

Ian Prince (1960-2017)

A tool box. What a perfect way to remember Ian Prince. A man who spent all his time making, building and repairing. Ian was a doer not a thinker. I'm the opposite: I just sit around thinking about things. And sometimes I think about my Uncle Ian and the legendary advice he gave me: 'Here, Stu – if you keep studying your brain'll explode.'

Education wasn't for Ian. He was in much too much of a rush to get out into the world and do stuff. That tendency goes right back to some of his earliest and happiest memories. Of spending time with his dad at work on the railways; catching lifts with him on the train, riding on the footplate, cooking breakfast in the cab.

No matter what he did, Ian was always his dad's favourite. His old man used to say that he loved every hair on Ian's sweet little head. That was probably just as well, because Ian was no angel.

I'd like to tell you about some of the naughty things he got up to. Mm, it's probably best if I don't mention that one... Oh, and I'm *definitely* not reading this out loud...

Ah, here's one I'll risk sharing. It links to that song we heard at the start, which was one of Ian's favourites. The Style Council's 'You're the best thing'. It includes the lines: 'I might shoot to win / And commit the sin'. Perhaps these words reminded Ian of the air rifle he got one Christmas. He tested it on the neighbour's greenhouse. Not one pane of glass survived to see in the New Year.

At least when Ian was at school, his parents could relax for a few hours. Right? Wrong. As one memorable school report put it: 'Ian Prince? Who's Ian Prince?'

Ian enrolled in the school of life – and passed with flying colours. He began his career as an apprentice plasterer working for the construction firm, Beazer – a local business that started out as a family firm in the early 19th century. The young Ian's ever-loving dad dragged him out of bed, made his sandwiches and strove to keep him on the right track. It worked. Ian learnt a trade before moving on to the engineering company Stothert & Pitt.

Ian was both physically strong and mentally resilient. He could turn his hand to anything. He was fearless and took many risks while working.

This recklessness plus a wicked sense of humour were developed at an early age. Take, for example, the occasion when his older brothers persuaded innocent little Ian to jump out of a first floor window. 'Don't worry!', they explained: 'Hold this umbrella and you'll float gently to the ground. It'll be just like in *Mary Poppins!*'

Another early aerial experience involved being sat in the branches of a tree with his sister, Gill. She must have been about 10 or 11 years old. They were spotted by some local girls, one of whom pointed up and shouted: 'My sister wants to go out with you!' We can only begin to imagine Ian's excitement upon hearing this news. Sadly, his fantasies were short-lived. 'No, not you! Your sister!' (I think the signs were there early on, Gilly.)

This must have been one of those very rare occasions when Ian failed with the opposite sex. When this *did* happen he could always turn to the other love of his life: motorbikes. Picture the young Ian, not as Mary Poppins, but as James Dean, riding a motorbike over Pennyquick in Bath. Richard remembers one occasion when Ian asked if he could have a little go on his new motorbike. Rich didn't see either again until the petrol ran out. Ian had to push the bike home and face one very pissed off brother; but I bet it was worth it.

I think Ian must have been an easy person to forgive. He lived up to his name: Ian was Prince Charming; a handsome, charismatic man with a passion for fashion. His hand-me-down clothes took pride of place in my brother Chris's wardrobe. They were more than just cast-offs. They symbolised the uncle he idolised. A bad boy role model who introduced him to all the things he shouldn't have done then and can only dream about now.

Ian had the gift of the gab. He was a natural wheeler dealer who could always negotiate a bargain and get his own way. But as he matured he used those qualities to build a strong family. A man can achieve great things if he is blessed with the love of a good woman. That song we heard at the start should be interpreted as Ian's message to Helen:

'You're the best thing that ever happened / To me or my world'.

But, as we all know, in the real world a Prince doesn't turn into a frog after just one kiss. The old Ian never really went away. Josh, for example, remembers some extra classes arranged by his dad. This involved taking him out of school to have paid lessons with a top motocross rider. This was such a success that it happened again – and again, and again. Ian knew that Helen would be delighted by this educational experiment meaning that there was really no need for Josh to mention it to his mum.

Indeed, Ian was so concerned about his son's education that it led to a special one-to-one meeting with Josh's headmaster. This was because Josh gave his dad the wrong date for parents' evening. So Ian turned up a day late and bumped into a rather surprised headmaster. After all those years, that old school report was still ringing true: 'Ian Prince? Who's Ian Prince?'

But be in no doubt: Ian was a doting father who always ensured that Lauren and Josh had the very best.

Don't forget, though, that Ian also had first-hand experience of what kids get up to when their parents aren't around. So it's not surprising that he was perhaps a *tiny* bit overprotective. Like that time when he sent out a search party to locate the teenage Lauren – and promptly reported her missing when the search failed. Lauren, of course, was having the time of her life at a house party just round the corner, too afraid to tell her dad where she was going and struggling to think of an appropriate response to a text message from Bath police station asking her to contact them urgently.

The great thing about growing up is that we can look back on such things and realise that our parents were irritating and embarrassing because they loved us. Ian's not around anymore, but his love for his family will never end. He'll be a constant presence in your lives. Just as you were in his.

So let me end by referring one final time to that Style Council song. Ian knew that his family were the best thing that ever happened to him. And, the song adds: 'So don't go away'. Well, Ian, we haven't – we're here to say thank you and to let you know that we'll never forget you.

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