



12 memories
of sudden and unexpected loss



“To grieve you is to see your
absence everywhere I go,
while feeling your presence
in everything I do”

anonymous



KENSINGTON PALACE

No two experiences of bereavement are ever the same. The sudden and often unexpected loss of a loved one can be profoundly difficult to process, even with the passing of time.

However, some solace can be found through the sharing of experience. The families who have contributed to this booklet have shared the most precious of memories, thoughts, and feelings. I would like to thank them for opening up and allowing us into their very personal journey.

I hope that this booklet will provide some comfort and support, and that you might find it useful. For those reading this who are bereaved, and whose world is now very different, my thoughts are with you.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'L. Williams'.

Prince William,
HRH The Prince of Wales

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A tribute to Shaquan
as told by his Mum



IN MEMORY OF Shaquan

My name is Jessica Plummer and I'm a mother of three. I have a daughter, Shantel, who is 28. My second child was Shaquan, who turned 25 on 30 March 2022, and Andre, my last born, who is now 23. I also have one granddaughter, Shamaya, who is two and was born on 25 December 2019. She gives me a reason to smile at Christmas.

I raised the three of my children on my own. They do have a dad, but I did everything, from sending them to school, making sure their uniform was in place, making sure they had everything they needed, and making sure they grew up with respect and good manners. It wasn't easy, but I made sure I did everything I could to make sure they were comfortable and happy. I raised them like I was brought up in the West Indies.

I came to the UK in 1989, I was around 18. Although I am someone who loves kids, I didn't know what it was like to spoil them. I never got the opportunity to spoil them. I didn't raise them for me, I was raising them for the whole world. In my eyes, they're out there representing me. I raised them to respect others, like how my mum and dad raised me. Back home we did not have much; anything you had, you had to work hard for. Both my parents worked hard to provide for us, but it's not like it is in the UK. For instance, back home, if you needed a school uniform you had to buy the material and take it to a dressmaker for it to be made. Sometimes you didn't even get to have a school bag, instead we had carrier bags and had to buy our own textbooks. That's how it was, and so I tried my best to make my children understand that things in life don't come for free. You have to work hard and earn them.

I used to tell my children to make the most of their education: 'You're not studying for anyone else you're

doing it for yourself' I would say. I used to get tutors – they weren't cheap, but I wanted them to have the best. They would work hard on their schoolwork during the week, but they also got free time, so at the weekends they would relax. The school would always say how neat my children were: Shantel had ribbons in her hair, Shaquan was always well-dressed. I always scrubbed their shirts every day, then on a Friday, they would all go in the washing machine. I had seven uniforms for each of them which meant I could always drop in a clean uniform if they got dirty at school. They were good children.

I decided to be a parent governor in their school, and that meant I was really able to help not just my children but other kids too. Shaquan was somebody who was very active and was always on the go. He loved his friends and often spent a lot of time with them. I think the school sometimes struggled with him, I remember

**I REMEMBER SEEING HIM WALK AWAY,
TURN AND WAVE AT ME, AND THAT WAS
THE LAST TIME I SAW MY SON ALIVE**

they once advised that he see a child psychologist, so I took him for an assessment but they said

there was nothing wrong. I just think he wasn't being stimulated enough. It was often a struggle to ensure he was supported, but I tried my best.

I had a good relationship with all of the children, but Shaquan and I were closest. Although he thought I liked Shantel more because it was easier to buy clothes for her than for the boys! Shaquan was the man of the house. If he was watching television, no one

else could watch something. If I was in the kitchen and cooking a special meal, he would come in, steal one of the bits of food and run upstairs. He would laugh whilst teasing me as he knew I couldn't run after him up the stairs. He'd take the plate and eat it right there, then leave the plate on the floor. I called him Nuun, and I'd say 'Nuun come and pick up your plate' and he'd say 'coming mum... or mum you could just pick it up'. Or he'd walk in and turn off my gospel music and run upstairs. He was a cheeky boy.

I remember when Shaquan started sixth form, the phone rang and it was one of the teachers saying they hadn't seen Shaquan that morning. I checked upstairs and he was fast asleep. I woke him and he said, 'mum there was nothing for me there today, just revision'. He started moaning and refusing to go in, but he didn't realise the teacher was still on the phone listening. The next day he went in and they had assembly and when he got into the hall the teacher came in and said 'oh, I have something to share with everyone' and he told them Shaquan was told off by his mother. Turns out he had done the work though; he had even done some extra homework and got an A. He wasn't lazy.

Shaquan wanted to make me a rich lady, so I didn't have to work. He was a loving person. He'd go out in the street and help old ladies with their bags. He said sometimes people saw him coming and got scared he was going to do something, but he just wanted to help. They would give him money, but I told the kids they weren't allowed to take money from others, so he would say to them 'no my mum says I'm not allowed to take it'. Because he always wanted to earn his own money, when he started year 7, he got a paper round and would leave home at 5am, do the round and then come back, shower and go to school.

When he was old enough, he applied for a job in a supermarket and he went for the interview looking very smart. When he came back from the interview, he told me that the other boys who were also there for the interview were just talking and not taking it seriously, so he didn't engage with them because he wanted the job. The manager who interviewed him told me after he died just how well he presented himself during that interview – he said 'he was a credit to me'. He did get the job in the end, it came with the store discount and the last thing he bought me was a turkey, for Christmas. If I was not home, I would say don't open the door for anyone until I am back, and he would have to cook for Andre and

himself. So, he googled how to cook rice and to be honest, his rice was better than mine. He always made me so proud to be his mum, but that is how you raise your children.

The day Shaquan died is with me and will always be. It's extremely hard. I can remember him coming home because he was doing his A-levels at the time. He also worked Wednesday, Thursday and Friday in a supermarket, then on Saturday he worked at a football stadium. I still have the little piece of paper that he left on the table for me with his Waitrose working hours on it. I remember that Friday he kept going upstairs and changing his clothes, standing in the mirror, saying 'mummy look at your peng son. When you dress up you need to have swag'. I always remember those two things, him saying he was peng, and that I needed to have swag. As he left, I followed him downstairs. When we got to the front

door my neighbour was standing outside as he was going. I said 'Nuun, remember, when you're out there, be a leader not a follower. Be yourself'. He said yes mummy. But before he could finish, the neighbour said 'leave him alone, you know your children are good kids and they always behave'. I remember seeing him walk away, turn and wave at me, and that was the last time I saw my son alive.

The next thing I knew there was a knock on the door. I was expecting him at around 10pm but the knock was way before then. When my children are out, I can't properly relax, but nevertheless I had no fears. I'll never forget that knock. It was not a normal knock. I was shouting out 'Nunn open the door you have your key'. Then I looked out the front window and saw blue flashing lights. I remember thinking oh I hope no one is in any trouble. They kept knocking. I walked down the stairs, opened the door and met two police officers, a lady and a man. The policeman showed me his badge and said that they had been told to come and get me. Then he asked if I was Shaquan's mum. I said yes. The police lady said she needed me to get my bag, some money, my bus pass and I needed to come to the hospital with them. She then asked who else was home with me and I said at the time it was only Andre. I asked what had happened and she said she didn't know. The lady helped me up the stairs as I suddenly felt so weak. I remember putting on a tracksuit under my nightshirt which I kept on. My mind was all over the place. We walked back downstairs and Andre followed me down. My head felt hot, I didn't know what I was doing. When we got to the bottom of the

THERE IS A HOLE. THAT HOLE IS THERE AND IT WILL NEVER GET FILLED.



stairs the police officer said Andre should come with me. Andre said no, he didn't like hospitals. As I was leaving, I asked Andre to call his dad and tell him Shaquan was at the hospital.

