

Martyn and Angela Marshall – St Benet's



Angela and Martyn with Bishop Peter at their Reception and Confirmation, May 2024

Early Life – Martyn

I was born in Cople, Bedfordshire on 20th December 1962 in the middle of one of the coldest winters. I was born at home, but as I was breach, the midwife called for an ambulance which never made it on account of the snow which remained until my baptism in March! My dad worked for Royal Insurance and my mum stayed at home to care for me and my brother, Frank. She was a trained seamstress, so Frank and I were always well 'turned out'! My parents had a strong Anglican faith, so Frank and I were always taken to church.



Frank and Martyn, Cople 1963

There is four years between Frank and me, and I was the stubborn younger brother who caused Frank much trouble! When I was two, one of Frank's friends, who only had a sister, was so envious that Frank sold me to him for a penny! Of course, our parents made him return the payment for my safe return to the family! I hated school and mum had a difficult time getting me there. One morning when she was sick, Frank had to take me. Afterwards, he asked, "Mum, does he really need to cry all the way?!" Apparently, I stopped crying from that day onwards and Frank continued to take me to school.

When I was seven, we moved to Ruislip, as Dad now worked in the city. Both Frank and I loved music, and we were fortunate to have piano lessons from this time. At the same time, we joined

the church choir and later in our early teens we took up the church organ. We moved to Horsham when I was ten and it was there, I started at Collyers, Horsham.

When I was thirteen, we moved to Petersfield, Hampshire and I continued my education at Churcher's College. At 16, I went to college in Chichester where I took A-level Music and a Diploma in Music. When I was 17, I played for services at St Mary's, Buriton and at 18, I became organist at St Mary Magdalen, Sheet. At this time, I started teaching piano and organ. As well as music, I had a love of cars and joined the White Rose dealership for Vauxhall as a Service Clerk. It was Advent Sunday in 1983, when I met Angela who had just moved to Sheet where she joined the choir.

Early Life – Angela



Angela in Nana and Grandad's garden, Cottingham 1967

I was born in Driffield on 8th January 1965. It was a snowy start in Yorkshire and my parents had to drive across the Wolds in the middle of the night with snow chains attached and a second vehicle conveying my grandparents in case a car became stuck. It had been a difficult start for my parents. They were 19 years old; dad was studying Physics at Manchester University and mum had been studying to teach at Endsleigh Catholic College in Hull. Dad's parents were Anglican, and he was the first of six children to attend university. His parents strongly advised him to continue his degree studies, so my early life was spent at our digs where our landlady became known as 'Nana Arnold'.

When I was two, Dad passed his degree and joined the Royal Navy as a young officer, and we moved to Dartmouth. I was three when we moved to Fareham, Hampshire and the first of my younger brothers, Antony was born. In November 1970, our younger brother, John, was born and when he was a few days old, we moved to Ilchester. Dad was based at the Royal Naval Air Station Yeovilton, Somerset and we lived in the married quarters. A year later, Dad started a tour on HMS London, a destroyer based in Portsmouth. We moved to live in Cosham and lived in the married quarters on Portsdown Hill. Dad was away at sea for many months at this time.

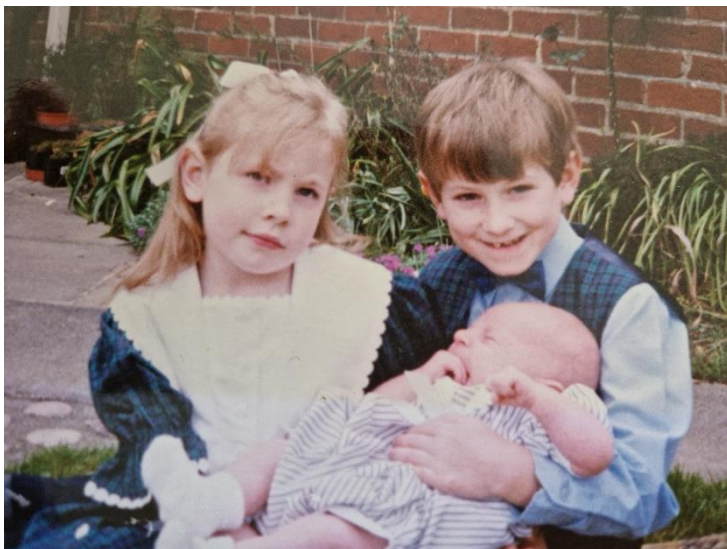
We moved several times throughout my childhood, and I attended 11 schools in total. Our biggest move was in November 1976, when Dad was posted to Sydney Australia, which was a long way from Grandma and our friends. It was a difficult start; we landed in the middle of the night and apparently no one was there to meet us – the Australian Navy had not expected us for another month! We lived in a motel and had no school until we settled in our new home in Carlingford near Parramatta the following February.

