

## A Tribute to Matt Palmer

The day I became one of Matt's best friends was on 3rd September 1996. I remember the day well as it was his first day of starting A-Levels at Hayes School and I had decided to do an extra year at school to go to the University I wanted. I knew Matt as being the clumsy but ridiculously good at sport brother of Jon, who was in my year. I was extremely worried about the decision and as I walked into a classroom of familiar strangers, Matt, without hesitation, called me over to sit next to him. He instantly made me feel welcome and at home. Any fears I had vanished instantly. That was always the way Matt would make me feel every time

Matthew Palmer was born in York on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1979, the son of Nigel and Janet, the brother of Jonathan. He completed their family. Just 5 weeks after birth Matt was back in hospital for an emergency operation. He had a closed valve at the neck of his stomach which meant he could not digest his food and required opening. I am reliably informed that this was the last time that he had any such issues with 'digestion' and for those of us lucky to have enjoyed his incredible culinary skills that can only be a good thing! From Jan's side of the family he was known as the 'little blonde boy' and his love of sport was apparent from the first time he kicked a football. He had incredible hand/eye co-ordination and the list of sports he excelled in reads like an Olympic timetable.

As a family the Palmer's moved to London in 1982 when Nigel was promoted to Assistant Manager at 54 Lombard Street. Barclays main branch and Head office. After some understandable initial trepidation of moving to the big smoke what followed for the family were 10 of their happiest years with Hoddesdon Round Table, Broxbourne Rangers Football Club, Broxbourne Sports Club (for Cricket, Squash & Tennis) and Sheredes JMI school being the centre of their social lives.

After primary school, Matt had a year at The Broxbourne School, before a further promotion for Nigel saw the family relocate to West Wickham / Hayes. Matt really missed his friends from Broxbourne and it was a difficult time for him until he met those that were to become some of his very best friends for life. Looking back now I wonder if Matt saw some of himself many years later when I walked into his classroom and he took me as his friend instantly.

The Palmer family lived in a house that was just a short walk from the local pub and school. Something Matt absolutely made the most of. Many of his friends talk warmly of the free periods they spent having tea at Matt's house and there are very very very many people here today who enjoyed a house party or after-party there especially when Nigel and Jan were away on holiday which seemed to be often! Matt was the most willing host and I think it may have been at these "Matt's parents are away" parties that he honed his skills for hosting

knock-out events (that would later become his career) and making delicious food (that would later become his passion).

Matt was always the life and soul of the party and when not being the host he was the first name on everyone's party/night-out invite list. I have Matt to thank for my love of festivals as he dragged me as a naive 19 year old, very unprepared to the Reading Festival, known for its heavy rock and focus on the music. The tent he had provided for us blew away in the first 2 hours of being there but Matt being Matt that was no obstacle to us having a good time and somewhere to stay. He made new friends with everyone he talked to and the offers of a tent to share were plentiful. It was also at this festival that I got to see for the first time Matt's many many dance moves and ability to get a crowd going. On this occasion it was 'Moshing', a style of dance whose participants push or slam into each other. It is most associated with "aggressive" music genres, such as hardcore punk and numerous styles of metal. Matt was the instigator and at the centre of a lot of Moshing that weekend. In later life the "Moshing" was replaced by some of his other trademark dances like the 'dwarf' dance where he would get down on his knees and dance on them near an unsuspecting group. As they noticed one by one it usually resulted in a crowd forming and the usual friendship and adulation for him that inevitably followed. We have never seen anyone quite own a dance floor like Matt with his unique moves and showman qualities. Many festivals followed and Matt's eclectic music taste meant he was equally at home in the mud at Glastonbury as he was glamping it at a club in London.

After some fantastic late teenage years dominated by sport and socialising he somehow managed to find the time to get good A-Levels and go to the University of Brighton, where he studied Information and Media Studies. The vibrant seaside lifestyle and campus style University was the perfect setting for Matt to make even more lifelong friends and be the life and soul of even more parties. On my first visit to see him at University we were in a club called the Event that had a massive spiral staircase in the centre of the club. He had secured some tokens that gave us limitless free drinks. He came rushing back from the bar with a beer in each hand, tripped and fell all the way down to the bottom of the stairs. We all looked on worried as he proceeded to jump up and declare that he hadn't spilled a drop. We also then shortly after discovered that his hand was badly gashed and he needed a lot of stitches. That was typical Matt displaying his clumsiness, great sportsman like-agility, unpredictability and competitiveness not to be defeated all in one moment.

