

Island holiday led to being Spirit-filled

Anna Britchfield was on a High Tide residential when she first experienced God. She has had some ups and downs since then

It was while she was away on a Christian holiday on the Isle of Wight that Anna Britchfield first had a direct experience with God.

She was with dozens of other teenagers on a High Tide residential at Easter 2022 when she felt overwhelmed with emotion. She didn't know why, but others told her she'd just experienced the Holy Spirit.

It led to her being baptised by immersion at St Jude's Church in Southsea several months later, and then being confirmed.

Her faith was subsequently tested after her mum had a stroke and was in hospital for two months. She ended up feeling angry with God. Now she's come through that and is heavily involved with her college's Christian Union.

"I can now see that God was there throughout all the ups and downs," she said. "I'd never seen that until recently. God had been looking after me and my mum. Even though I was mad at God, he wasn't mad at me. So it didn't feel like a burden coming back to church again."

Anna, who is now 17, came from an agnostic family, although she'd been to the all-age Funday Sunday services at St Jude's Church. She was in Year 7 at St John's College in Southsea when it was announced



Anna Britchfield is baptised at St Jude's Church, Southsea, in 2022 by the Rev Adam Tams (right) and the then youth worker Dom DeBoo

that the school would close at the end of that academic year. Her parents wanted to apply for a place at St Edmund's RC School in Portsmouth, but needed to prove some religious affiliation.

So Anna joined the youth group at St Jude's – called 'Be Group' – which meets during the evening service, and enjoyed being part of it. She also became part of the

regular High Tide youth services for teenagers of all denominations, joining them on Zoom during the Covid pandemic.

"I found Be Group and High Tide really interesting, and I enjoyed asking questions and learning," she said. "I discovered there were a few friends I knew on High Tide. I loved the singing, and it was great to socialise and become more

connected with God. There were also older teenagers I looked up to, who seemed to be on the same page as me.

"The chapel at St Edmund's School was very different. We did have prayers each morning and I went to the Vatican with school. But it wasn't quite what I was into.

"We went to the Westbrook Centre on the Isle of Wight for the first High Tide residential at Easter 2022. It was during the worship on the first night – the song was 'Build My Life'. I found myself crying and overwhelmed with emotion. My friends said someone should pray for you, so Malcolm and Debbie from Emsworth Baptist prayed and told me that this was the Holy Spirit.

"From that point, I felt really in touch with my faith and I asked to be baptised. There were some

people who wondered what had happened to me, and even said I'd been brainwashed. But I carried on with High Tide and worshipping at St Jude's. I was baptised by immersion at St Jude's in July 2022, and my family and friends were there.

'Even though I was mad at God, he wasn't mad at me'

"I went to the second High Tide residential that summer. I had been worried about what people might think if I raised my hands in worship or if I was praying, but that summer I stopped caring what people might think and did it anyway."

Bishop Jonathan confirmed Anna and other High Tide teenagers at St Jude's later in 2022. But then in February 2023, Anna's mum unexpectedly had a stroke. She was in hospital for two months, and Anna spent nights by her bedside,

on top of the challenge of studying for her GCSEs.

"Everything changed," she said. "I didn't go to church for ages. I felt as though I'd done all the right things, and I didn't know why God had done this to my mum. I felt like punching God. Be Group didn't feel like the right place for me, and I neglected my faith. I didn't have time for God and I didn't want to make time. I thought: 'This is who I am now'.

"Mum came home from hospital that April, but she's not how she was. She went into her shell. But that June, I started reading the Bible again, and I met Jack and Camila, our youth workers. I admitted that I was maybe acting irrationally because I'd been upset. I started getting some prayer and laying it down before Jesus.

"I decided that maybe I needed to stop partying and stop trying to be someone I'm not. Faith became my rock again, and I started praying, asking Jesus before I did things and listening to his whispers, rather than just recklessly doing things by myself."

Anna joined the Trailblazers youth ministry at Portsmouth Family Church, inviting her friends and praying for others. She began leading worship, and then also joined Harbour Church in Portsmouth.

After her GCSEs, she begun studying A-levels at Peter Symonds College in Winchester and is now involved with its Christian Union, which attracts around 40 students.

"I don't want to keep my faith to myself, I want to give it to other people," she said. "I've given my life to Jesus and I'm letting him work through me. I don't see any other way. I'd love to do a gap year before university, maybe going to Africa or Brazil, somewhere where I have to be reliant on God."



Above: Anna Britchfield worshipping at one of the High Tide youth services held in the grounds of St Mary's Church, Portchester; left: with friends on a Surf Camp in 2024 organised by St Jude's Church and Spirit in Sport