I didn't settle into school as well as hoped in Australia and, in April 1978, I returned to England to start boarding school at Harrogate College, living with Grandma during the holidays. It was during this time that I would accompany her to church, Our Lady of Lourdes, or occasionally, I rang the bells for Hessle All Saints. I found boarding life very difficult; music was one way I learned to cope. I was learning the flute and violin as well as singing in the Chapel choir. Also, I met my best friend, Sarah, who was a day girl at the school. Sarah and I started confirmation classes together and we were confirmed in the school Chapel by the Bishop of Ripon. Sarah and I have remained friends since; attending each other's weddings and are Godparent to a child each.

My parents returned from Australia in 1979 and moved to Helston in Cornwall as Dad was based at RNAS Culdrose. It seemed such a long way from my school in Harrogate. The train journey home was always exciting but returning to school was a wrench. To make it easier, I moved during the sixth form to Sexey's School in Bruton, Somerset. However, my parents then moved back to Portsmouth! After A-levels, I spent a few months as an au pair in Germany for a Naval family returning to Kapeln. It gave me a chance to brush up my German which I had not studied since O-levels. I returned to England in early December and joined the choir at St Mary Magdalene, Sheet. Yes, my parents had moved house again! The choir was directed by such a young handsome man - Martyn. In September 1984, I started at college in Chichester; I retook A-Level Music and gained my Diploma in Music the following year. I was accepted at Bishop Otter College to study as a primary school teacher with music as my specialism. However, four years of study seemed such a long time and Martyn and I chose to marry instead.

Married Life

We were married at St Mary Magdalen's on 2nd May 1987 and moved into our first house in Portsmouth. Soon after this, Angela's parents moved out to California. Our eldest son, David, was born in July 1988 and we enjoyed a couple of holidays staying in Monterey with Angela's parents before our daughter, Monica was born in August 1990. Martyn now played the organ at the Church of the Resurrection in Cosham, and we had moved into our second house nearby in early 1990. At this time, Angela trained as a registered childminder and taught woodwind in the evenings. In 1992, Martyn took on a new role at the garage minding the premises and we moved into a house on site at Hillbrow, Liss.



David, Monica and Robin, 1996

David and Monica started school here and Angela was busy as a mum and woodwind teacher. She started a recorder club at the children's school and soon Littlefield's School in Liphook asked her to give woodwind lessons, direct the orchestra and give termly concerts. Martyn had now become organist at St Peter's in Petersfield; his parent's church and where he and his brother had been in the choir and learned to play the organ. David and Monica joined the choir and Angela assisted in running the Sunday School. In March 1996, Robin was born and he quickly fitted into life at St Peter's and was desperate to learn an instrument like his older brother and sister.

A change of career – Martyn

After taking a singing diploma, Angela decided she would take a degree in Music. She brought home a prospectus from King Alfred's College, Winchester. After reading the details, I said, 'I could do this!' to which Angela replied, 'Why don't you then?!' I applied and started my degree studies in World Music. Work allowed us to remain living on site and I worked as their security as well as

responding to emergency breakdowns during the night. The local funeral directors knew of our hardship and pushed work my way as much as possible. There was one occasion when I nearly forgot a funeral. I raced to the church, still dressed in jeans and T-shirt, I had to carefully make my way past the cortege to the organ loft! I have made sure never to forget a wedding or funeral since that day!

In 1999, I started teaching music at Wrekin College in Shropshire and Angela started her degree studies in Music and Religious Studies at Wolverhampton University. David and Monica were involved with playing in the many bands at Abraham Darby School and in 2002 Angela started as a graduate trainee music teacher at their school. During this time, Robin wanted to become a cathedral chorister; he was auditioned at Lichfield Cathedral and became a probationer in 2003.

