

Justin Lall

1986-2020

by Christina Lund Madsen



The Bridge world has suffered many losses during the nightmare 2020 has become. But none greater than last week when Justin Lall passed away a month before he would have turned 34.

Justin was everybody's best friend. And he knew a lot of people. He made us all feel special. He always made nicknames for everyone, many of which stuck forever. It was his way of building a personal bridge to a person.

He was generous bordering the ridiculous. He would join a group for dinner without eating himself and yet insist to pay for everybody. Actually he would just go up and pay before the check arrived to make sure nobody could object. If he thought someone did not tip the bartender well enough, he would throw in a 20 though the drink was 10 dollars.

He never judged or tried to change anyone. He believed people should live their life as they wanted - as he did - and not adhere to society's notion of a "right" way of life. He was supportive of his friends regardless.

Loyalty was the most important character trait for him. It was difficult to cross him, but disloyalty would do the job.

Honesty was the second. If you asked him his opinion about bridge or love or life, he would give you his opinion whether you were going to like the answer or not, but never in a hurtful way.

His honesty was also displayed at the bridge table. He would go out of his way to make an ethical decision though it might cost the contract if he instaducked with an ace.

From a young age it was clear he was a rare talent. He achieved amazing results at a younger age than his fellow bridge stars. He won the World Junior Teams in 2005 at 18 and again in 2006, he became an American Grand Life Master at the age of 25, the youngest ever at the time. In 2011 he played his first Bermuda Bowl at 24, still a junior, and won silver. He was also an amazing poker player, and his brain was processing everything so quickly that when asked a question, he replied quicker (and louder) than anyone else.



Justin Lall with Joe Grue's gold medal from Lyon 2017 - in 2011 they won silver together. It is not clear who was happier Joe won - him or Justin.

He could probably have become good at anything he set his mind to; however he did not desire fame or power or money. He had a very modest nature for a man who was always the center of a group.

He was a loud, swearing, wild-haired gentleman in sandals.

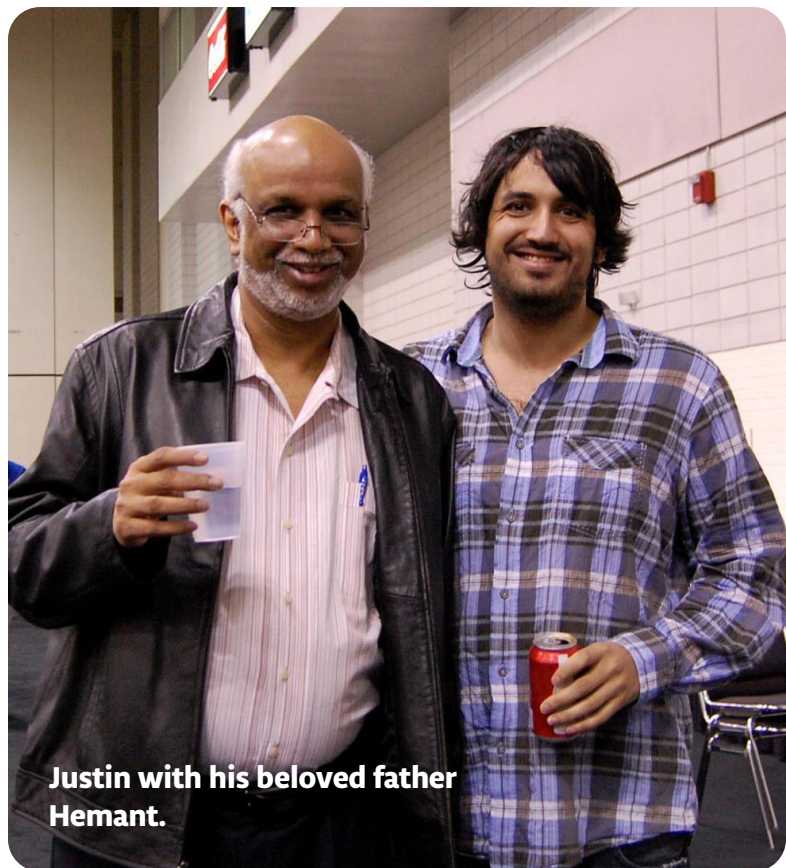
He was also a struggling man. He was bipolar and open about it. During a dark time after quitting his meds, he tried to kill himself by jumping off the Brooklyn Bridge. Luckily he survived (as one of the few who make that attempt) and realised he wanted to live - and that he needed to take his medicine. He wrote the following on his blog:

"I was so very wrong and arrogant, and I don't want anyone else to make the same mistake. Don't arrogantly assume you have more control than you do, and don't be too proud or ashamed to take medicine."

Because of his openness, many struggling with similar issues came to him to talk. He would always listen and always make them feel better. He might unknowingly have saved other people's lives.

When he made mistakes (jumping off the Brooklyn Bridge was one) he owned up to it and was always the first to apologise to others if needed.

It could be hard to love him – because to love him was to always worry. And so many did. He leaves behind his father Hemant, mother Jan, sister Jessica and love of his life, Stefanie, who loved him through ups and downs until their last kiss. Just as real love should be.



Justin with his beloved father Hemant.

Many would say he lived life on the edge. In truth he lived most of his life over the edge.

He might have died way too young judged by years, but judged by experience he has lived a full life.

He would not want us to mourn him for long. He would want us to remember him with stories, laughter and Jack Daniels & Coca-Cola.

His father once told me with a pride he could not hide:

"Justin used to be known as my son - now I'm known as Justin's father."

Always loved, never forgotten. Rest among the stars where you belong, JLall.

