



Before and Here After
Andy Smith

When Helen died, I knew that my music would save me. I decided very early on that I wanted to release a collection of some of her favourite songs, songs that I'd written especially for her during our thirty six year love affair. I also knew that every penny from every sale was my way of 'paying back' a fraction of the enormous debt I owed to Myton Hospice. The love and care which was bestowed on Helen and our family during her last few days defies words. A love which is still shown to us two years later, because like us, they don't forget.

Originally I wasn't planning on re-recording the songs, but somehow it seemed right to re-visit and re-live the moments in which they were written. The arrangements 'tip a hat' to the originals, but are also slightly different. I've shed many a tear singing some of the lyrics because when they were written, we didn't know what lay ahead, which is probably just as well.

Songs composed since her death are inevitably sad, but I'd like to think that writing them has given me a strength to carry on and also a voice to justify how I've felt and behaved. I hope the album is positive, because in the end it's a collection of love songs. Helen might be dead, but I'll never stop being in love with her.

From day one, my dear friend Richard Barnes has encouraged me to pursue the recordings. and in addition to volunteering to play the bass parts, has helped both financially and emotionally with the project.

I hope you enjoy the listen and can sense a bit of Helen in the songs.

BEFORE

DARK SIDE OF THE WALL

I started writing 'Dark Side of the Wall' in 1983, just a few days after we met. I pictured Helen turning off the light to go to sleep and hoped that she was thinking of me. Considering we'd only known each other for a handful of hours, I'd already got it pretty bad.

She was very excited to have a song written especially for her, and in one of her many letters she tells me 'I just keep playing it'.

The song was originally written for an album called 'Turned to Blue' and probably took longer than any song on the album to record. In my head I could hear a fiddle following the guitar part. Unfortunately, the fiddle player (who kindly offered his services for 'a few pints') was rarely sober. I recorded him several times and cherry picked his best bits - in fairness, he did a great job. I'm sure Marion was completely *compos mentis* when she recorded her string parts, and once again gave it the sound I had in my head back in 1983/4.

MAYBE TONIGHT

I asked Helen to marry me on her second visit to Rugby – we both knew it was what we wanted, but also agreed that it was too soon to broadcast our news.

I went on a weekend visit to her home in Oldham and despite her lack of money, she insisted that she was going to take me out for a meal (*'maybe tonight, you'll wine and dine me'*) She took ages to get ready...literally hours.

Her mum and dad had an old harmonium in their front room and while I was waiting I wrote 'Maybe Tonight' (*I've still got the scrap of paper with the scribbled lyric*). When she eventually appeared, it was well worth the wait, she looked even more stunning than usual.

'Maybe Tonight' has never been released before, but it has become one of my personal favourites. Such beautiful memories of a halcyon time of our lives.

(I LOVE YOUR) MOTHER'S DAUGHTER

I don't write many up-tempo songs – so this was a bit of fun, and a play on words.

Originally released on my album 'Another Night, Another Morning'. The arrangement hasn't changed much since 1985. I was a big fan of Cat Stevens back then, and this was a homage to him and his influence on my writing.

NORTHBANK

Another song written on my in-laws' harmonium. Originally released on 'Another Night, Another Morning' (1985).

The title takes its name from Helen's parents' house. It was an unusual old building and became my second home for countless weekends over our long engagement. Although the song is called 'Northbank', the lyrics actually tell the story of a love which was wrenched apart by distance. Perfect weekends in either Rugby or Oldham were punctuated by frequent fortnights apart.

Several months before her death I had a gig in Oldham. Helen was suffering with the side effects of her chemotherapy treatment and too poorly to come with me, so I travelled alone. Before I drove home, I decided to embark on a trip down memory lane, revisiting places we'd walked, restaurants where we'd eaten, the church where we married. I think I knew I'd never do it again. I parked outside 'Northbank' and for ten minutes I transported myself back to my first visit over thirty years before. The house looked different; it was no longer their home and I felt quite sad – I still sensed a strong connection to this rather ugly, but beautiful building, it was an enormous part of our lives and our story. A new family, making their own memories lived there now – I needed to head home.

It was only after recording this new version of 'Northbank' that my daughter told me that it was always one of her favourite songs, which makes it more special in a way.

AIN'T THAT YOUR WAY

Featured on my 1985 album 'Another Night, Another Morning'. I was always a bit embarrassed by the word 'Ain't' – but 'Isn't That Your Way' just sounds silly.