I left with them in the car and had my fingers crossed the whole way. I prayed and prayed. They kept asking if I was okay, I don't know what I said back. We were on blue lights speeding, but for me it was taking too long. It felt like forever, like I would never get there. I remember when we got to the hospital, there were double doors to the left with a lot of people and police through there. But the police took me to a different room. We entered that room and I sat and called a few people. Shaquan's dad soon arrived. He asked me what had happened and I said I didn't know and was still waiting. We were there for a good while, I was pacing up and down, rubbing my hands, saying 'please Lord let my son be okay'. Not too long after the air ambulance doctor, who I later came to know as Tom, came in and asked for me. He asked me to sit and he knelt in front of me and that was when he told me that Shaquan had died. I said he was lying. But he wasn't lying, it was the truth. I will never forget hearing those words.

He asked me if I wanted to see him and I said no, because I was scared. I regret that now. I wish I had gone. Because I never got to see my son. Now I only have pictures of him. We left the hospital shortly after. First thing Saturday morning the police came, I know they needed to ask questions, but it felt like they were interviewing me, like I was involved in the crime. Later that morning people started coming and

HOW WAS I GOING TO AFFORD TO BURY MY SON?

the house was full of people. At some point I got a message from our local MP saying he wouldn't be able to come that day, but he'd be there first thing the next morning – and he was. As an MP he has supported me well.

I remember being shocked to see journalists outside my door. They were asking all sorts of questions and trying to probe. All the time I was still asking what had happened and why – no one gave me any answers, I was in the dark. At the same time people kept talking about burial but I didn't have two pennies to rub together. How was I going to afford to bury my son?

I knew I needed to tell Shantel as she wasn't home when we got back. She called me and I was crying but I had to calm down and ask God to help me find the strength to tell her. I told her and when she got home, she held me tight and said 'it was a lie. It's a lie'. In the days after Shaquan died, I remember we were just trying to cope. I wasn't sleeping and my blood pressure was so high. I had a district nurse coming every day to check my pressure and give me drugs. But I couldn't sleep, my mind was racing, I kept reliving the time in hospital.

I still didn't know what had happened to Shaquan until unexpectedly, Tom came to my house to explain what they think had happened and the treatment they had given Shaquan. Shaquan had been stabbed and had been bleeding. Tom told me they had had to operate on him in the street and he had massaged Shaquan's heart to try and restart it. They also gave him blood, but his heart was weak and despite all the efforts, he didn't survive. Shaquan had died from severe blood loss.

About a week after his death, I went to identify his body. I asked to touch him, but they said no. I could only view him behind a glass. I still picture him lying there. I had hoped to be able to touch him at the funeral parlor, but the funeral director advised me not to because he wouldn't look like my Shaquan.

I had to buy an outfit for him to be buried in and I remember a kind person gifted me some money to do this. I can't even remember how I felt buying it, but I did get the socks and the shoes he liked. We customised the coffin, we made it orange as that was his favorite colour.

We went to the cemetery to pick a plot. I didn't like the idea of a burial, so instead, with the support of close family, I bought a vault for Shaquan. I own the deed to the vault for the next 60 years, it's like owning a home. Going to visit him is always immensely hard, because after every visit it feels so painful to leave him behind. In the summer I make food and take it with me and sit with him until the cemetery closes.

I attended the whole trial, although it was hard not to be allowed in for some of the hearing in case my grief influenced the jury. I was told I needed to not get emotional or cry. I understand why but it's not right. It was clear from the judge's summary that he knew that Shaquan came from a good home. He didn't have to tell me that, but he did and that felt so comforting. It meant a lot to hear those words from him. He told the defendant he robbed us of the opportunity to see Shaquan grow and make something of his life.

I miss my son. The pain is still very much there. When his anniversary approaches it often feels like everyone has forgotten. Sometimes it also feels like the justice system is failing us. But I also think it's not all down to the justice system. We all have a part to play, I feel we sometimes fail our own communities. We need to work towards tolerance and setting positive examples instead of looking at each other and passing judgement. We need to set better examples and give young people something to aspire to. We shouldn't talk at them; we should talk with them and in doing so we will get to understand them better and consequently be able to support and guide them.

No accolades will ever bring my son back or change society. My focus is on trying to change the negative narrative into a positive. Each of the children I reach out to, they are my children. I lost Shaquan, but I gained hundreds more children and that makes me a happy woman. That is what I am living for. If it wasn't for Shaquan, I wouldn't be doing the engagement work I have been doing. I would be sick and weak, but he keeps me going. The young people keep me going and we're doing it together. I walk on the street now and I say to young people 'come on, be that leader, aunty Jess is here to help you'. Some of the young people I have helped have gone on to do positive things in their lives, they keep in touch and check on me. I always remind them that when they are out there in society, they are representing their mothers.

I still find it hard. But I have my belief, it helps me, and I know I can lean on it and say 'God do what is best for me and continue to guide me in the right path to help these young people, because they are lost and they need to find the right way'.

When I lost my dad, it was sad, but it wasn't the same as losing Shaquan. I struggle when dealing with death. You don't get the support you're supposed to. It feels like

I RELIVE IT EVERY DAY, EVERY TIME ANOTHER DEATH IS REPORTED IN THE NEWS

some of the support organisations can't wait to discharge you. Counselling wasn't for me. I went to see a counsellor, although I

had to wait three years after Shaquan's death to see them. When I was there it felt like I was reliving his death and I would leave the session feeling worse. That's when I decided to start helping young people, it gave me a better way to channel my grief. Through this work, I was put in contact with a police officer in Harrow, who too had been trying to reach out to local young people for many years without much success. However, working together, using Shaquan's story, we're now influencing the lives of many young people to bring about a positive change.

I thought it would have gotten better, but even after seven years; it is extremely hard. There is a hole. That hole is there and it will never get filled. I lost my son, he wasn't sick, someone just took his life away, how are we meant to cope? We have four chairs around our table but at Christmas there are only three of us, and sometimes the kids don't even want to stay here.

LIFE IS NOT WHAT YOU MAKE IT AS I WOULD NEVER HAVE MADE A LIFE WHERE I LOSE MY SON

Sometimes I spend Christmas here alone. But what is uplifting is Shamaya – my granddaughter – she has gotten us through some hard times.

It's hard, it's really hard, for me to cope. I don't know how I'm standing. I don't feel strong, when the anxiety takes me, I feel so weak and I don't want to leave the house. Since Shaquan's death I feel like so many young people are dying. I am so protective and I am so worried. I relive it every day, every time another death is reported in the news. It's like reliving Shaquan's death all over again. I don't watch the news anymore. It just breaks my heart. Sometimes people send me news of someone who has been stabbed or murdered and it hurts, and I just think how is that mother coping?

