and I visited Stafford to locate accommodation and found a delightfully sunny room with en-suite facilities. Pretty soon and he had turned it into a pad worthy of Smithers. Wall scrolls, anime, science fiction, music - a mini version of the Imperial College Science Fiction Library.

With great rail connections to London and Leamington Matt had easy access to his London friends, and his family. We delighted in his frequent visits and news updates, and were in almost daily contact with him online. As an income earner Matthew indulged himself in his passion for all things Apple, and we had many debates on the relative merits of Macs verses PCs. I thought I had him trumped on the second mouse button issue, but he was not persuaded.

Working for Areva suited Matt. He was making contacts, staying informed, and preparing for the opportunity to become involved in the nuclear energy side of things. He formed new friendships within Areva and within the Stafford University Myth Society, although he would have us believe that he still did not easily make new friends. A quick look around now tells a different story.

Matt was strongly principled and lived by those principles, becoming a vegetarian, giving blood, urging tolerance of others. He was concerned by climate change, but unlike most of us he had a clear idea of what he wanted to do about it and was working to those ends. He could have made a real difference.

We know what happened next. We have lost the best son imaginable, the best brother, the best grandson, the best nephew, the best Godson, the truest, kindest and most modest friend we shall ever have. I was running out of things I could teach Matthew. He was only just beginning with what he was going to teach us. He was as fine a person as I have ever known. The pain we feel is in direct proportion to the love we feel. The pain will subside, the love will not. We must celebrate his life, through the tears at first, but then through laughter and joy at having known him.

Dear Matthew, dear Smithers, rest in peace.