

**Comic-con is an interesting and unique phenomenon, with thousands of fans travelling across countries to attend huge events elaborately dressed as their favourite figures and characters. As I wandered around Kensington Olympia in the summer of 2015, a sea of self-proclaimed nerds parting before me, the last thing I expected to see was the most talented artist that I have ever met. Sat between a beheaded Ned Stark and Fiona from Shrek stood Chris Baker, a young artist with an incredible story.**

Chris was born in the September of 1995, the middle child of three boys, son of Sam and Stewart. At age seven, Chris was diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome, something his mother had suspected for a while.

“It was very clear from an early age that Chris was different to his older brother and then when his baby brother arrived this stood out even more.

“When Chris was a toddler I spoke to my health visitor about his behaviour being different and his inability to adapt to change. As Asperger Syndrome did not have a diagnostic tool at this point my health visitor told me that if middle child syndrome existed then Chris had it by the bucket load.”

Sam and Stewart continued to raise Chris in the same way as his brothers, but they soon discovered that this was no longer working. They adapted their parenting, and let Chris explore himself in a safe environment.

“Our theory was if he could understand himself then we would have more of a chance of understanding of how to support him effectively. Through his home life and what his teachers told me about his school life we were together able to put the pieces together. This then led to Chris being referred for assessment,” Sam explained.

By this point, Sam and Stewart had researched Chris’ traits on the internet, and were convinced that he was living with autism.

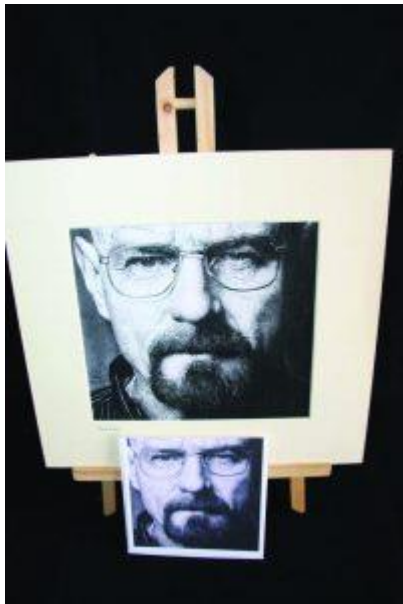
“At the diagnosis I remember asking the doctor what will Chris be able to achieve, he looked at us and said if you were going in for major brain surgery wouldn’t you want to know that the surgeon would follow each step in depth and move forward until each step was perfect? At that point we realised that Chris could achieve whatever he wanted with support and understanding.

“To come from a point of not knowing what Chris could achieve to knowing that the only limit is Chris himself; the pride that we all feel as a family is immeasurable.”

Sam and Stewart live in Cardiff now, where Chris works out of the second living room, which has been converted into a flat-come-workspace to accommodate his long-term interest in art.

Chris chooses to draw people who inspire him, and characters from TV shows and films that he loves. Once the subject is chosen, Chris then chooses a photo, draws out a grid, and changes the contrast to make it just right.

The detail he manages to get with a pencil is simply astounding, with no single drawing failing to look like a high definition photograph. It's hard to believe that someone can make a drawing look that realistic, a talent that hasn't gone unnoticed by other stars of the world.



On Chris' 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, at Cardiff Comic Con, Chris managed to meet Robert Englund, who played the infamous on screen serial killer, Freddy Krueger. Robert loved the picture so much that he caricatured himself as Freddy next to it, writing 'Happy birthday Chris, shame it's going to be your last.'

But this wasn't Chris' only brush with the stars, as his work continued to gain traction and turn more heads in the showbiz world.

As a huge darts fan, Chris was over the moon when he got the chance to meet world champion Michael Van Gerwen. However, what happened next was beyond Chris' wildest dreams. Michael was blown away with Chris' art, so much so that he commissioned him to

draw a personal portrait of him and his wife. A few weeks later, Chris met up with Michael again to discuss the image, at which point Michael's manager said 'Chris, you are to art what Michael is to darts'.

This was the point that Chris realized just how good he was. Since that day, Chris has collaborated with Michael again, and now gets to attend Cardiff tournaments as a VIP through Michael and other players Chris has met.

Chris said: "Meeting the PDC darts players was so cool, I have watched them on television for years and then I get to watch them play, it was cool when we went to Las Vegas to watch them play and they all remembered me. Raymond Van Barneveld and George Noble helped to organise a space in the arena where I wasn't squashed. Meeting Gary Anderson was a surprise, we didn't know he was going to be at the hotel, he gave me my first ever VIP darts tickets and he even tweeted me in my birthday."

As he turned 21, Chris received another birthday surprise, as he met Sir Ian McKellan backstage at the New Theatre. Ian simply couldn't believe the detail in the drawing Chris had done of him, saying "young man, someone is looking down on you and said, 'we're going to make you kinda funny here (pointing to his head) but we're going to make you extra special here (and he touched his hands)'".

It would seem that things couldn't get much bigger than the champion of darts and one of the most famous actors in the world, but Chris wasn't done there. In 2017, Chris met his favourite band of all time, and perhaps the most famous of all time, The Jackson Five.



The Jacksons could not tell the difference between Chris' work and a photograph, blown away by the young man's talent. They gave Chris a t-shirt and a signed photo, along with tickets to their show, but the greatest gift was to come.

During the show, the Jackson's took a break from singing to address the crowd about a special someone, none other than Chris himself.

'He drew a picture of us,' Marlon announced over microphone. 'Let me tell you, my brothers and I, we thought it was a photograph. That's how good his drawing was. So Chris, you say

we are your favourite group, guess what Chris? After we saw your drawing today, you're our favourite artist.'

"Meeting The Jacksons was amazing, they have been my idols since I was 7. All of my drawings have been drawn while listening to them and Michael Jackson. They were very kind and gave me a t-shirt and signed photo they also gave me tickets to their show. In the show Marlon talked to the audience about meeting me, it made me happy," Chris said.

Chris' admiration has not been limited to the famous alone, as he has been awarded with many other accolades and honours.

He was commissioned by the Wales Millennium centre to draw portraits of three Welsh influential black women. The A4 portraits he produced were turned into huge banners which were then hung in the centre during black history month.

In 2016, Chris was nominated for a Welsh Diversity award, in the inspirational role model section. The awards have currently been put on hold, but if Chris makes the final, he will be invited to attend the black tie awards ceremony.

Chris was also invited to apply to showcase in an exhibition that Art Box are organising. Chris applied and his piece was accepted, going on show in New York from the 5th to the 17th of March 2017, with the family will be flying out to see it in the gallery.

"I enjoy drawing because it can be challenging and it helps to focus my thoughts. I want to keep doing what I'm doing and to go to more events. I enjoy all parts of being an artist, I love drawing, travelling and seeing people happy when they see my art," Chris said.

Chris, Sam and Stewart have many more events, exhibitions and Comic Cons planned for the future, and are aiming to keep expanding Chris's successful business, making a name for himself in the art world, in the face of adversity.

*To view more of Chris' art, head to his website [www.cjbart.com](http://www.cjbart.com)*