To another mother, I would say, it's not your fault. It's sometimes easy to blame yourself, but we cannot blame ourselves. Likewise, we cannot blame others

– I blame the person for what they did to Shaquan, but I try not to let it consume me. Things happen in this life that are outside of our control. We need to push to get the help and support we need. Find groups where you can go to for support. I belong to a group of mothers who have lost children to murder, we support each other, and we go on trips together and support local campaigns. Finally remember you don't have to explain yourself; it's up to you if you want to tell your story.

People say life is what you make it but that's not exactly true. Life is not what you make it as I would never have made a life where I lose my son. I will never forget Shaquan. His death was senseless but I try my best to keep his memory alive, through everything I do, from wearing a badge of his face wherever I go, to talking about him and his story as much as I can. The memory of my beautiful cheeky 'Nuun' will always live on.

A tribute to Kevin
as told by his Wife



IN MEMORY OF *Kevin*

I've known Kevin since I was 18. We were good friends for about six years before we got together: we used to hang out in the same social group. I never really thought I would end up with Kev, but it just happened. I guess we were friends for so long, I didn't really see him like that in the beginning. But when we were both single, we ended up spending more time together and I realised I had stronger feelings for him. Luckily he felt the same way. Being good friends was a good foundation for being in a relationship. We got married in 2011 and were together for 21 years in total.

He was such a character and the best friend you could have. All his friends were so loyal to him because he was such a loyal friend. He liked the simple things in life, he loved cycling. He didn't like fuss. We liked going on holiday – we just had a really good, stress-free, happy life together. We had a great life, we really did.

He was a funny guy, although he didn't realise just how funny he was. He had a very dry sense of humour. He was a very kind and generous person but he didn't suffer fools. If you were his friend, he'd do anything for you. He was very close to his sister, Claire. He would do anything for her and for his nephews, Alex and Sonny. He was just a very nice fella. He could be quite opinionated, but I loved that

about him, he was never afraid to speak his mind and he was honest and truthful. He was a decent guy, a really decent guy.

We got married in Ireland, where my mum was from, where my mum and dad had got married. My dad had died in 2005. He wasn't there when I got married so it was really important for me to marry where my parents had got married. That was in June 2011 and then my mum died in February 2012. She was unwell when we married so it took a lot of planning to ensure she was able to attend, but Kev brought it all together. It was important to me and he knew that. I felt very protected by him. Things were always okay when Kev was about. He'd look out for me and was always supportive. I thought he'd be here forever.

A FEW HOURS EARLIER HE HAD BEEN A PICTURE OF HEALTH, AFTER OUR RECENT HOLIDAY, AND THE FITTEST PHYSICALLY HE'D EVER BEEN, AND NOW HE WAS FIGHTING FOR HIS LIFE



Cycling was his thing. He got into it quite late. He actually started doing it for his mental health, he suffered with anxiety a bit, so he'd go on long walks. He wasn't a runner, but it was during the long walks that something clicked, and he decided he wanted to get a bike – and that was it. He had an endurance that we were all surprised at because he wasn't particularly athletic. But all of a sudden, he had this resilience and endurance for these long rides and in a short time he was building up his miles. We asked how are you doing this? And he'd say he didn't know; he would just go into a mental hibernation and all his worries and fears would go away. So, as well as the fitness aspect, it was what it did for his mind, which made the obsession stronger. He cycled every day, even if he couldn't go out on his bike. He'd set up the bike here in the kitchen and he'd be cycling away when I got home from work. Nothing would stop him from getting a ride in.

That's what's so tragic about the whole thing. He'd got to a really good place. He'd got his work/life balance sorted; he was working for himself. He worked the hours he decided and always factored in a morning bike ride. He was in a good place with his mental health, happy and in a good place. Other than my parents passing, which was tough for a few years, we had nothing to complain about. Nothing at all.

The morning of his accident it was about 8am and he came down to the kitchen. I was loading the dishwasher – I remember it so vividly. He came down in his cycling gear and he looked out and said I'm really worried about this autumnal sun. It was September. He said I'm going out for a ride and we had a chat about where he was going to go and off he went.

I distinctively remember he didn't kiss me goodbye, he always used to kiss me goodbye, but that morning he didn't. I remember thinking I should have called him back. I looked round and saw him, because he was in all bright green and I could see him at the end of the drive. I now know he was talking to the neighbour's boys about his bike.

Three minutes after he left, I went out to go to the train station. At that point the incident had already happened just around the corner. It transpires that as I was crossing the road to the station, the incident was unfolding just further along the same stretch of road. As Kevin was cycling down the road, the car was going up in the opposite direction, turning right. The driver didn't see him and collided with him, knocking him off his bike.

I was at work when I got the phone call from Kev's friend, this wasn't until 11:11. He had tried to get hold of me earlier as I recall seeing a friend request on my social media that morning. I was at work so didn't really pay any attention to it. Somehow, he managed to get my number and I remember his exact words when he rang me. He said 'there's been an accident, Kev's had an accident'. He explained he had driven past the accident and his son had noticed Kev's bike so decided to call Kev's phone. The police answered so he knew something was wrong. They would not speak to him but asked that his next of kin call them urgently.

I then called Kev's number and I could instantly hear in the man's voice that this was bad. He was asking me where I was and I explained and asked what was happening. I remember hearing the word

airlifted and the word hospital. When I heard airlifted my panic kicked in. From then on, I wasn't taking anything in. I remember getting up from my desk and walking across the office and two of my friends were there and they heard me saying what's going on. The officer didn't know any more detail, but said they were going to come and get me. So, I gave him the office address and they blue lighted to me. I put the phone down. I kept saying he's going to be alright, isn't he? I was in total shock. I went downstairs and one of my friends came with me. The police arrived and I got in the car and it was just silent. I was scared to ask and they didn't know what to say.

So, we rushed to hospital and when I arrived, I was taken into a room. I remember the person in A&E – the consultant I presume – she came in and said he's had a really serious incident. There was a whole list of injuries but obviously the head injury was the main concern. She told me I needed to prepare that he might not make it. That was my first understanding that this was really serious. I asked to see him, but I couldn't at that point. She said she'd let me know when I could.

Kev's friend who had called me then appeared. He made his way to the hospital after speaking to me. Then I called Claire who was at work, her phone had diverted to Matt, her husband, who was working in Brighton at the time. Then people just started gathering. I had no more information to tell them and was in total shock. We also contacted Kev's parents, Molly and Charlie, and they made their way straight to the hospital. This whole time we hadn't had any updates. We were all just sitting there debating what they would say. Claire said she bet he would be out in 12 weeks and I agreed. We were just having crazy conversations, saying he would be fine.

The enormity of what had happened did not hit me until I walked into that bay in ICU. They had prepared me, they'd explained that the brain had swollen and they had done a big operation to help. But when I walked in, wow that was a shock. I remember standing at the door in absolute horror. It didn't even look like him. Claire was with me. I think we were all there. They allowed us all in as he was so poorly. A few hours earlier he had been a picture of health, after our recent holiday, and the fittest physically he'd ever been, and now he was fighting for his life. We couldn't comprehend it. It felt like I was in a dream.

Everyone else went home but I couldn't face leaving him. I knew I couldn't leave him. So, Claire and I stayed, which is what I did for the next 18 months. That was the start of it all, the day everything changed. Life was no longer recognisable.

