

FOR FI

How our Fi Angels found us



*Made with love
and care*

WE WANTED A
FUNERAL FULL OF
ENERGY AND SPARKLE
JUST LIKE FI

WRITTEN BY VICKI CALDWELL, FI'S MUM

I wanted to share the story behind the Fi Angels, why they have become so special to all of Fi's family and friends, and to encourage you to buy a Fi Angel in support of FEES Fund – the enrichment education support fund set up in memory of Fiona Braidwood.

When Fi died suddenly and unexpectedly in a car accident in March 2016 her family were devastated, a community left in shock with so many young people desperately sad experiencing grief for the first time. We were all missing Fi when we came together for her funeral service on the last day of the Easter holidays. The opportunity to share our love for Fi and to provide much needed support to one another.

Fi's funeral in the village where she grew up was beautiful and very much in keeping with her life energy and sparkle. The day was filled with yellow flowers, bright colourful bunting, vibrant art work made by friends and the wider community, her favourite music, candles, photography's, sequins, glitter, bagpipes, bubbles, rainbows, stars and so many homemade cakes that had all been made with so much love and care

A whole community coming together

So many people came together to share in an multi-faith church service held in our village, a burial at the churchyard where Fi's grandparents and uncle were buried followed by a gathering in the community hall based in the primary school Fi had attended where her academic talents and love of learning had been nurtured.

At the funeral we had the opportunity to share happy memories alongside the tears, share words of comfort and feel the outpouring of love and kindness that surrounded us and helped us feel held at such a desperate time. A whole community in mourning coming together for a beautiful young person whose life had so tragically been cut short. A momentum started to build for something positive to come out of such sadness. A living legacy to help keep Fi's memory close and energy present.

The day after Fi's funeral was hard. Like many bereaved parents who had gone before us, we faced a realisation that life was forever changed and would never feel 'normal' again. We wondered how we could begin to function in this strange new world without Fi physically present and being part of everyday family life. The grief and sadness was so heavy and overwhelming.

At every turn there was a painful reminder and a disbelief that as the Easter holidays drew to an end, nothing that had been planned could be realised. Fi was not going to complete her A-level exam's, celebrate her 18th Birthday, enjoy her school leaving summer full of parties, festivals, travels with friends before starting university in the autumn as far away from home as her exam results could take her.



MONTHS, WEEKS, DAYS AND HOURS STRETCHED AHEAD

It took every ounce of strength to keep putting one foot in front of each other in those early days. We felt numb and extremely fragile. The term 'bearing up' took on a new meaning in our family. It was a response we frequently provided when asked how we were doing. I have since looked up the meaning and can see how accurately 'bearing up' described how we were feeling with the definition mentioning 'summon up courage, resolution or strength in the face of adversity or strain' – that would be about right!



Ten Tors Training on Dartmoor

WHERE DID WE FIND OUR FI ANGEL?

Our first trip out of the house on day two after the funeral was a trip to Dartmoor. We had taken our son to meet up with his scout group who were training that weekend for the Ten Tors Dartmoor challenge. After dropping him on the moor, his positive meet up with friends and confirmation he was happy to travel back on the coach, we planned to scurry home. We quickly realised this wouldn't be possible - our car was chockablock full of home-made cakes from the funeral. Just the treat and reward to share with the young people and their leaders, who had been walking for two days, camped out on Dartmoor and were low in energy and needed a sugar boost to set them up for the coach trip as they headed home.

For people who have never been, Dartmoor is a bleak place, wild and unforgiving. Its natural rugged landscape although beautiful, can be grim with the weather in April closing in and characterised by wind, rain and a heavy mist settling on the hills. Its bleakness matched our mood on that day, we mooched about aimlessly without a sense of purpose except wanting for the day to be over. We didn't have the energy for walking, we weren't interested in visiting places of interest nor pottering in any of the quaint villages. The hours stretched ahead as we waited for the agreed time we could meet the walkers at the end, hand over the cakes for sharing and start the return drive home.

The volunteer scout leaders had created this incredible opportunity for them all

The only comforting part of the day was to be in an area Fi knew well from her own Ten Tors challenge. Fi completed the 35-mile challenge in May 2012 just before her 14th Birthday. She was the only girl in a group of six scouts, they walked together for two days navigating their way to the 10 different tors that made up their route, working together and showing how it was possible to thrive in such a harsh environment, thanks to the training they had taken on board.

Fi's smile beamed as she crossed the finish line wearing her scout uniform, still carry her heavy pack and waving her scout troop flag to all the cheers from well-wishers. We were so proud Fi completing the 10 tors challenge at such a young age. But also recognised what an incredible personal achievement it was for her too. For months she had trained hard, learnt new skills, worked as part of a team and dug deep when the going got tough. In completing the challenge Fi had learnt to draw on the kindness of others.

We smiled when we realised quite how much of her kit the kind boys had offered to help carry, so they could all cross the finish line together. So perhaps there were advantages of being the only girl in the team after all! Anyway, back to Fi's Angel story ...