A love song. I always liked the simplicity of both the tune and the lyric – and as so often, I found it easier to tell Helen how I felt through my music than through my actions.

There's an element of insecurity in the lyric of the middle section which surprises me, because despite the miles apart and the separate lives we were forced to live for nearly three years – we always trusted each other. To be honest, I think I just struggled to understand how someone so beautiful could fall in love with me.

HELEN'S SONG

Written for the album 'Footsteps' (1989). After getting married, sheer contentment stopped my creativity for a while, but in 1988 it made a return and this was one of the first compositions. 'Helen's Song' was always a working title, but it *was* her song and so that's how it stayed.

Helen often visited her family 'up north'. Sometimes I'd go, sometimes she'd go with the kids and I'd stay at home working and reading the lyric, I'm guessing that this song was written on one of those occasions. There's an apologetic feel about the start of the chorus, I was often less than perfect, but our love endured everything and in the end I think this is one of my most positive songs.

The new songs; the 'married' songs took on a different feel, the love was equal in intensity, but it changed, it evolved and grew with us. There is an incredible contentment in the lyrics – and I can sense how happy we were just to be together.

YOUR PERFECT WAY

Originally released on the album 'Footsteps'. When we married, Helen moved to Rugby. She left her family, her friends and she made a home with me over one hundred miles away. She was very shy, she worked in our bedroom. I was very concerned that she would be homesick and that however much she loved me – it wouldn't be enough. Luckily, family, friends, friend's wives and partners welcomed her with open arms. She made friends of her own and she was just fine.

The verses of 'Your Perfect Way' are about me and my happiness, the chorus echoes my fears that she might be missing her roots. She always assured me that she was happy, Helen was the world's worst liar – so I had to believe her.

WHEN ALL IS SAID AND DONE

In 1993 I bought an old Wesleyan chapel to run my business from. It was a beautiful historic building, but it had been empty for several years and was a bit of a mess. It needed a lot of work to make it fit for purpose, and I spent countless weeks decorating, gardening and installing my equipment.

In fairness, it took up a lot of my time – time which I should have been spending with Helen. Helen always spoke her mind – and she told me she felt neglected. She was right of course, I'd become selfish, I was suffering from tunnel vision and I was slightly obsessed with my hundred year old building. I felt very guilty, I was letting down the one person who meant more to me than anything else in the world – something I'd promised I'd never do. I apologised, and like she always did, she forgave me. I wrote this song to qualify my feelings.

I've recorded this song numerous times, but never been happy with the result. It featured on 'Nearer Dusk Than Dawn' but only as a bonus track. Finally I've recorded a version I like, Jude's beautiful oboe playing adds a layer which was never there before. This was always one of Helen's favourites – and so I hope she likes it.

FADE AWAY

Originally released on 'Nearer Dusk Than Dawn' – a few changes in the arrangement, but not a million miles from the original.

More than any of the old songs, this was the hardest to return to. The lyric shows a love which has matured. A love where you think you know everything about a person, but they can still surprise you. A love where you feel so comfortable together, that it's stronger than life itself and naively you believe that nothing can break it. We looked forward to '*growing old and grey together*'. It never occurred to us that we wouldn't.

The vocal is far from perfect, but I've kept my original recording. I'd fallen apart several times during the session and didn't think I'd ever make it to the end. I wanted it to be 'live' – a performance from start to finish without stopping. After too many glasses of wine and at two o'clock in the morning – I made it. The original featured harmonies, but this version needed to be raw.