I didn't understand that at first, that was a slow process. I think your brain can't take it all in, it just has to deal with what is happening in the present. It's just too big to take in. We had to stay positive, so we were all helping each other, but we did all cope differently. It's a very tough time. Being so intuitive, I found myself picking up on everything, like a look on someone's face. I remember trying to pick up on all the cues and it was information overload.

That feeling in ICU is indescribable. It's in the pit of your stomach, that awful dread. I had that all the time. The constant worry. You never really lose that. I was warned it was a long road, told he was going to get infections and he's going to have bad days, but you're never really prepared. You see the tubes get less and that's progress but then there might still be tough times. All I could feel was that I had to be there, I had to sit with him, I couldn't be anywhere else. Eighteen months of being with him every day. When I wasn't with him, I couldn't wait to be there with him, but then even when you are there, it was very hard.

I never went back to work after that day. Everything was just as I left it after getting the call. Two weeks in whilst Kev was in ICU, I had to go in to work as a report needed completing and no one else could access the system and it had to be done. I went in on a Sunday and they thought I was crazy, and I was crazy, but there's a keep-going function that kicks in and you just do these things. I look back now, and think what was I doing?

I was lucky I suppose that I could focus 100% on Kev, that was all I had to focus on. Other people have kids and a family to worry about at the same time. Because I just had him maybe it made it even more all-consuming. Someone commented once that I made Kev my job. I would turn up and talk to all the clinicians and almost took on the role of getting him as far as he could get. I was able to do that because I didn't have to go back to work. I can't imagine having to go back to work when a loved one is fighting for their life.

I remember everything people said to me because it's such a jarring time. I remember someone saying "You've been hit by the same car; it wasn't just Kev. You both were hit by that car. Kev is fighting for his life and you are here picking up the pieces." At the time, I didn't really appreciate that because I just felt whatever I am going through is nowhere near what he is. I had so much guilt every time I had to leave him. I had guilt over stuff that wasn't even there. The emotions are all over the place.

I KNEW WHAT KEV WANTED AND I KNEW HE HAD SIGNED UP AS AN ORGAN DONOR AND HE WAS VERY EXPLICIT ABOUT THAT

I remember it was a Friday, we went up to the hospital and I could sense the team was looking for responses that weren't there. We were thinking we'd seen things, but we'd been told these were reflexes. They said they were looking for something slightly more. They'd taken the sedation down, but Kev wasn't responding how they'd wanted him to. It had been two weeks since the accident at this point. He had a severe brain injury, so I knew he wasn't just going to wake up easily. It was that day that they took Claire and I into a room, but I was dreading it and I had to think worst case in that scenario. I was thinking what if they say the life support needs to be turned off, and that's pretty much what was said. There was an element of 'we have tried but it's not working and now we need to think about what's best for him.'

I remember coming out of that meeting after effectively being told that Kev had died but the machines weren't off yet and I just knew I needed people to have time to see him. I went back on the Saturday and said please give us until Tuesday, I needed people to say goodbye. That was questioned but I begged and said please give me that day. So, then I had to start making phone calls. It was so difficult. Lots of people began visiting, I remember all the emotions of seeing all his friends and family so sad. I knew what Kev wanted and I knew he had signed up as an organ donor and he was very explicit about that. He wanted his organs donated. We'd had that conversation, so Claire and I met with the donor team and carried out Kev's wishes even though it was one of the hardest conversations to have. It was upsetting for all of us but there was some comfort knowing how many people he was going to save and that in a way parts of him would still be alive.

Kev wasn't a Catholic, but I'd been raised as a Catholic and I knew he liked the ritual of the last rites that the priest performs before someone dies. He had seen it happen with my parents and at that moment I knew I had to do the same for him. We used this period to say what we thought were our goodbyes, but things did not go as planned. Kev did not do straight forward.

I remember Claire came out to get me to say there was a consultant who needed to speak to me. She thought it was about the process and the procedure of turning life support off. But it wasn't about that, not about that at all. I remember Claire and I and one of Kev's friends going back into that same room with the clinicians. They started the conversation and I remember the

WHEN YOU'RE PUT IN THAT LIFE-OR-DEATH SITUATION, YOU'RE NEVER GOING TO CHOOSE DEATH

neurosurgeon saying things I already knew. I remember thinking 'why are you retelling me this stuff, about reactions and responses' but what he was trying to say was

that he had assessed Kev on the Monday and had seen a change. He felt that if he was taken off the life support, he would survive and he would be able to breathe with the help of a tracheostomy. I fell back into the chair in shock and asked if he was telling me that he was not going to die. We had spent the weekend coming to terms with the fact Kev was going to die and now we were being told this might not be the case.

We were all so shocked, I just didn't know what to say. Claire and I thought how are we going to explain this to everyone, bringing all these people to say goodbye and then there was a U-turn. When I eventually got my head round it, I thought wow, he's been given a second chance. This is what we need to focus on, I've got him back. He's still here. When you're put in that life-or-death situation, you're never going to choose death. Even the priest said he'd never given the last rites and then have that person survive.

We kept saying only Kev! He's not going out without a fight. And my God, did he fight. That was the beginning of 18 months of fighting. He did the physical fighting and I had to be there to advocate for him. I felt like we became one person.

As he started to open his eyes and we started getting small responses, everything the team had said was coming true. But again, it's the unknown. I knew he was severely injured and the clinician who reviewed him as part of the second opinion agreed. He said there was no denying that he had suffered a severe brain injury and it was

impossible to know what his outcome would be as no two brain injuries are the same. He therefore said he deserved a chance and time to see what he does.

From then on, we started to see little things change. They may have been little to us but for Kev they were huge. He spent 12 weeks in hospital and I remember one day I came in and he followed me with his eyes around the room, he tracked me. He'd done it in the morning with one of the nurses too. That was an overnight improvement and that was massive. I realise that now. People would reiterate that the fact he was even alive was a big thing. We started at the lowest point, so I took every little step as a positive. It was a very long slow road, but I had been warned that was how it was going to be.

Then he went for neuro rehabilitation where he was for six months. He started to kick a ball. The physios

got very excited as he could anticipate the ball coming, it wasn't a reflex, it was accurate. He was kicking it and he was getting stronger and stronger. There were all these little things that you take for granted, but this was a man who was on his death bed at one point and now he was starting to respond. He eventually managed to be in a wheelchair and started showing signs of being minimally conscious because he started to recognise objects and know what they were, like a remote control.

Eventually we got a place at a slow stream neuro rehab unit. From the moment we arrived there he started making great strides. I took pictures and videos every day. People said to me I would see things before anyone else and that was true. I saw every little change, for example I knew he was getting an infection based on what he was or wasn't doing. You become an expert.



I JUST WANTED TO BE WITH HIM WHEN HE PASSED, BUT THAT WAS NOT MEANT TO BE

Because Kev was becoming more aware, I could see frustration in him. We got him a tablet to aid communication because he couldn't speak to express himself. We realised quickly that he could read and understand what was being asked of him. I remember his therapist wrote down 10 things, such as point at the door, look at the ceiling and he did all of them. He could understand, it was unbelievable. The therapists were brilliant, they were all engaged and could see the strides he was making. He started to eat yogurt and soft foods. His swallow function was back. All the things that he had lost were slowly coming back.