As we waited at the meeting point car park on our first trip out after Fi's funeral there was STILL time to kill. The teams were walking slower than expected partly due to the difficult walking conditions, and a further half hour had been added to the ETA. We were so glad to spot a sign to the village hall close to the car park advertising arts and crafts, tea and coffee. It felt a welcoming place to wait after the long day hanging around Dartmoor. My memory of the craft fayre is that it was packed with table stalls where local artists showcased their talents. It was full of quirky items, silver cutlery that had been crafted into beautiful rings and bracelet, local paintings of beauty spots and one-off items that you would never see again and wished you had purchased for a perfect gift for that hard to buy for person.

I got distracted by all the treasures and was taking a much slower pace through the stalls than my husband. He rounded back to find me, as he wanted to tell me about a jewellery stall further round the fayre, which was selling Angels that we might want to buy and give to Fi's friends. The Angels were in a basket at the front of the stall. The Angel, made from colourful semi-precious beads and stones, had silver wings with a keyring clip, and had been packaged into a dainty draw string bag with the following message inside;



I ASKED HER IF SHE WAS CALLED FI AND IF SHE HAD MADE THE ANGELS

My husband was right, this really was the perfect gift for so many. We went about counting out the Angels in the basket, while at the same time working out the best way to make a payment, as the card reader didn't seem to be working too well due to the patchy signal coverage in that part of Dartmoor. We started to pool our cash in an effort to cover the costs of our bulk Angel purchase. It was around this time the 'Handmade jewellery by Fi' stall sign was noticed. In making eye contact with the stall holder, I asked her if she was called Fi and if she had made the Angels.



A smiling and very proud Fi crossing the line carrying the flag as she completed Ten Tens on Dartmoor

HER VERY SIMPLE RESPONSE 'YES I'M FI, HAVE YOU LOST SOMEONE SPECIAL'

Her very simple response was, 'Yes I'm Fi, have you lost someone special', triggered such an emotional reaction from me. I became so upset the tears flowed, she came to hug me, with me becoming even more distressed when I realised I didn't have enough cash on me to buy up all the Angels with the card reader still not working. I was trying to explain about my daughter's accident, untimely death, the very recent funeral, all the sadness of her friends and what a special place Dartmoor had been to my daughter.

Looking back, I'm not sure how coherent I was in sharing our story, and why I had found my experience at the craft fayre SO triggering. Finding the special little Angels in the gift bags, with the perfect message, while on Dartmoor, so soon after Fi's funeral and then realising they had been made by someone also called Fi. It felt such a coincidence but also very, very comforting and healing. A story I knew I was going to enjoy sharing as I gifted the Angels to people who were also feeling sad and missing Fi.

Fi, the stall holder, was so kind, she packed us off with 20 or so Angels and trusted that we would be true to our word, and make a bank transfer as soon as we were able. At that point I can honestly say I was no longer 'bearing up' or in a state to wait a minute longer for our son, and the rest of the scouts to arrive back at the car park. The strong emotions since Fi's accident had well and truly erupted - there was no way the flood gate could be closed any time soon. We left the cakes with a scout leader with a garbled message that we would meet our son off the coach in the village as we headed for home.

I wanted to give everyone who was missing Fi an Angel and share the sentiment

The hour and half journey up the M5 created space for reflection. I held the very first bag of Fi Angels close on the car journey home and realised that the number of Angels it contained, wouldn't cover the list of people I was counting in my head that I wanted to gift an Angel too. I wanted to say thank you or provide a much-needed energy boost at this difficult and sad time. We made the bank transfer as soon as we got home and messaged the stall holder immediately to confirm the payment and also placed another Angel order. Fi's 18th birthday was just 4 weeks away. I wanted to be able to give everyone who was missing Fi a little Angel and share the sentiment contained in the message.

The Angel story has been shared with many. We love hearing about the exciting places Fi Angels have visited and the confidence boosted by having one close. Many of Fi's friends chose to hang their Angels in their cars to keep them safe while driving. Angels have gone up mountains, to far flung lands, into exam rooms, in pockets at interviews, and been held close when important life events happen. There have been Angels in delivery rooms, given as christening gifts, worn at weddings, they also made appearances at many funerals.

I wear my Fi angel on a necklace and keep one especially close when I take on a walking challenges with friends. My Fi Angel is credited with helping me to complete a 10 tors challenge undertaken with friends and family to mark the first anniversary of Fi's death. I also took a Fi Angel with me when I completed the Yorkshire three peaks. I have also had one on my work lanyard and love that the nurses that cared for Fi still treasure their Fi Angels while at work

Over the years many Fi Angels have been gifted to people who are going through challenging times as a way to send love, hope and strength. They do seem to provide a much-needed energy boost just when one is needed. I hope the sharing of the Angel story will encourage you to buy a Fi Angel and help FEES Fund to raise money to provide opportunities for children and young people's aspirations to grow and develop.

Fi Angels can be purchased through our Angel fundraising page and cost £6.50 each.

My Fi Angel with me at work



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