

Thank you all for coming today for Carol and for Dave, Paul and me. Carol and I were together for 26 years, nearly half of our lives. This is some of our story.

We met in late 1992. Carol was hot, so hot the electricity crackled off her. We burned with desire that grew into love. Carol in Doc Martens, 501s, white vest, flat top haircut. We danced half naked at Flesh at the Hacienda and at Cruz 101 in Manchester to Haddaway's What is Love and Urban Cookie Collective's The Key The Secret. We embraced the hedonism that ran parallel with AIDS. Carol embodied gay: she loved Kylie and Bros, she did Julian and Sandy sketches off pat. She was camp as a row of tents. And as for Victoria Wood, a quote for every occasion.

March 1993, we flew to Malta and realised it was love. Further holidays in the sun to various gay meccas: Gran Canaria, Tenerife (less gay), Gran Canaria again and then to Naxos where Carol ate burgers for the entire week. She surprised me by being able to read Greek script. We took a boat trip to Delos for history and then to Mykonos. Back in Manchester we frequented the Rembrandt and the bars in the Village. We partied at Pride and waved our banners for gay rights. On a night out, Carol was not a big drinker and I was usually driving so we made our cans of Red Stripe last all night! She would eat a doner kebab on the way home. I was very slow to realise that she didn't cook and all she seemed to eat was crumpets, potato cakes and chocolate. She heated things up very nicely. She smoked Peter Stuyvesants and Marlboros and later Silk Cut when she was pretending to give up.

Carol worked in mental health and housing in Manchester, volunteered on Gay Switchboard and was learning ballroom dancing. She was living in her flat in Salford with Neil who started off as a lodger and became a good friend. Through Neil we met his partner Nikk and friend Howard.

July 1994, at Fountains Abbey, Carol asked me to marry her. That evening we were badly beaten up by a couple of thugs in Ripon where we were staying. One of them served time for what he did and the other had to do community service. That was the worst of the gay bashings. And we had to wait a long old time to tie the knot.

I moved to Salford in 1995, so this made life easier travel wise. I'd met the Bibbys - Allen, Muriel and Paul, the first Christmas we were together. Carol kept her family and her friends tight. Many more Christmases with the familiar refrain from Muriel, "oh Carol, you shouldn't have!" This was also when I first met Dave, who was supposedly going to make the first parental meeting smoother. I didn't have any hair which can't have helped my reception. But Muriel got over that when she realised I was there for the long haul.

The long haul started in June 2000. Carol had bought a house in Shaw and Dave's sister Liz, was living with her. She was by then working in Oldham and had moved into contracts management. Carol had her first brain haemorrhage. She was in hospital for months. Cerebral aneurysms and polycystic kidney disease march hand in hand and this was the first indicator of the kidney disease. Carol was 39. A month later my mum died. Carol had surgery to clip the aneurysm which left her with a slight dent in her head but her hair grew over and no-one would have known. She was back at work by the October having been

barely able to walk the month before. We learned that there was another aneurysm on the left side of her brain that was sitting there like a time bomb. She just wasn't quite the same as she'd been before.

Shortly after the brain bleed, the litter picking commenced. She suddenly decided she wanted to keep the neighbourhood around her house clean. So 18 years later, she must be acknowledged and thanked for having set up litter picking groups in Shaw, Milnrow, Ripponden and Barkisland. She led her volunteers, applied for grants, got Barkisland Big Tidy Up into the Halifax Courier, she trespassed on fields to pick up plastic bags, got into all sorts of interesting scrapes, lost her keys in Ringstone reservoir, lost her phone on Branch Road, got attacked by wasps and pretty much never ever had the right clothes on for the weather. She knows nearly everyone in the village and beyond, as I am discovering! She made contacts with anyone who would help on the litter mission both as pickers and in the various authorities locally. She made an impact on everyone she met.

In December 2003 we moved in together. We were in rented houses for about a year and a half. Renting gave us the opportunity to see if we really could live together and we called it Living Together Separately with a view to maintaining our independence under one roof.

We finally found Fountain Villa in 2005 and knew straight away it was the house for us, even though it looked weird and needed a good bit of work. We added on 2 rooms. We moved in in the October. Carol loved our house, the peace and quiet, the views, the birds and the living together separately.

Civil partnerships had become possible in 2005 but we were still dealing with the fallout from the brain bleed and the surgery. Carol's model for a good marriage was based on what she had seen of Allen and Muriel's, built on decency and respect for one another and she wanted to bring that to our life.

In October 2008 we finally got partnered civilly. I remember grinning all day long. Dave, his mum Joyce and my best friend Chris all spoke at our wedding. Joyce referred to Carol as her 2nd daughter and me as her 3rd. We later got an upgrade to a marriage which was backdated. Phew, no more dates to remember! Carol liked to say that we were a respectable married couple!

In 2010 Carol stopped working. She'd been happy in her work at Oldham but then the job ended and she'd done the rounds of the local authorities near to us but travelling was hard especially as she didn't drive.

So litter picking organising became a full time job. In addition Carol kept the house spotless and did all the washing and all the ironing. A quick Victoria Wood quote: "I love gay people. I couldn't be a gay man though. I couldn't face all that ironing." I did all the cooking, the driving and the technical bits. She was great at organising and detail and did various bits of advocacy work for friends and people she worked with, keeping up her skills.