Then COVID-19 hit. That's when things really took a turn. This was now March 2020, we'd been at the slow stream rehab unit since June 2019, making great strides.

It started with a reduction in visiting hours and that was when I really started to panic. I had been by his side the whole time. How was it going to work with him not seeing me and people not visiting him? I remember writing on his tablet 'global pandemic' and I had to try and explain that I couldn't visit and that they were reducing visits and we didn't know how long for. I had huge feelings of guilt not being able to visit him. I remember the last visit before 'lockdown' I had to say goodbye. I was absolutely devastated. They all said they'd look after him and he'd be fine.

On the Friday of the same week, I got a phone call, we weren't in official lockdown but I wasn't allowed to visit. They said 'we think he has got an infection, maybe a chest infection and we've started him on antibiotics'. I was so worried it was covid. They said 'no, probably just a chest infection brewing'. I didn't have a good feeling about it, especially because I wasn't there and couldn't see him. We managed to have a video call and I could see him and he looked fine, so I was a little reassured. But then on the next phone call, there'd be a change and they couldn't get his oxygen levels up. They had called an ambulance to take him to the hospital. I was filled with panic. Panic that he was that ill but also that he was going into a hospital. I was petrified that he'd get covid in there. I rang Claire and we drove up to see him. While we were driving up, they had been trying to get hold of me to let me know that the consultant at the hospital wanted to speak to me.

Claire and I drove to the A&E and because of the covid restrictions, Claire had to wait outside. Only I was allowed in. I couldn't believe I was back in an A&E relatives' room. This lovely consultant came in

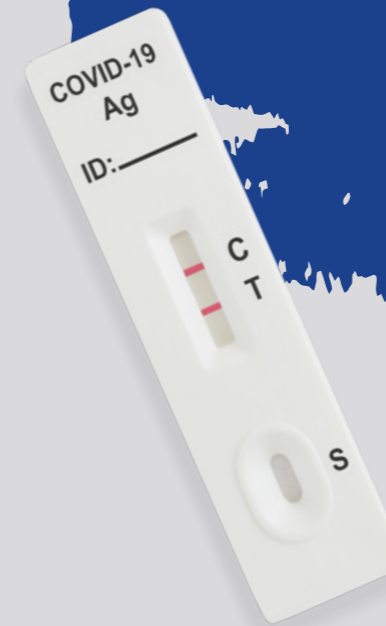
and said, he's not going to make it. I said what do you mean? He said it was covid, he was not going to survive. He explained that this was a virus that was killing fit and healthy people and this made Kev's chances of surviving it very low. I said I need to be with him, he asked me about myself with reference to the risk of catching the virus. I said I didn't care, what else have I got left, just let me in. They let me in to see him and his breathing was so labored, but he was awake and he saw me. He put his hand out. I just thought oh my God I can't believe this is happening again.

Claire and I stayed with him. He was transferred to a covid ward, which was all side rooms. We had to be in PPE, allowed in one at a time. I spent the whole night with him, talking to him throughout. I couldn't believe we were here again, it just seemed so cruel. I remember wondering if there was ever an end to this, to his suffering. With the brain injury, there was such an uphill battle that he had to climb, that he had climbed, but there was so much more to go and we didn't even know what that was going to look like. I was exhausted. He was exhausted. This was a totally different battle. It was not a 'let's intubate and see' scenario. This was too far and it was such unknown territory for everyone as this was the start of the pandemic. I didn't care if I had it or not. All I thought was I cannot leave him again. We got to the next day and at this point I was now delirious, I hadn't slept. They said it may not happen imminently and that I should go home and rest and then come back. They said they would call me if anything happened. I knew I needed to sleep so Claire and I left and I drove home.

I remember driving home, they said they would let me back in, but I was worried about that. Once home I called every hour on the hour for an update but there was no change. I just wanted to be with him when he passed, but that was not meant to be.

Around 2am I got the call. I just knew. I thought please let this be a come in call, but it wasn't. It was a doctor saying that Kev had died. I was devastated. My first thought was, I was meant to be there. I had been with him all the way from the day he was injured but I wasn't at the very end. Then I rang Claire. She said 'he wouldn't have wanted you to be there to put you through that. We've all been through enough. He wouldn't want the fuss'. I was tortured with the fact that I had left him. I shouldn't have left him.

I now think that's so Kev, to go like that.



I REMEMBER THE LAST VISIT BEFORE 'LOCKDOWN' I HAD TO SAY GOODBYE. I WAS ABSOLUTELY DEVASTATED.

There's not a day that goes by that he isn't talked about or mentioned. Everyday somehow, he's brought up. That lockdown gave everyone the space and time to stop and just be, and I had that support around me. We all supported each other. Without that I don't know how I would have got out of that dark cloud.

What's life like now? It's very different. How do you get through it? I feel for the first time, I'm in a good place. There's been dark times, but I learnt through what happened with Kev, the feelings and emotions that you go through don't stay the same. They change, they pass and they might come back again. I realised I had to focus on every day. I felt like grief is not a period of darkness that you come out of, it oscillates, you could have periods where even in the darkest times, you find something to lighten the mood. I remember wondering, how am I able to laugh, in the midst of tragedy, but you'll have small light moments. I always thought grief was something you have to navigate through, but now I know it never leaves you, you have to manage it somehow. I started to notice I could talk about him and not be crying but be smiling and remembering good times. The psychologist said to me, if you were in a dark place all the time or appeared to be always in a good place, I'd be worried. You're bouncing between the two and that's where you need to be. It's a constant.

I let myself go through those phases. I recognised how I felt one day and I knew for me it wouldn't last continuously. I can't speak for everyone, but I'd learnt from the incident that I'm not going to feel like this always. Even if you're just getting up and you're showering and you're eating, you've had a good day. Not wanting to see people because they're going to ask you questions is terrifying to start with but one day, you'll find you are going to do it. For me, I trusted in that. I talked about it, it was very important for me to talk. I had professional help, which was amazing, that really did help me. Having a space where I could talk and say what I felt, for me that helped. Don't get me wrong, in the beginning I dreaded it as I knew it would open pandora's box, but it was needed, it was cathartic.

Kev and I were a great team, but we had our roles. He handled some things and I handled others. One of Kev's jobs was to put out the bins out via our side gate. After he died, I realised I didn't even know the code for the padlock. He used the gate to bring his bike in, but I never came in that way. There were two of us and now there was just me, so I had to step up and do things I hadn't done before.

We couldn't get Kev home for a month due to lockdown and the complications that brought with it. I was aware I wasn't with him when he died, so it was important for me to see him after death. There's an element of goodbye that needs to be done, especially as I wasn't there when it happened, so I needed to see him.

We held his funeral with 10 people only due to the covid restrictions. I never managed to get him home, even though we were so close to getting him here post rehab. They had said it wasn't perfect, but it was doable and we could have made it work. Him coming home was a goal of mine but it didn't happen. So, I wanted the funeral procession to come to the house. It was my final wish for Kev.

I had put details of the funeral on social media, knowing people could not attend but wanting to let them know. The morning of the funeral, we looked out of the window to see everyone had started appearing in the road, I was floored. Every neighbour, all along the road, all down the street, on every corner, in a lockdown. Even in a lockdown everyone came out to pay their respects. That was just testament to Kev. He would have been taken aback by the number of people who cared so much about him.