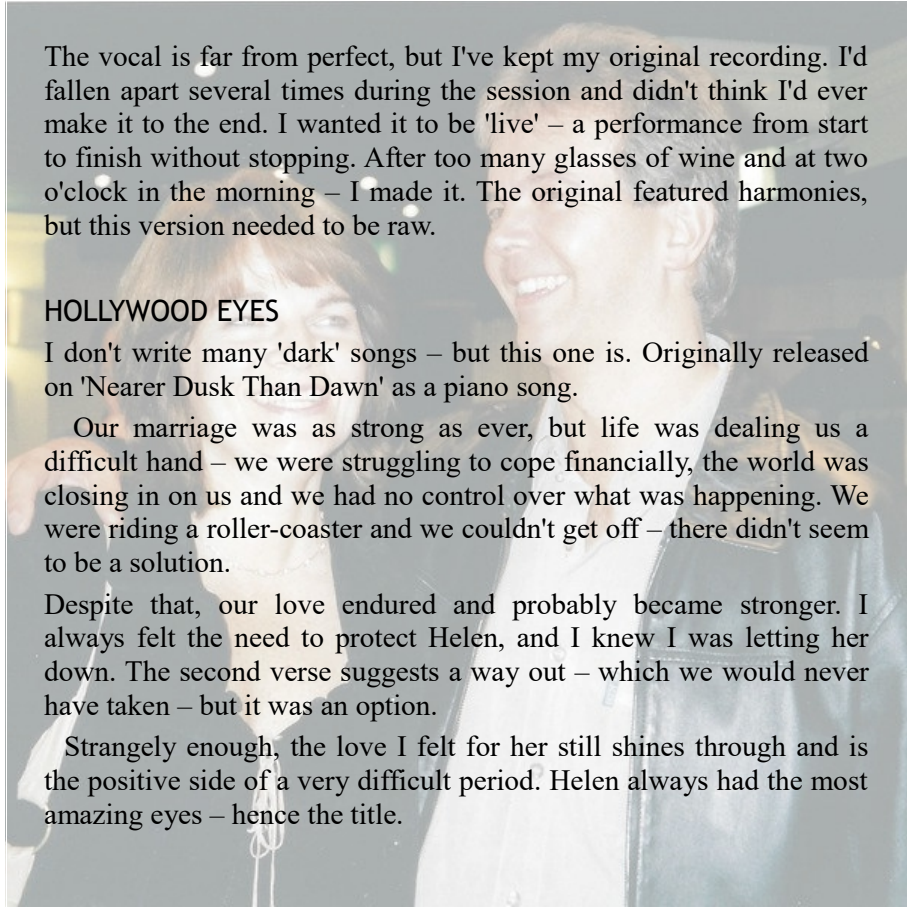
HOLLYWOOD EYES

I don't write many 'dark' songs – but this one is. Originally released on 'Nearer Dusk Than Dawn' as a piano song.

Our marriage was as strong as ever, but life was dealing us a difficult hand – we were struggling to cope financially, the world was closing in on us and we had no control over what was happening. We were riding a roller-coaster and we couldn't get off – there didn't seem to be a solution.

Despite that, our love endured and probably became stronger. I always felt the need to protect Helen, and I knew I was letting her down. The second verse suggests a way out – which we would never have taken – but it was an option.

Strangely enough, the love I felt for her still shines through and is the positive side of a very difficult period. Helen always had the most amazing eyes – hence the title.



CHEAP SEATS

Originally released on 'Nearer Dusk Than Dawn'. Helen loved going to music concerts, particularly 'Sixties Nights'. She was never happier than when she was bopping away to a Beatles or Searchers song.

This song is an amalgam of two different nights. One was on a very wet summers evening at an open air concert featuring her favourite local band (*they'd played at our daughters wedding and so there was always a connection.*) The second was at a theatre in Weymouth where several of the old sixties bands were back on tour. Luckily I have a very good friend who was lead vocalist with The Searchers and he managed to get us some complimentary tickets – the concert had virtually 'Sold Out' and so our free seats were at the back of the upper circle - the cheap seats.

On both occasions, (and many more) I would lovingly watch Helen's response to a favourite song, and the sheer pleasure on her face when she jumped from her seat to dance. She was the best view every time.

NEVER APART

This song originally featured in a musical I wrote for Helen when she was poorly. I vividly remember writing it. Originally it wasn't written for the show – but there was no way it could be left out – and was everything I felt.

It was written on February 14th 2017. My Dad was very ill, (he only

survived a couple more weeks). I remember phoning my mum, she was very touched that he'd remembered it was Valentine's Day and told her how much he still loved her. I hoped, (although I knew that I was unlikely to get the chance), that when I was old and failing, I would still be able to profess my love to Helen. The lyric poured out and ironic as I knew it was – I hoped we were 'Never Apart'.

The song was played at her funeral as she was carried out of the church. I hope she was listening.

SHOWER THE PEOPLE (*james taylor*)

Helen was very instrumental in her own funeral plans. One of her main requests was that 'Shower the People' by James Taylor should be included somewhere in the proceedings.

