

(A tribute by Libby Service, St Augustine's Church and local friend.)



Solihull's George, affectionately known to many as 'the man with the trollies', sadly passed away on 31st December. He was 82.

George was well known in and around Solihull and Sheldon for many years, believed to have been living on the streets since 1988, when he lost his beloved Mum, Elsie. As well as being comfortable with nature, being outside was a way of coping for George, who was peace-loving and quiet-living, and who adored the sunshine.

George was a survivor, and had lived through changing times over the decades. The youngest of seven, George was born Sydney Haines, to Elsie and her husband on St Valentine's Day 1939. A widow within a short time, Elsie was a loving mother and a nurse at Dudley Road (now City Hospital.) The family moved from Longmore Road, Shirley, to Edgbaston, then on to Small Heath and finally, close to the Radleys, Sheldon.

George's eldest siblings were in the armed forces like their father before them. George was devastated when his Father's medals were stolen from him some years ago. Ever modest and often shy about his own abilities, George was always proud of his family's connections with the Army, Royal Navy and RAF.

It is understood that George, despite finding written work challenging, was exceptionally talented with technical work, for example, building a wheelbarrow from wood early into his senior schooling years at Bordesley Green, and later, independently creating the school shield.

George demonstrated a flair for fixing televisions and radios of all kinds later on, and at one time, ran a television shop. (He still loved to collect and operate radios while he was living on the streets much later in life.) In other jobs, George worked on rigging lighting for outdoor events and liked electrical work. It wasn't until older adulthood, that Autism was finally suggested as a possible explanation for many of George's unique talents, challenges and life choices.

In adulthood, George was a physically fit man, who reportedly played for Sheldon's football team at one time, and George once jokingly reported with a laugh, that he had a 'mean right foot' !

Meanwhile, he was a keen Manchester United supporter, following matches, scores and news with a keen eye on the papers.

George loved motorbikes and had one or two, at various times in the 1960's. His favourite were BSA Goldstars. George was employed by firms that manufactured and fixed bikes in Birmingham and Coventry at one time. George also worked for Beresfords Steel Weldings at Tile Cross, listening to the bands that played at the Mackadown pub at the weekends. He also worked for Rover. George's favourite job later on, was making deliveries around Britain. He liked driving, and loved stopping off at towns and cities, especially by the sea. George also remembered the days of velvet jackets, wearing his own favourite red one back in the day, going out on the town with his brother Reg.

George continued to hold a fondness for walking familiar routes along Lode Lane, Coventry Road and into Acocks Green and Shirley as the years passed. He liked going into Birmingham on the bus until more recent years. Social shyness meant a solitary existence for George, but he tried to overcome this by going places he liked. George regularly visited St Augustine's Catholic Church for awhile, regularly attending Sunday Mass prior to Covid 19 lockdown. Fish and chips, Bovril, neopolitan ice-cream, chocolate, liquorice allsorts, mint cremes and Walkers salt & vinegar crisps were favourite foods, while Fanta orange was his tippie of choice.

During the first Covid outbreak in 2020, George lost most of life's simplest comforts- the very basic everyday things that brought him a feeling of freedom, safety, security and sameness. Anxiety and new physical health changes emerged, and George's admission to Heartlands hospital led to placement in a care setting which could suitably support him with his changing needs. Frailty and dementia began to develop in 2021, and complications of contracting Covid 19 during Christmas week 2021 hit, compromising George's ability to survive.

A fond farewell to you George. Many blessings, and rest in peace..... From all your friends

(\* please see below, photographs of George walking along Lode Lane 3 years ago, celebrating his birthday in a care home in February 2020 and painting outside while enjoying the summer last year.)

Libby Service, 7.1.2022