Claire and Matt decided I shouldn't be alone, so I moved in with them for five months. I think back on it now and I don't know what I would have done without them. Everyone would have gone back to work and I honestly don't know how I would have been. I don't have any family here apart from Kev's family. Everyone would have gone back to normal and so in a weird way, in that horrific situation, actually the lockdown enabled me, and us as a family, to have that support and time together.

People don't often talk about death, but I was raised to. So, I talked about Kev all the time. Matt did say to me it's brilliant you're here because you're showing the boys that it's important we talk about him. He's still part of our life and always will be.

ONE OF KEV'S JOBS WAS TO PUT OUT THE BINS VIA OUR SIDE GATE. AFTER HE DIED I REALISED I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW THE CODE FOR THE PADLOCK.

I haven't gone back to work. I just didn't feel like I wanted to go. They kept my job open, they were amazing, but there were a lot of aspects I didn't want to do. It was too painful to go back to the life I didn't have anymore. The only thing that hasn't changed is me living in our home. I stayed here because this was our house, so I found comfort in that. I knew I needed some stability as it had been a difficult 18 months and it wasn't an immediate loss. It was a long journey to process.

I feel selfish thinking I'm glad he didn't die in the accident, but I am. I wouldn't change it. It's such a hard one because in a way if he had died immediately, he wouldn't have gone through some of the suffering, but I am incredibly grateful for that time with him. The small wins and big wins we had. I saw glimpses of him throughout, in his eyes. Once he was in the wheelchair and the sun was shining on me while I was talking to him, and he put his hand on my face to shade it. I thought wow oh my God. In that moment, it was amazing, he was telling me he was here, the joy that gave me was tremendous.

My friends and family say some amazing things about how I managed during that period, they don't understand how I coped. I don't understand how I coped. Their love and support got me through. But I also realised there is an inner strength that you find from somewhere, because you have to, because you have to cope. You must find strength or grit or resilience from somewhere. Because you have no other choice.

For me, I prefer when people acknowledge the loss. I have no problem with someone doing that, but that's me, everyone is different. I had someone defriend me on social media after Kev's accident because they thought posting things would upset me. That to me was them walking away. But they later explained why. I know they were trying to help, but for me people avoiding it is much worse.

I was conscious of making people feel uncomfortable around me, who might not know what to say or not

want to talk about Kev. So, I made a point of showing up, even when I didn't want to. I knew it would be hard, but I had to leave the house, I had to start going to things. I needed people to see that I could still talk about Kev and that I wanted to and they didn't have to be delicate around me. That was the worst, people feeling like they couldn't speak to me.

I know how difficult it can be approaching someone to say I'm sorry or are you okay. Not everyone is able to respond well to that, so it's not easy to know what to do for the best. But even just a text, I was very appreciative of everyone in whatever way that they acknowledged it. Whatever makes you comfortable to express something to somebody who is going through loss, is very much appreciated. It can be a text or something left on the door.

I remember feeling so guilty after he died. It was a really hard time. It took me a good while, but I started to realise I can't be feeling like that all the time, it's not right. He hasn't got the opportunity to live or feel, and I have, right or wrong this is where we are. He would be saying 'what are you doing, you've got these opportunities and I would be taking them up'. He was always the one encouraging me and pushing me forward. I feel stronger and braver for that. He's not here to tell me, but I know what he'd say. I knew him for 21 years so I know what the reaction and response would be. So, in my mind when I'm stuck, I can hear him saying 'come on Mairead you can do this'.

I think a lot of what happened I didn't process until after Kev died. So, I didn't grieve the man I lost at the time of the incident, I refused to see him as someone who was different, it was still Kev. I refused to allow it to define us. When he died, the whole lot hit me. Funnily enough when I was thinking of him, I was thinking of Kev pre-incident, like the incident never happened. I definitely never had the time to grieve post incident. He was still alive. Now when I think and talk of him, I have thoughts of him both pre and post the incident.



What would I say to another wife... this is one of the hardest things you'll ever do but keeping the memory of the person alive and talking about them is important. They're in your heart, Kev is never not going to be in mine. You're never going to forget them.

Don't underestimate grief and how it affects you physically. That surprised me. Look after yourself. Take it slow. Take the time you need. It's taken me four years to get to where I am. Each step is a step. Some just little steps, some leaps. It is tough, the emotions that you feel sometimes, you can't explain. There's no manual for grief. There's no rule book and there should be no judgement. Do what is right for you, if it's getting you to a place you need to be then that's right for you.

It's changed me as a person, I've learnt a lot. It was a rollercoaster, but I would not change that. Absolutely not. I felt lucky that he had that second chance.

My attitude to everything has changed. I used to be a planner, I had to know a year in advance what we were doing. Now I don't even try, I live in the moment. I try things. I owe it to him to live this life. I'm not scared of anything anymore, what is there to fear. The things I would have worried about I really don't care anymore. Things that I thought were important are not. He's given me that lesson.

My focus now is to be content, it hasn't been easy to be happy on my own. I thought I was going to be with Kev forever, then life took a very different turn. However hard it is, I know I was lucky in some ways, we had such wonderful times together and you know some people search their entire life for that.

In loving memory of Molly and Charlie Dady.

A tribute to Ann
as told by her
Husband and Daughter



IN MEMORY OF *Ann*

Steve (Husband)

Ann was a people person and she was loud! Our social life revolved round her friends and that was great. She had a huge friendship group, who are still such a support network to us now. Ann played a key role within the church – making many friends there – but was also able to befriend people from all walks of life. This was evident at the funeral when 450 people came to pay their respects, there was a queue to get into the church and it was amazing to see so many faces.

I met Ann when I was 18, at a church house party, but we didn't get together seriously for another seven years, after our paths crossed when she and my sister were both helping with the Girl Guides. In 1986, we got engaged and married three months later. Ann always said if you know the person is right, there's no point in hanging around, just get on with it. We moved to St Albans a few months later and have been in this house for 30 years now, we built our lives here – Josh and Tori our youngest children were even born in a birthing pool in the dining room.

Emily (Daughter)

Mummy achieved more in a day than anyone I knew, she just lived life a lot. She really loved being busy and making the most of her life. Often, we would arrange days off together where we'd go out for lunch on a week day, drink wine and have a lovely day. Or go to a National Trust site and do nice things together, it was so nice to just hang out with her.

Mummy had a younger sister Jacquie, she was very much the oldest child. The night before her accident, she'd dropped in to see her and Jacquie suggested having a gin and tonic in the jacuzzi, so they did. I love that the last photo taken of her was in a jacuzzi, gin and tonic in hand. It just tells you everything. She's not even wearing her own costume, it was her sister's.

Steve

On the day of the accident, Ann and her friend Karen were out riding. Ann had ridden on and off all of her life and was really keen to help Karen with her horses. All we know is that something scared Karen's horse. Karen jumped off to move the thing that was scaring them, holding the reins of her horse. For whatever reason, Karen's horse bolted and Ann's followed, disappearing into the distance. Karen ran after them and found Ann on the ground. She rang 999 and for some time it was just the two of them, before some passersby came to help.