It was used on a PowerPoint photo presentation – and was also meant to be played after 'Never Apart' on her exit from the church. (*Unfortunately there was a technical hitch and that didn't happen.*) During a lunchtime pint, Richard and me decided it would be fitting to end the first part of the album with an excerpt from the song.

James Taylor's live version of 'Shower the People' features a gospel choir and we thought it would be lovely to include family and friends singing harmonies on our very own personal track.

People sent me recordings that they'd made on their phones, in their recording spaces and some also visited my studio. Singers and non-singers alike took the time to make their very own moving tribute to my much loved wife.. She would be so pleased. Thank you x

...AND HERE AFTER

LONG WAY FROM HOME

At all the difficult times in my life I've turned to my guitar and channelled the pain into something creative, but it was more than two months after Helen's death before I finally wrote a new song.

I think subconsciously, I didn't want the song to be bitter. I was sad, I was angry, I was going through every emotion in a twenty four hour window, but if I wrote a song, it needed to be a love song, about loss, but more importantly, an affirmation of our love.

I was spending a few days with friends on Portland, they'd gone to work, I made a cup of coffee, picked up their son's guitar and wrote 'Long Way from Home'. I was worried that it was too simple and that I hadn't done her justice – it was only when I came to record that I realised that it was actually quite complicated. I also realised that if it was listened to out of context – it could just be a sad love song. I'd achieved what I wanted.

I like how I refer to the flowers on our wedding day, and in the same verse, I'm sat by her graveside.

HUNSTANTON 2019

We have some very good friends who own a static caravan in Norfolk. Every time Helen's chemotherapy treatment ended, they lent it to us so that we could have a free holiday, relax and enjoy each others company. In 2019, our final visit together, I arranged for our holiday friends to make a surprise appearance on one of the weekends.

We'd watched 'Pointless' and Helen disappeared to the bathroom – when she returned, there were four additional people sat in the lounge. She fell to the floor with surprise and joy. I will never forget. I'm rubbish at keeping secrets, but we all managed to keep it from her for over two months.

It poured with rain for most of the weekend. We spent the Saturday afternoon in a pub drinking a mix of beer, wine and coffee, we had a flutter on the Grand National and Helen won. It's all in the lyric.

Originally the song ended after verse one – it was written in the caravan on my first trip back - alone. Although both trips were included in the single verse, I knew that I needed to include the visit from my daughter and grandson who rescued me at the end of the week. The second verse was written several weeks later – but makes the story complete – two very different visits and very much the case of 'before and here after'.

FIVE DAYS

This song covers five random days of grief.

In the autumn of 2019, I went to a beautiful little theatre in Malvern to watch a show which was directed by one of the actors from my musical. It was a lovely evening, but I left the theatre hating that there was no one to share my experience with. I felt lonely and very sad.

I'd decided to book into a hotel for the night and I was allocated a single room which was very sparse. There was little space for anything other than a bed and a chair and it really didn't help my mood. I had a glass of red wine from a coffee cup and went to bed.

In my waking moments, I had a very vivid dream of Helen, she was wearing jeans and one of my favourite tops – and looked very concerned. Luckily I'd packed a guitar – and I wrote the first verse before checking out. The song is very much a conversation with her, I include both of our grandchildren, which I think she'd like. There are a lot of questions – which is how I frequently talked to her at that time.

When I got home I felt a cold coming on, I saw no one for most of the week, but I finished writing 'Five Days'.

MERLOT

I enjoy a glass of red wine. Helen and me frequently had a couple of glasses of an evening, it was a nice thing to do. But after Helen died, I started to drink wine for a completely different reason. I drank purely to numb my senses and help me sleep. I was lonely, I was lost, and

the wine helped me feel less. Eventually it had the reverse effect, I became angry, I shouted at the wall, I threw things at the door. If anything, it was making me hurt more, not less.

After finishing 'Merlot', I tried to write an alternative final line. Nothing worked. I played the song to several friends, the last thing I wanted to do was shock or offend. The unanimous response was to leave it be, if that was how I felt, it was important to remain honest to the original sentiment. I think it was the right decision.

The first line alludes to visits from my grandchildren. The total mayhem of several hours of laughter and fun – and then the total silence when they went home.

EVENING

Another drinking song, but a very different sentiment to 'Merlot'.

I'd spent several weeks converting Helen's garden studio into a playhouse for the grandchildren. I became quite obsessed and spent many hours clearing out and painting. When it was finished, I took my guitar down the garden, sat in a chair, poured a glass of wine and wrote 'Evening'.