Carol loved ghost stories and MR James in particular. She was a member of A Ghostly Company for many years, it's a society for devotees of the ghost story. I've had several email from the ghostly people, saying how much they miss her. Carol has an enormous ghost story collection and would often scare herself silly, meaning I'd have to tell her non frightening things so she could go to sleep! She read crime fiction, children's stories, historical fiction. She was very well read and would reread her much loved favourites, like Little Women, Minnow on the Say, Just William, the Children of Green Knowe. She loved Jane Austen, Robertson Davies and Alan Bennett and she usually received a new Stephen King each Christmas.

She approached movies and TV programmes in a similar way watching and rewatching The Forsyte Saga (both versions), Upstairs Downstairs, Dinnerladies, Brief Encounter, all the Jurassic Park movies, and all the Alien movies. I think she probably watched every single episode of Location, Location, Location. Two nights before the second brain haemorrhage, she made me watch Prometheus which is a prequel to Alien. We'd had it on the box for about 2 years so I'm glad she finally got to see it and in the nick of time. Spoiler alert, not recommended if you don't fancy the idea of a machine to do self surgery! Carol was quite blasé about that bit!

Carol had an eclectic taste in music. She made me mixtapes called Hell and Heaven: Hot and Hungry which included Orfeo, Springsteen and a track called Let me be your underwear! We were united in our love of Springsteen, Carol and I saw Bruce 7 times along with Chris. Carol had seen him back in 1981 on the River tour at New Bingley Hall. The first time we saw Bruce together was on the Human Touch tour at the National Bowl in Milton Keynes in 1993. We were very close to the stage, wrapped up in a nylon stars and stripes flag. I don't know whether I was more excited to be so close to Bruce or so close to Carol!

We had many holidays cottaging around the UK. Favourites were Herefordshire, Scotland, Wales, the Lakes and Northumberland. We would decide on an area, Carol would do the cottage research and give me a long list. I would then give her 2 or 3 for a short list. We'd find a cottage we liked and go back several times. I would pack up the car with the kitchen sink. Carol would bring bags of books. We hiked up hill and down dale. We explored remote and tiny churches, ruined castles. We had pub dinners. Or I would get to struggle with a peculiar cooker with no instructions. Carol took lots of Landmark Trust holidays with Dave and lots with me as well. She delighted in finding a historical bargain!

In late 2011, Carol started on dialysis at Seacroft hospital in Leeds. The home renal unit was set up the following year. Carol was tip top academically but frankly poor on the technical side. I was very concerned when I saw what was involved with setting up a dialysis machine. Anything requiring fixing with a tool was not in Carol's remit, this all fell to me and/or Paul. The dialysis machine has multiple components and lots of tubes (lines) that all need to go on and off in the correct order. She was so determined to make it work, and after a while she could do it without her set of instructions.

Carol was not only generous with money and gifts but also with love, she never complained when I was away a great deal and was also distraught because of Chris's illness and death.

Her support was unwavering. She was loyal and fierce in the way she loved. She believed that you can't have too much love and she knew how precious love is.

We supported each other when the people we loved died: close friends in the 1990s. Carol and Paul's parents, Dave's sister and mother, my cousins' husbands and our friends Chris and Mandy. So many of the people who had made up the fabric of our lives.

Carol continued on home haemodialysis until near the end of 2017. She was very unwell that December and started attending Huddersfield Renal Unit. Carol's consultant there spoke to me last week and said how Carol had been an inspiration about staying in control whilst living with kidney disease. Carol realised last summer that she wouldn't be returning to home haemo. Home dialysis had provided her with independence and she was able to continue doing what she wanted to do but it did inevitably make her short on time. It's a 5 hour stint 3 times a week. Dialysis at the Renal Unit took up even more time. The disease was tiring, the treatment was harsh and tiring, the drugs were heavily soporific. Kidney disease alters taste, that affects appetite and she developed an addiction to Mini Cheddars instead of chocolate. She was rubbish at eating properly and mostly ate ham sandwiches, ham supplied by Barkisland Post Office. Her hair fell out and so the hat became a permanent fixture. Her joints were damaged causing terrible pain and discomfort moving her legs. It's amazing that she did so well for so long. And relatively uncomplaining. She wasn't perfect and I wasn't perfect either. We did try to be kind to each other but it wasn't always easy. As Bruce says: "You, me and all that stuff we're so scared of."

Perhaps the worst thing was knowing that her dreams would not be realised. We'd planned in my retirement to buy a place where we had our own holiday cottage to let out. Carol was to look after the cottage and I was to lead people on walks. She stopped talking about this over the last year.

This last Christmas she was talking about going on holidays, wanting to see Springsteen again and was looking forward to day trips with me being at home more (Carol's death has coincided with my redundancy which has turned out to be a blessing). We did have some nice times before this last chapter. We saw Val McDermid speaking at Todmorden's first book festival, we had Christmas day with Paul and Boxing Day with Dave and she and I spent a day in Hebden Bridge having lunch in a cafe, going in bookshops and looking in estate agents' windows. Cliff came to see us on the day before new year's eve and so Carol had a nutritious last meal of Farm Shop supplied beef in a casserole!

On new year's day in Jimmy's, us both having just found out that she'd had the brain bleed, she said that I had to get a waving cat for the front door. That's the last thing she said to me. For once I have done as I was told and it's there waving its left paw to bring me luck. Carol waved her left arm quite a lot while she was unconscious so maybe she was waving for luck or maybe she was reliving being back on the podium in the Hacienda.