After University he went travelling the world where he had an amazing 9 months before running out of money and needing to get a job. His first few jobs were not really for him but then heard about an opportunity to work for "Fast Bikes". He was interviewed by Warren Mackenzie who tells me that he was well on the way to offering him the job but had a few questions left to ask. When put to Matt, "How would your friends describe you?" He paused

for a moment, laughed out loud and replied, “a bit of a nob!”. Typical Matt - not even a formal interview could stop his self deprecating humour and sheer strength of personality coming through. Not only was he offered the job he was also to become Warren’s Best Man, something he was very proud of, especially the speech.

Matt was ambitious and he held a long-term desire to break into Event Management. Banks Sadler was the perfect setting for him to use his organisational and social skills to run events all over the world. It wasn’t just his employers that got to see first-hand what an Event Management maestro he was. In May 2008 Matt conducted the sting of all time in arranging surprise joint sixtieth birthday celebrations for Nigel and Jan with such impressive military precision. It took all of the family and friends by surprise and endeared him to all. I casually asked him for some tips to organise my Mum’s 60<sup>th</sup> and before I knew it the venue was chosen, everything arranged including pianists and cartoonists for the children which I never would have thought of. Needless to say it was the perfect event. I have no doubt that Matt surprised many of us over the years always doing everything he could to give us a special day.

He bought a house in Hopewell Yard, Camberwell with his life-long friend Dom. Where he hosted many more parties and even created his own mini-festival called Hopewell Fest. He later became the Chairman of the Hopewell Yard Residents Committee, doing much for the neighbourhood as well as hosting many more parties. I used to go round his house on a Friday evening and not often leave before Sunday evening. His infectious laughter, sociability and positivity was infectious and given free-time I would always want to spend it with Matt, so much so that I ended up moving in with him for a spell.

After a number of glorious years with Banks Sadler, Matt was keen to further his career and moved on to W&O Events where he took on additional responsibility and ran even larger events. He travelled every corner of the globe and got to stay in some of the finest resorts and eat in some of the finest restaurants. He gained rave reviews for the work he did there so much so that he was approached by one of his clients to do a secondment in Copenhagen where he spent 6 months covering for one of their employees who had had a heart attack.

Being the life and soul and such a positive spirit I don’t think everyone knew that Matt had his first panic attacks about 10 years ago before joining Fast Bikes. He researched tirelessly about coping with depression and building self-esteem which allowed him to cope with any future blips. It is a credit to Matt, his winning attitude and the incredibly positive life that he had created for himself that he was able to beat and suppress his demons until very recently. Sadly the last event he was to manage was the trigger that tipped him over and caused him trouble on this occasion that he could not overcome.

Matt was universally loved by everyone and universally loved us back. As a son, I saw so much of Nigel and Jan in him and it is plain to see how proud of him they were. As a brother, he always looked up to Jon and was always there for him when needed. He was a doting Uncle, a proud grandson and to the rest of us the most incredible friend. Matt, I will never forget how you were there when I needed someone the most and I will be eternally grateful for how you never judged anyone and just always only wished the best for them. As a matchmaker you were one of the best and I know of at least 3 couples here today that wouldn't have met if it wasn't for you.

Matt leaves me with a massive "Palmy D" sized hole missing in my life that can only be filled by him. I am going to fill the hole with memories of the countless good times, the dwarf dancing, the million nicknames you had for yourself and gave everyone else. Of how you would introduce me as "Mavis" to all of your new friends and how you were so pleased with yourself that you had come up with my new nickname "Popa Mavis". I am grateful that the last time I saw you was me treating you to a gig and that it ended (as so many other nights did) with me falling asleep and then you taking the mick on this occasion by posting the video on Facebook. When I think of you unhappy I will picture the text alerts you would receive about your beloved Grimbsy Town football club going a goal down and how annoyed with the England football team you were when we went to the World Cup in South Africa.

Berty Big boy (another of his many nicknames) you brought us so much joy, laughter and happiness. You crammed more into your life than any normal person could ever dream of. Thank you for being the amazing, one-off, complete and utter legend of a man to us all.