Karen rang Tori who was nearby. Tori got there to find Ann on the ground. I don't know exactly what Tori saw in that field. She immediately called me and told me that Mummy has had an accident, but I thought maybe a broken bone. I didn't really think it could have been what it was. I started to make my way to the scene, but then Tori called back to say the air ambulance team were there and they were taking her to hospital. I rushed home and picked up some things, Karen and Tori and I got the train to the hospital. We rang Josh and Emily. Josh was up in Nottingham and had to make the two-hour car journey with that news on his mind.

Emily

I was coming home from Glastonbury festival and was at Fleet services when I got the call from Tori to say Mummy had had an accident. She was trying to explain what had happened, she said she was groaning but she wasn't doing anything else and they could see she had sustained a head injury. As a nurse my heart sunk that it was head trauma, it's the last injury you want to hear. When I arrived at the hospital in wellies, covered in glitter, I found my dad, Tori, Josh and Karen in the relative's room in A&E. I remember being in there a long time as by this point mum was in surgery. The nurses were keeping us updated but none of us had seen her.

Before we got to see her, there was a lot of check ins about “what do you understand about what has happened” and I got really frustrated because everyone wanted to explain everything, but all we wanted was to see her. We’d been waiting around six hours and at this point we just wanted to see our mum.

Steve

When we did see Ann, there were lots of tubes and sensors everywhere, but I remember trying to tell myself that she was just sleeping.

Emily

That night as we were waiting, I was texting lots of people. I took it on myself to be the one communicating with everyone about Mummy, which is the role she would have naturally taken. It was tough but comforting to see the messages of support pouring in.

In those first few days, we set up camp in the family area just outside ICU and had food and people there all the time. We would have mornings at home and then go up to hospital, every day. It was surreal really, we were just on autopilot. We got into a routine; we did it for three weeks.

Steve

After a long day at the hospital, we’d get home around 10pm and there’d be food from someone on the door. It was fantastic, Ann would have done the same if it were her friend’s family in the same situation, so it felt right that her friends were doing it for her and us.

Over her stay in intensive care, we had regular updates from the team; as a family you’re just looking for positive signs. I appreciate it’s a highly complex scenario and you don’t expect people to give you definitive answers, I just wanted the simple version. I didn’t want all the details, I just wanted the basic overview of what was going on. You don’t want those conversations, but on the other hand you know you’ll have to face them at some point. It was hard as every time they sat down with you, they’d be brutal. “These are devastating injuries and she’ll have life-changing results” they would say. The repeated nature of those conversations was really hard.

Emily

We all dealt with those meetings differently: Tori didn’t want to attend them, we wonder if it’s because she was at the scene, there was a lot going on for her. Josh on the other hand would come to them, he was the only one of us who saw her CT scans with one of the consultants. I didn’t want to see it as I knew it would

confirm my worst fears. As a nurse these meetings would make me nervous and my family would take my mood as an emotional barometer. Over time I tried to hide how I was feeling to the rest of them. I had only been qualified as a nurse for three years, but being a nurse in that environment was awful because you know a little but not enough – my gut and my training meant that I realised sooner than the rest though. After Josh saw Mum’s CT scan, I think we were both aware of how bad it was, but we didn’t say it to each other. It wasn’t said, we were just privy to a bit more knowledge.

Steve

When Ann had all her sedation medication reduced, we were told if she isn’t doing anything in a few days the team would be quite concerned. If the swelling from the operation was going down, everything looked better. It was a weirdly nice time as there were no updates to be had, we were just hoping and waiting, and we all got to spend lots of quality time with her.

Emily

Over the following days, it started to become clear that this was as bad as we had feared, those days were crippling, willing her to do something. I found it excruciating to be by her bedside. The team asked us to meet with them, so we did on a Wednesday, where there were conversations about what was in Ann’s best interest: for us it was very clear cut. She was so energetic, not being able to speak or recognise us, being bed bound – that wouldn’t have been the life she would have wanted. That bit was very clear. Once the decision had been made and we knew it was going to happen, it did make it easier in some ways.

Having that conversation changed everything. Because I found it so painful waiting for her to wake up, knowing that she now wouldn’t give me some peace and I found comfort being by the bedside again. I could go and say everything I had wanted. I remember the night after that meeting, both my dad and I stayed up late drinking gin and tonics, we’d invited a few of her friends around because we all felt quite positive and jubilant that we knew how the land lay again. We talked about what a relief it was in some ways. Two and a half weeks had felt like a long time to be waiting to know what was going to happen, so to finally have an answer, have some news and all be so unanimous in our decision, we felt at peace finally.

We were very lucky on the last day we brought food in and toasted her at her bedside with a bottle of champagne. We had music on, Tori finished reading Harry Potter and the Philosopher Stone to her and we had a constant stream of people who wanted to say goodbye.

SOMETIMES YOU WOULD CATCH YOUR BREATH, BUT THEN IT WOULD COME CRASHING BACK TO YOU THAT SHE'S NOT HERE TO SHARE IT WITH YOU ANYMORE

Those last times spent with mummy were special and we do talk about them with smiles on our faces. We did make it positive in that latter part and that positivity carried on to the funeral. We made it very her.

I think it was Josh who brought up organ donation. I think my grandmother also contacted the hospital as she felt “something good is going to come of this”. Funnily enough I was the most resistant one as I knew it would happen in an anesthetic room and that really changed my perception of what her death would look and feel like. But looking back I am of course very proud of the fact she was able to donate and she would have wanted that.

She died in the early hours of Sunday morning. Standing on the kerb of the hospital at 2am waiting to be taken home, knowing she had just died, wanting desperately to leave the building: that was probably the lowest point for us.

We came home and slept. Then we went to my aunts, it was a gorgeous day and we had a barbecue. My mum’s parents were there and we all got quite boozy. By that time, we had had time to digest that she was going to die so there wasn’t a big change in our mindset.

We had been told to contact the bereavement office, even though I worked for the trust, I had forgotten to call beforehand, so when we went there in person they seemed surprised to see us and turned us away.

For quite sensible people, we did have quite a runaround with it all – it wasn’t straightforward and we knew we had to do something, but we didn’t know what. One complicating aspect of the process was that her accident had occurred in a different county to the one in which she died and we weren’t sure where her death needed to be registered. We were then put in touch with the coroner’s office and issued with an interim death certificate.

Steve

I don’t remember a lot of the details after Ann died. But I know that, thanks to Emily, there was non-stop stuff going on all the time. Going here and there, seeing friends, doing things, planning the funeral – there was lots to do.

On the day of the funeral, the weather was awful and there were people queueing round the church to get in. We greeted everyone and I’m so glad we did that. A taxi driver even asked if it was a celebrity.

Emily

We then moved onto to the local cricket club and there was a marquee. It was like a wedding, I kept calling it a wedding. But it was genuinely that joyous a day – it was a celebration. Some of mummy’s friends were dancing on the tables. It was great.

Steve

In the months after, the children just kept things coming. No rest allowed. I didn't go back to work until November, so I had four months off. At the time I was pretty busy. Sometimes you would catch your breath and think I'm having a fun time and then it would come crashing back to you that Ann's not here to share it with you anymore. But it was the right thing for us to do. It helped us deal with the situation and it's what Ann would have wanted us to do.