In 2004, I took up a post as Director of Music at Queen Ethelburga's College in York and Angela began her NQT year teaching Religious Studies and Citizenship. It meant moving to Yorkshire, the place of Angela's birth but new territory for me. Both David and Monica played brass instruments in the Malton White Star Band, and they encouraged us to learn a brass instrument too; I took up the trombone and Angela, the baritone. Living in Malton, just north of the Wolds meant we were able to see more of Angela's Grandma, who now lived in a flat in Hessle. Every Christmas and Easter, we took David and Monica to join in the services at Lichfield Cathedral. It was very much like being part of a large family with all the other parents and friends of choristers; we joined in the services and ate the Christmas meal together in the Bishop's Palace; even Tony Christie joined us as he was one of the chorister's grandparents.

In 2005, I left the family living in Malton and took up the post of Director of Music at The Glasgow Academy. It was not a good time to move David and Monica from their schools and Angela needed to get down to see Robin each weekend. This was such a difficult time for us all. Occasionally, I managed to get a train home for a weekend; one Friday evening, the train was so badly delayed that Angela and the children slept in the car in York station carpark until I arrived! Angela continued teaching and now worked as a permanent supply teacher for Goole High School teaching Music, Citizenship, Religious Studies, Drama, ICT and Art. We celebrated Angela's Grandma's 100th birthday with all the family: aunts, uncles, cousins and friends at a hotel near Hessle. We arrived with Malton's White Star Band to play a few numbers for her as she often spoke of Sunday afternoon walks with her father to hear the brass band play. She told us how she was so pleased we were moving to Scotland as that was where her family was from. It had been a bit of a surprise as we all thought they had come from Ireland! It appears it was a time in history when Catholics were persecuted in Scotland and many moved to Ireland; it would be lovely to research more about Angela's family's roots. Sadly, later in the year Monica (senior) died, and Angela moved to join me in Scotland; it felt like the end of an era.

The family reunited in Glasgow

In August 2008, four of us were living in a soon-to-be pulled down tenement flat in Glasgow until we moved into our own house in Paisley. Martyn introduced annual music tours abroad and took pupils to New York, Belgium, Netherlands, Italy and Spain. Occasionally, Angela accompanied the tours to assist. We took a wind band, string band, an orchestra, choir and, of course, the pipe band. During an occasion when the orchestra had no bass, Angela switched to playing the euphonium to fill out the part. One ferry crossing from Rosyth to Zeebrugge, we had a force 10 gale all night; 60 plus children were very sick as well as all the staff and Martyn. On the journey home, the captain announced the weather would be fair and expected a smooth crossing, "Ah boring!" exclaimed a few of the pupils!

In September 2008, Robin became Head Chorister at Lichfield Cathedral, and he had many concerts of his own which we enjoyed attending. At Christmas, he sang solo at the Symphony Hall, Birmingham and he performed for Carl Jenkins in his *The Armed Man: A Mass for Peace*. Robin completed his final year in Lichfield and joined Martyn at The Glasgow Academy in 2009.

During this time, Martyn became organist at St Michael and All Angels in Helensburgh, an Episcopal Church; Angela and Robin joined the choir. Around this time, Monica went to Aberdeen University to study Sport and Exercise Science; David was already studying Computer Science at the University of the West of Scotland.

It was at the start of 2011 when Robin became very ill and underwent several tests. Results always seemed to be inconclusive and Robin's school work began to suffer. He stoically took his Standard Grade exams together with Higher Maths and Music in 2012, gaining excellent results, but still his health was bad, and he was becoming painfully thin. In 2013, he had an ileostomy where a biopsy confirmed he had Crohn's.

In 2016, Martyn became Director Music at Stonyhurst College in Lancashire. Angela stayed in Scotland as she had started a master's degree in education at Glasgow University. Angela's primary focus was around safeguarding, and she worked alongside Women and Children First in Paisley, an organisation assisting women and children who were at risk of harm. On completion of her degree, she moved into our tiny cottage at Stonyhurst and began work as a Project Worker for Bernardo's. This was our first taste of the Catholic church together: Martyn played every Sunday and Angela assisted by singing with the choir. Martyn's mum died in July 2017, and Martyn went to live with his dad whilst teaching music on the Isle of Wight.

