

# Soulful Tribute to Absent Friends

by Robin Williams



With the soft hum of vinyl and the steady beat of Northern Soul, a room fills with music, memories, and a whole lot of heart. For the past decade, Robin's "Comin' Home Baby" charity night has become more than just a dance event; it's a tribute to friends lost, a celebration of life, and a powerful way to give back to Forest Holme Hospice.

The now annual night began with a simple idea born from grief and friendship. When Robin's dear friend, Gillian Mowlam, passed away after a long illness, the compassion she received at Forest Holme left a lasting impression. "After her passing," Robin recalls, "another friend, Dee Notley, mentioned it would've been lovely to have a Soul Night to remember Gill by."

Within days, a hall was donated, DJs volunteered, and a team of helpers came together. The night was such a success, Robin was gently nudged into making it an annual tradition.

Ten years later, with a slight pause during Covid, the event has raised over £10,000 for Forest Holme, offering both financial support and a connection to the community.

"But the night isn't just for Gillian anymore. Over time, the tribute has grown to include Maureen Gillingham, Robin's sister, and Mark Hazelgrove, a longtime friend from the scooter scene. And, quietly, it has become a space for everyone who's ever lost someone special.

Grief is a deeply personal thing," Robin says. "But we try to make it a celebration of life. I hope it's becoming a celebration of love and life for everyone who has lost someone and also enjoys soul music."

Held at the Canford Heath Social Club, "Comin' Home Baby" draws soul music lovers from across the BCP area. It's more than just a good night out, becoming a place where rival events are set aside, and the shared love of music brings people together as friends and fundraisers.

"Soul music gets people to dance," Robin smiles. "And dancing makes people momentarily forget the sad things in life and the worries we all have."

The event's magic lies in its atmosphere, which is a perfect storm of enthusiastic volunteer DJs, passionate music lovers, and a room full of people united by purpose. The DJs are never paid, and yet Robin always has more volunteers than he can fit into one night.



Each DJ is given complete freedom within the genre, and the result is a soundtrack as vibrant and passionate as the people on the dance floor.

Of course, pulling it all together each year isn't without its challenges. Robin admits he's a "bit of a last-minute person," but credits a loyal team of helpers, DJs, and the supportive venue staff for making it work every time.

Looking ahead, Robin hopes the event will carry on, even if one day he can't run it himself.

"I'd like to think it's gaining a momentum of its own. It doesn't need to be bigger as it might lose its community feel. But I know a lot of people take comfort that they're supporting Forest Holme, while others just come for a great night out. That's good too."

And so, every year, the music plays on and for Robin and everyone who gathers under the banner of Northern Soul, it's more than a party. It's a promise that love, once felt, never truly fades.

