

## Spire FM and Salisbury Journal

### Local Hero Awards

Friday 20th January 2017.

Brandon Hulcoop.

On Friday, I came home to find a tuxedo hanging on the back of the door. I showered, got dressed and was ready to go by six.

In the car, Dad was worried that he'd be the odd one out. "What if everyone's wearing a bow tie and I'm not?"

Dad was right to be, because we arrived and most, if not all men were wearing bow ties.

"Should have worn my mess dress or tux," he muttered as we sat down.

When we arrived at the Stones Hotel in Salisbury, Bailey noticed that Martyn Starke, Spire FM breakfast show's presenter, was sitting behind us. The tables were all covered in white lace table cloths, the cutlery gleamed, and the bar was open. Mum and Dad were in their element, for, as Dad told me, they did this by themselves at each mess party.

"Are you drinking tonight?" Dad asked Mum.

"No, I can't, can I? I'm driving. I'll just have this one glass, then I sober."

I wanted to meet Martyn Starke but Mum bent down towards me.

"You know why we're here?" she asked.

"Yah, Rhea's won a poetry competition."

"No. You've been nominated for an award-The Child of Achievement Award..."

"But we don't know if you've won, so don't bother asking," Rhea broke in. "He might be presenting the awards anyway, you'll meet him then."

I grinned at them. Nominated? By who?

After a while, they bought the three course meal out- Bread and Soup, Roast Beef, Crembreley and Cheese and Crackers. The lady sitting on my right, Kelly, said I pretty much finished off the cheese board!!

There was much talk about the Live Singer; Kelly thought it would be someone who was trying to find themselves a career but I just hoped it wasn't Honey G.

After the meal, the singer was named at last. Kelly and Dad were right; it was someone I'd never heard of before. She performed some classic songs from Disney films probably. I remember muttering to Dad, "How does she do that to her voice?"

"It's natural," Dad replied.

Once the two songs Fly Home little Bird and My Fair Lady had finished, a loud speaker blared from the back of the great hall; a voice and some slow, calm music.

"We remember our heroes. Remember them forever. We remember their names, their faces; feel their places in our hearts. We know their pain, sacrifices and passions. We hold them close. So today, now, here, who will be remembered? Who's faces? Passions? Pain? Where are today's heroes? What are their names? Today's heroes are all around us. They are our neighbours, our relatives, our friends. They're ordinary people; you and me; in our extraordinary times of sacrifice, bravery, belief and humility." The music got louder now, slightly more upbeat. I felt a chill go through me, slightly emotional already.

The voice continued. "ALL around us, they inspire us, move us, change us all for good. We hold them close, and they will have places in our hearts forever." The music slowed and the

voice stopped. There was a round of applause. A new one, that of Chris Wright, replaced it-cheerful and grinning. "This is the Local Hero awards with Spire FM and Salisbury Journal. Please now welcome your hosts for this evening, from the Spire FM Breakfast Show, Henrietta Creesie and Martyn Starke!" There was another loud, massive round of applause. The song "Wake up it's a beautiful morning" was played as Martyn Starke and Henrietta Creesie took the stage. "Hello!" Martyn Starke spoke first. "Good Evening, and welcome to the Local Hero Awards put on by Spire FM and Salisbury Journal."

"Tonight we are celebrating the champions of South Wiltshire and West Hampshire. People who make our area such a special place to live in. In the last few weeks, we've been swamped with hundreds of nominations across 11 categories. We've heard incredible stories and we're going to share some of them with you tonight. I can guarantee a mix of emotions over the next hour as we celebrate some extraordinary people."

Martyn Starke cracked a joke and everyone laughed. "Throughout the night we'll also meet the Award sponsors and some of the people who nominated their friends, family, colleagues and in some cases a complete stranger. As well as a trophy each of tonight's winners will receive a cheque of £100 to go to a charity of their choice."

"So on to the business of the evening," Martyn said. "And our first award celebrates a child who has achieved something remarkable."