This is a 'Covid Lockdown' song. Being unable to see friends and loved ones made the evenings an unbearably lonely place to be. I would talk to Helen a lot, and this song is a conversation with her. It's sad to hear how I wanted to swap places, I no longer feel that way.

TEARS AT BEDTIME

Written very late one evening. I knew that there was a song trying to come out (that's how it works for me), but I'd spent most of the evening sat at the piano getting nowhere. Eventually I went into the studio, picked up a guitar and had the first verse written in ten minutes.

The song tells the story of our last three years together. Verse one covers the period after her first three months of chemotherapy. There seemed to be light at the end of the tunnel, she was weak, but hopefully the treatment had worked and we could resume living.

Verse two picks up in 2018 after being told that her second bout of chemo had had little effect and that we needed to 'go away and make some memories'. We weren't going to grow old and grey together. Ultimately it was a road that Helen had to walk on her own, but I like to think that I was beside her for the whole journey, even if I felt completely helpless.

The middle eight section is me chatting to her after she'd gone. I talk her through my mundane 'trying to cope' week. There's also a reference to the book I was writing. (*Musically I love this section. I told Richard that I could picture an 'Eleanor Rigby' style bass line – and he nailed it!*)

The final verse tells how I miss everything about her. It tells it's own story. In the end, we were beaten together, but I owe it to Helen's memory not to let life beat me on my own.

WORDS NOT NEEDED

I knew that this song was going to be the last one on the album - even before I wrote it. It's a harrowing song, it talks of the hours we spent by her side, her final hours. The sheer helplessness of not being able to do anything about the pain she was enduring or the inevitable outcome. I can't listen to it without travelling back to the nightmare we had to live through.

On her final morning, she had a rare moment of consciousness, I was able to tell her how much I loved her, she was too weak to talk, but she mouthed back 'love you too'. It's a memory I'll take to my grave, it makes me feel happy, sad, lucky, unlucky...but in the end, I had something more powerful than life itself, I had the love of Helen, a love that will last forever.

All songs written by Andy Smith (December 1983 to November 2021)

(except Shower the People written by James Taylor)

Proceeds in aid of Myton Hospices, Coventry, Warwick & Rugby

A FEW WORDS FROM RICHARD..

Despite being good friends for many years, Andy and I somehow never got around to collaborating musically until he was working on his musical 'Snowfall in July' in 2018/19 and he invited me along to his studio to add some bass parts to some of the songs. It went very well, and after a few sessions we had demos for most of the songs pretty much done. The show's launch was a great success but sadly by that point Helen was very ill, so plans to release the Snowfall album were put on the back burner. Maybe some of the songs will be revisited in future projects.

Obviously when Helen became seriously ill the wonderful evenings my wife Anna and I used to share with her and Andy, (usually starting in an Indian restaurant and ending in a pub), became few and far between and were very much missed. I would meet up with Andy for a beer fairly regularly to try to give him whatever support I could during what was an incredibly tough time for him, Helen, and their lovely family. We were on holiday when we got the news of Helen's passing and, although we were expecting it, we were utterly devastated when it came. Helen was such a beautiful person in every way, it just seemed so unfair that she of all people should be taken so young.

It was inevitable that Andy would turn to music to help him to deal with his loss. He delved into his back catalogue and revisited songs that Helen loved, or ones which he'd written with her very much in mind, and he started writing new ones, hence the album title 'Before and Here After'. I was hugely honoured when he invited me to get involved in the project. Soon however, the pandemic arrived and the need to socially distance put an end to our musical get-togethers, but thanks to the wonders of modern technology we were able to continue remotely with Andy emailing the basic songs, me adding bass, in some cases others adding their parts, and then Andy adding the finishing touches, fixing and mixing. We missed the social contact of course (not to mention the beer and curry that often followed our recording sessions) but we were making progress.

What you now hold is an album of songs expressing the love Andy felt for Helen, and the sense of desolation he felt after losing her. There are obviously no laughs here, but there are some beautiful, heart wrenching, honest songs. I know that working on this project gave Andy a focus and helped him with the ongoing process of coming to terms with the situation, and maybe it could help others unfortunate enough to lose a true soulmate. It's been a real privilege for me to play my small part in its creation and I hope you enjoy the album.

Richard Barnes

