

Richard Astill – Commemorative Account

This account will be in two parts:

- From Jim Astill (as Richards Brother).
- From Louise Astill (as Richards Daughter).

Background

Richard was adopted by William and Gladys Astill when he was around 3 years old. Prior to this taking place he had been with a foster family rather than with his biological parents.

Jim was also adopted and was 4 years younger than Richard.

Richard had his children:

- [A son and a daughter, Louise] in 1991 and 1993.
- [personal/sensitive] 2003.

Account from Jim

1970s

Living in Whitwell – Derbyshire and Bingham – Nottinghamshire,

This was undoubtedly the time where I was the closest to my brother as we were both under 10 for most of the decade.

He was as happy as any child could be during this time, we were both cared for very well even though times were tough financially for our parents.

We shared a bedroom during this time, and often played games until the streetlights went out just after midnight.

Times were very different in the 70s and being older than me it wasn't uncommon for him to be out with his friends for most of the day, coming home at the time he was asked to by our mum.

We holidayed mostly at the same place in North Wales year after year, but it was just as exciting even though we did visit the same types of places each year.

Richard was 10 in 1977, and I guess this is when we started to develop our own paths more so for him I guess.

Towards the end of the decade, we moved to Bingham in Nottinghamshire, and from this point onwards we had our own bedrooms.

1980s

Living in Bingham, Chesterfield – Derbyshire and Spalding – Lincolnshire.

The early 80s were a more turbulent time, we moved in relatively quick succession through our parents' work. Richard did take to the changes relatively well as he was much older and more confident.

We lived in Bingham between 1979 and 1983 which means we were quite settled during this period.

For a time we were at the same school but didn't really mix due to our age ranges.

Our holidays to North Wales continued and I remember Richard getting into some trouble as him and a few others for drawing on one of the toilet blocks. Our parents were quite embarrassed by this, but I thought it was quite cool and I admired him for doing it.

We lived in Chesterfield for six months in 1983 and there is nothing meaningful to report from this period. We finally settled in Spalding in late 1983 and that area became his home as he started his adult life.

By this point we had separate lives, as Richard had started college and by the end of the decade he had started work.

During this time he made some good friends that all supported each other. They did some crazy things, had some good nights out and started seeing girls on a regular basis.

Towards the end of the 1980s he did become a little unsettled, my Dad always said this was down to the issues of his very early life and being adopted at a later age. There was talk at this point of him searching out for his birth parents but to my knowledge this never went any further.

I can't remember exactly when he met^[his ex-wife], it was later in the 1980s and from memory they married in 1988 or 1989.

A standout memory was when we both had mopeds, he had a lambretta from what I could remember. We'd regularly go for a relatively slowish ride down some of the rural roads around Spalding.

I remember meeting him in a supermarket car park one Sunday on our bikes, he was letting^[his wife] have a go, it was very funny.

As I spent most of the 80s in school and college, and Richard had started work we didn't really see much of each other from that perspective.

1990s

Living in Cambridge and Colchester (Essex).

Richard's work took him from the Inland Revenue to British Telecom and saw him initially living in the Cambridge area with^[his wife]

These were definitely happier times in Richard's life, his two children were born and he got a better job with BT that took him to Colchester. There were various family trips to Colchester to see him and the family but these were few and far between.

Things got a little more complicated when Richard and^[his wife] split up, but they did their best collectively for the children. Richard had told me he was happy that **[she]** had met someone who cared about his children.

Richard lived most of the later 90s either single or in shorter term relationships. During this period we spent a little more time together at weekends and had some epic nights out. On reflection I think this is when he started to suffer with his own mental health, as he didn't have a particularly stable personal life.

Some stability returned later in the 1990s, as he met^[his partner] who also worked at BT with him in the Colchester area. They had a good life together and for Richard this was the stability he needed.

2000s

Living between Colchester and Lausanne – Switzerland.

My first two children had arrived by 2001 and on a semi regular basis we would travel down to Colchester and meet up with Richard and [his partner] along with [his son and daughter,] Louise. We would spend time doing family things such as visits to the zoo.

For a reason unknown to his family, Richard decided to take a job for Orange in Switzerland in 2002 which meant he was living between the UK and Switzerland.

