

Daniel Spargo-Mabbs: background statement 120215

Dan was sixteen when he died. He was in sixth form at Archbishop Tenison's CE High School, where he'd been since he was 11. He was studying for A-levels in English Literature, History, Economic and Politics. He was bright, articulate, quirky, curious, popular, funny, kind, generous, mercurial, engaging, charming.



Ten months before he died he played Macbeth in the school's first Shakespeare evening, despite having such a bad throat infection it was difficult to hear his lines. Seven months before he died he was overwhelmingly voted prom king, and was runner up in a number of other categories, including funniest boy, boy most likely to be prime minister, nicest eyes. That he gave his crown to a friend with special needs who wanted to wear it for the evening was typical of Dan. Six months before he died, on our family holiday in Cumbria, he spent hours with us scouring second hand bookshops, reading Balzac, Hemingway, Steinbeck, exploring the landscape and perfecting his photography. Five months before he died he got his GCSE results, a string of A*s and As, with a couple of Bs and Cs thrown in. Several people in his year have since told us that without Dan's help they'd never have managed to get a C in maths.

Four months before he died, he started in sixth form, wearing his new smart clothes and one of his growing collection of weird and wonderful ties, worrying about doing as well as he wanted to. He'd signed up to be a bone marrow donor, and had started carrying an organ donor card in his wallet. Three months before he died he had extra guitar lessons, to help him learn his part in the band for the school production of The Wiz, in which he performed less than two months before he died, wearing his green sequined waistcoat with the rest of the band. A month before he died he borrowed my cookie cutters and went to his girlfriend's house where they baked and decorated so many Christmas cookies that we were eating them for weeks. This was just around the time of their two-year anniversary. Two weeks before he died, we'd had to go to Ikea to buy a new desk because he'd broken his old one climbing on it to take a close up photo of the frost on the roof outside his bedroom window. His mock exams were starting a week after he died, and he said he couldn't revise without a functioning desk.

The morning he went out to the rave, he'd gone off on his bike before school to do his paper round as usual. He did little errands for the old ladies on his round, which he'd done since he was 13. He didn't want to change it to a shorter or easier round when the opportunity arose, because he said he'd miss his old ladies. The morning he was taken into intensive care he was due to do a couple of hours of gardening for an older lady in our church, which he did most weekends. He usually stayed on for coffee afterwards, because he knew this lady really appreciated company, that she got very lonely. Two days after he died, he was due to start the youth Alpha course at our church, a course to explore the Christian faith, which he'd signed up for many weeks before without us knowing.

After he died we received many, many tributes. His headteacher wrote, "There is something about Daniel, his life and his character, which compels us not just to be sad at his going, but also to be grateful that we knew him...Daniel at school was always there. He was involved in things. He was very sociable, but also his own person. He exercised his right to think things out for himself. He was a boy of genuinely academic interests and yet also of great humour and fun." For other students Dan was "one of the kindest, most goodhearted members of the school community"; he is remembered for his "funny, courageous, articulate, adventurous, cheeky spirit"; his was "a face that brought a smile to my own every school day"; another recalls that "we shed many tears of laughter together".

The school community has continued to show great pride in their former student, despite the manner of his death, because they know this final, fatal decision says nothing about who Dan really was. His fellow students wrote on his chair in his form room and put it in the sixth form centre, as a memorial and tribute. The friend he always sat next to in English still keeps Dan's chair empty at his side. Nobody else is allowed to sit there. A new award for drama, the Dan Spargo-Mabbs Star of the Show award was created, for the person who really shone in the school production. A year after he died, his fellow students and teachers released 300 balloons at the moment when his heart stopped beating. A week later, the school planted a tree in his memory, which will be there for many years to come, reminding future pupils of Dan's continuing place in and value to the school community.

Dan wasn't a boy on a path to a drug-ridden future. He was a boy with everything to live for, and much to give to the world. He dipped his toe into something that we've since learned is increasingly normal, for increasing numbers of young people. The charity we set up in his name, the Daniel Spargo-Mabbs Foundation, works to prevent this happening to anyone else. The commitment and dedication of his many friends, and of our church and the wider community, to do all they can to support its work, to stop this happening to anyone else, is a beautiful tribute to the boy they know and love, who should not have died, and who would himself have fought to prevent such a wrong thing happening to anyone else.

Fiona and Tim Spargo-Mabbs