The loud speaker blared again, this time with happy music and a cheerful voice. "The Spire FM and the Salisbury Journal Local Hero Awards. The Child of Achievement Award. With Northwood, Sales and Lettings."

"And to present our first award for Child of Achievement, please welcome to the stage our sponsor from Northwood Sales and Lettings Stuart Colbert!" There was another round of applause as Stuart took to the stage and gave a short speech.

"All six nominees for this award are amazing young people. They've overcome huge personal battles in their young lives. There is one person that I thought, we thought, has not only overcome a disability, they've achieved awards, won competitions and inspired other people."

Another tingle went down my spine. Somehow, I already knew the name of the winner. "Get your tissues out, Roxxe," Dad said, "and you Rhea!" The hall was full of anticipation now; the couple sitting next to me were still as statues, not making a sound. A tear dropped from my eye when I heard my sister Rhea's voice coming from the loud speaker ahead. The full ceremony can be found on Facebook. "Brandon, I'm so proud of you and I'm so glad you've won and I'm amazed at what you can do." That touched me most of all. Another tear fell. I can't describe my feelings; yes, I was surprised, but happy at the same time; I was also not only proud of myself but of Rhea. As Henrietta Creesie said, I do have an amazing sister. "The winner of the Child of Achievement award 2017 is Brandon Hulcoop!" Rhea guided me up onto the stage, Rhea crying silently. At least, I think it was silent but there was a loud round of applause and music. I took to the stage in a daze, however, and I didn't notice the song and only faintly registered the applause. Was this the beginning?

Once on the stage, Martyn Starke shook my hand, gave me the trophy and Henrietta Creesie came towards me with a microphone.

"Wow Brandon, congratulations! You've done so much in your life, what are you most proud of?"

"It's hard to say," I replied, stuttering a little. "Probably winning the essay competition a few years ago because out of all the blind people in as many countries as I can name, I won that

award and I think that's a massive achievement."

"And what would be your message to anyone with a disability?"

"Don't let it get in your way. A disability isn't a disability if you learn to cope with it and get on with life."

"And what do you want to do next?"

"I'm hoping to get a book published at some point and I do want to enter the Paralympics in 2020 with my rowing."

"Wow, a future author and paralympian?"

"Hopefully." Everyone laughed at this. "And you've got a pretty amazing sister." I put my arm around Rhea and pulled her forward gently. "Thank you," I said. "She is pretty amazing."

"Everyone laughed again. "Thank you very much, and you really are a hero so well done."

Henrietta put her hand on my shoulder briefly before I was led off stage. I sat down and everyone started congratulating me- Mark, Kelly and Dad. "Are you all right?" Dad asked as I carefully positioned the star shaped trophy in front of me on the table.

Some time later, the ceremony ended. "It's a time to celebrate," Martyn Starke said. "The Bar's open, so enjoy the rest of your evening."

I picked up the trophy and my cane as the sponsor, Stuart, came up to me. "You are amazing," he said. "When your sister read out her speech, I knew you were the winner." He shook my hand.

"Thanks," I said, "but it's all in a day at the office for me."

"I know, but you've done so much and you're so brave!"

Mum led me to the next room and Dad talked to Stuart for a while.

"You've got £100 Waterstones vouchers," Dad said. "From Spire FM!" I grinned again. "Why so much?"

I felt like a blinking celebrity at that point; people from the Salisbury Journal were taking photos of me, both with Stuart, my family and the rest of the winners. Once all the photos had been taken, Dad took me over to see Pat Sissens, who's Birthday it was that day.

Pat's also a Doctor Who fan; he offered me a tour around Spire FM and we talked about Doctor Who for a few minutes. Then, I gave him a poser for Monday. It was used, and hardly anyone got the right answer.

Before we left, I was approached by someone else from Spire FM.

"I'm Ellie from Spire FM; can I ask you a few questions?"

"Yah, sure."

"What's it like having a disability?"

"I don't call it a disability," I replied, "More a slight problem. Problems can be overcome, and I have done so with this problem. Everything I do, it's just a normal day at the office."