His relationship with [his partner] continued, until he started a [new relationship] . This led to [separation from his previous partner] and following the new relationship [his youngest son] was born in 2003.

I visited Richard in Switzerland and whilst it was initially clear he had made a new life for himself he didn't always appear happy. In the UK he had many good friends, but in Switzerland I think those he thought were friends played on his insecurity and it was this period that ultimately led to the decline in his mental health.

I remember a visit to Switzerland in 2003 to collect Richard's belongings, as he returned permanently to the UK living back with [his previous partner] . To this day I don't know what really happened out there but its clear he was not himself and the paranoia had set in.

A comedy moment during this trip was when I joked about the van getting drug searched when returning to the UK, it was this moment that Richard realised there was still something in the van – this was quickly disposed of.

Ultimately it was this paranoia that led to him taking his own life in March 2004. I recall a conversation with him on the evening he died where we reflected on our lives together.

Despite this, his legacy continues in [his sons and his daughter, Louise] and they are three fantastic children who are now adults themselves. [His youngest son] was very young and clearly didn't know his dad, but for [the older two children] and those around them I know it was very hard.

Account from Louise

My dad was a brilliant father. He was loving, bright, generous and patient but above all he was fun and silly. He was full of life, and he was very loved by everyone in his life. He always had time for his children, to do activities, to help them with homework or to play games. He always knew how to get a smile and a laugh out of us. Whether it was doing silly voices, cracking terrible dad jokes or attempting funny walks in the park.

He loved to take us on adventures, to picnic in the forest or paddle boarding in the sea. Most of our holidays as children were with him, taking us to new places.

He loved his children fiercely and would do anything for us. He was my best friend and when he was around, I didn't feel like I needed anyone else. I wanted to spend all of my time with him.

Whilst my brother and I predominately lived with our mum growing up, we frequently stayed with our dad, on Thursday nights and every other weekend until he moved abroad for work. Our time together was filled with days out, activities, fun in the garden or cuddled up on the sofa watching tv. Even when he moved abroad for a period, we were still very close. We would speak on the phone most nights, talking about our days. He always made time to answer my calls, even when he was busy with work or life.

Our trips to Switzerland to see him were always full of fun and excitement. We went sight-seeing, tobogganing and sledging. He would speak French haphazardly frequently asking for ham and chocolate croissants, getting funny looks from locals and giggles from us.

Dad was never the best cook, but always tried his best, frequently calling, his mum, my grandma for recipes and cooking tips. He thought he was a master of the BBQ and we pretended we didn't see the prawns that had fallen between the slats. He attempted to make cheese fondue which was far too boozy and infused his own chili oil. He often tried to get us to eat the spicy foods he loved. We would often go out for dinner, trying all sorts of new foods together. Being foodies was our thing.

He had an eclectic taste in music and bought me my first album – By the Way, Red Hot Chill Peppers and we would sing along to it in the car at the top of our voices. He was a keen runner, taking part in numerous races and he always hoped to one day run the London Marathon.

He helped me with my studies, teaching me the importance of this which I have carried through my life. He started to read us the Harry Potter books and took us to see the initial films in the cinema – these remain my favourite books.

He would come and visit us out of the blue and it was always the best day if he turned up. His laugh and energy always filled up the room. For me, my dad was the person I could always turn and rely to no matter what.

Dad's mental health deteriorated quite rapidly in the final years of his life. It all happened quickly. His personality changed, he became paranoid and frightened. Despite this, there were still glimpses of his former self there and it was a battle he fought to remain with us for as long as he could.

His death still has a profound affect on us 20 years on. We have lived more days without him than we were able to have with him. Whilst we are grateful for every day we were able to spend with him, it was not enough, he was gone too soon. He has missed out of so many big life events, he never got to see me graduate or get to meet my fiancé and see me get married, he never saw his youngest son growing up or see how well his eldest son has done in his life.

I still struggle to talk about him, it is too difficult. I continue to carry the grief and the anger, whilst it has become less heavy with time, it stays with me. I blamed myself, believing I let him down and I have had to live with that since he died.

The trauma and hurt associated with losing our dad at such a young age, has shaped our lives. We had to grow up too fast losing our care-free childhoods. I often think about how different our lives could have been if he was still in them. He was a bright light that went out the day he died.