In 2018, Martyn joined Great Yarmouth Minster as the Organist and Director of the Choir as well as Outreach Worker taking music to the local primary schools. Angela joined him a few months later and began supply teaching Religious Studies at Great Yarmouth Charter Academy. This was followed by a short-term teaching position at Thetford Academy in January 2019 for two terms to boost the pupil's grades in GCSE Religious Studies as well as becoming a GCSE examiner. Later she took on a full-time position back at Charter Academy teaching geography and religious studies. In the meantime, we had all worked hard at the Minster in Great Yarmouth and developed the choir which had no children building it up to include 24 youngsters. Unfortunately, Covid interrupted our efforts.

In July 2021, Martyn became unwell citing breathlessness particularly when he laid down. We were due to go away to Gloucester for a short break and seeing as we were no longer under lockdown rules, Martyn was determined not to cancel. Whilst away, Martyn was ill again, and we went along to A&E at Gloucester. It became clear the hospital was not going to allow him to travel home and Angela had to put in extra nights at a B&B until we had more understanding of what we were dealing with. The hospital decided to move Martyn to Cheltenham where he spent the rest of the summer holidays – more B&B visits for Angela! Finally, after what seemed an endless amount of medication and an implanted cardio defibrillator, Martyn came home only to be taken back into the James Paget with an embolism in his lung. It was whilst there that we received the difficult news that he was to be referred to Papworth Hospital for a heart transplant.

Our first appointment at Papworth was in December 2021. It was eerily quiet with Christmas decorations up and everyone in face masks. Apparently, being tall was to be a disadvantage as Martyn needed a heart large enough to pump blood all around his body. Another drawback was having an O positive blood group. It meant that everyone else could be offered an O positive heart, but he could only accept an O positive heart, thus reducing his window of opportunity. Expecting a long wait, it was a great shock when he was called in May 2022 telling us an ambulance was on the way as they had a heart for him. They prepared him for the operation; at 2am, the devastating news came that the new heart was too sick for a transplant and we both left to stay in a Travelodge before heading home again.

How did our faith journey lead to us becoming Catholic?

We were so grateful for the care from many doctors and nurses, the support of a brand-new medication as well as the prayers from family and friends. Martyn's heart began to slowly improve;

it still only pumps at 35 to 40% but that's so much better than the 10% it was at. He has now been off the transplant waiting list for 18 months – quite a miracle for which we are truly grateful! We both felt we had kept God out of our lives at this difficult time. We had always worshipped together as Christians, but felt something was lacking. Remembering the strength that Grandma drew from her Catholic faith inspired us to go along to St Benet's. We found people so welcoming there and in May 2024, were received and confirmed.



We both enjoy living and working in the Waveney Valley. David and Monica still live in Paisley, sharing a flat together. Just before the second lockdown, Monica's boyfriend, Kyle, joined them. We have been delighted to welcome him to our family and look forward to the announcement of a wedding soon. Robin lives with us and works as a shift manager for Lidl in Beccles and still plays flugel horn for Great Yarmouth Brass Band and trumpet in the East Coast Sinfonietta.

Back from left: David, Kyle, Robin; Front: Martyn, Angela and Monica, August 2024

We are getting used to so many changes since Martyn's heart failure. We have downsized and moved into a house in Beccles with a smaller garden. Martyn has returned to teaching for Inspiration Trust, teaching singing, piano and organ to individual pupils as a visiting music teacher in four different schools. He enjoys conducting the G&S Singers in Gorleston and Angela sings; helping the sopranos or altos where needed. Angela has just changed to relief teaching for Inspiration Trust and now teaches across all 18 primary and secondary schools. We have taken on roles at St Benet's: Martyn runs the repository, and Angela has taken on the newsletter and website. It has been a busy time of change as St Benet's joins with the other churches in the new Waveney Valley Catholic Parish. We have enjoyed meeting new people at the other churches and Angela is looking forward to lending her support to Mary Kirk as they manage the communications.