Emily

We were doing things as if she was there: we took my dad to Edinburgh Fringe with many of my friends and even ended up at a late-night cabaret show. It was just so funny because I never thought my parents would have gone to a show like that and there my Dad was. We just wanted to all be a family together. It was a way to not forget what was happening, but occupy ourselves, it felt right at the time.

It was my dad's birthday less than a month after mummy's death, a few days after the funeral, so I planned a nice day out in London. We went to see the film *Get Out* at Somerset House, but I had completely forgotten about a scene towards the end involving brain surgery. As it dawned on me, I was so cross at myself. How could I forget that was in the film? I was mortified that I had brought my family along and made them watch something which felt so close to home and tactless. It's funny because now that would not bother me – but in those immediate weeks and months you are so hypersensitive.

Going back to work for both of us was hard, I took my time to go back – I wasn't having any issues but I felt I would be distracted in practice. My dad also took time off.

Steve

The first Christmas was hard, Ann loved Christmas. It's different now, but when we come together as four we still have nice moments together remembering Ann. As a unit we're still on the same page. We want to remember the funny stories and the good times.

Emily

Sean proposed to me on my 30th birthday. He had told my mum in one of the last few days in ICU that he was going to. Obviously, she couldn't say anything but he told her and didn't tell anyone else. I'd always planned to have a big 30th so we did it: an

ABBA night! Meaning Sean proposed to me when he was wearing platform heels and a wig in front of 70 of our close friends and family.

I got married in the same church as the funeral. It felt like the right thing to do. Mummy had always wanted me to get married there and I had always said I never would. I guess she got her wish. Partly because of COVID-19 and partly because it felt like the right thing to do.

We had orange flowers because Mummy wore a lot of orange – her funeral flowers were orange too. We held the reception at home, with only 30 people because of the pandemic. In the morning I had invited my aunt and grandmother to come spend time with Tori and I so that mummy would be with us. I was wearing her veil and in the speeches everyone mentioned her. It was a great day, but she was so missed. It was hard as I know just how much she would have loved the day. Looking at pictures you do see someone is missing. She was very much missing.

Steve

Our friends have been fantastic. They're Ann's family! I still have lots of Ann's friends around, we have regular Friday night drinks. I really enjoy those times – we still talk about Ann and that really helps me. It's funny because they used to meet on a Friday night, but we had not attended as much due to other commitments, but since she died, they enveloped all of us and looked after us. There's so much love there.

Emily

We're all going away together as Tori and I are swimming the distance of the channel (45km) in her memory and for our local air ambulance this summer. The last swim is in the Isles of Scilly where we will swim between each of the islands and they are all coming to cheer us on. There'll be plenty of gin and tonics at the end. We're very lucky and we get on so well. But it's through Mummy that those friendships were made.

Steve

If I had to go through it all again, I would say that you must lean on your friends and your family. Especially friends – they're missing her too – and so they want to help and be involved and talk. They want to talk about Ann as much as I do. If you can find those people, rely on them as much as you can. That's what has really kept me going, I need to talk about her still. It really helps me.

At church, Ann used to run a sewing day – they still have them and now they are now called 'Ann's Sewing Days'. I like to go along – I don't do any sewing – but I go and join them for lunch. I like to say thank you to them for still running them, both for me and for Ann.

What I found most helpful was people saying "let's do this": someone giving you a plan and something to do. That's so much better than saying, "let me know what I can do for you", because you don't know what you need – it's a bit of a cliché. It was good to know we had things to look forward to.

I would find myself getting angry with people who, just two or three months after Ann had died, wouldn't acknowledge it. I just wanted them to say "sorry for your loss" and then the conversation could move on. It's a simple thing to do, but I know it can be difficult. At work now, people don't say anything, but I would still like to talk about Ann, not for pity, but because it's part of my story.

People think they're going to upset you. But the truth is that the most upsetting thing has already happened. I suppose death remains a taboo subject. But it's your

story. So in the first year, I'd sometimes bring it up in conversation, even with strangers, because it's right there on my mind. Occasionally it led to interesting exchanges but other times, people wouldn't even respond to it at all, which I found rather strange.

Emily

Our family unit definitely got us through. Those three weeks were very tough, but showed us her strength and I think it was for us that she had that strength to carry on, so we could get our heads fully around what was going to happen. It would have been so much harder if she had died immediately. Then of course there was the ultimate gift of giving her organs.

Steve

I'm not sure this has brought us much closer as we were already very close, but it's made us realise what a unit we are. Ann would be so proud of us. You just know she's seeing it too. She'll see the frustrations and sadness but also the laughter. She'll always be with us. Always.

I WOULD SAY THAT YOU MUST LEAN ON YOUR FRIENDS AND YOUR FAMILY



A tribute to Chloe
as told by her Mum



IN MEMORY OF CHLOE

Chloe was born in Ashford Hospital in Surrey: our third child. She was in a rush to get into the world, I had a 20-minute labour.

Chloe had a love for the Wizard of Oz and fancy dress, and by the time you get to your third child you are so much more relaxed, so I let her dress herself, which always meant wellington boots and a fancy-dress outfit. I have this great memory of walking around a garden centre looking for Chloe, she must have been about toddler age, when I heard through the speakers 'could the parents of Snow White come to the desk.' Then, she dyed her hair red, and it looked amazing, but the school weren't happy. But she stuck to her guns, and she kept her red hair. That was Chloe.

Chloe knew how to have fun, she had a small circle of friends, and if you were lucky enough to be her friend, you had a friend for life. She was confident but also so incredibly kind, but she never advertised that. She didn't need to advertise it, it was something she just was. We would be standing in the kitchen and she would look at me and say, "do you need a hug?" and then we'd have a hug. I can remember those moments so well, her warmth and kindness.

She initially struggled at college but then really found herself. That's when she decided she wanted to join the police, not as an officer, but behind the scenes. She was so driven once she decided that's what she wanted to do. She did everything she could to achieve it, getting a place at university and really excelling.

In her second year of university, aged 20, is when she became sick. Her life as well as all our lives changed dramatically. She went from being an outgoing confident girl to one with a significant medical problem, which brought with it its own anxieties.

That's when we started our 'bath chats'. It was a free space where she could talk about how she was

feeling, cry if she needed to. I would often look at her and say, 'Do you need a bath chat?'. Chloe was determined not to let her illness hold her back and with the help and support of her university she was able to go back and complete her final year, achieving a 1st in her dissertation and within months of graduating securing her dream job with the police. Illness changed her life hugely, but it also gave her determination at a different level to succeed. I think for me, that is where I get my strength from. I can't give up because she didn't, so how dare I even think about it.

The Friday night before she died, I messaged to say I'd see her at home and told her to get a Nando's: her absolute favourite.

The next morning, Saturday morning, I went to work, as did Brandon her boyfriend, which meant Chloe was home alone. She called me at about 9:30am to ask me about a letter that had been delivered. I told her not to worry and I'd look at it when I got home. I knew Brandon would be home at some point in the day so I decided to stay

on at work a little longer, I had an important task that needed completing. I remember thinking I needed to tell Chloe

**THAT IS WHERE I GET MY STRENGTH
FROM I CAN'T GIVE UP BECAUSE
SHE DIDN'T, SO HOW DARE I EVEN
THINK ABOUT IT**

that I was going to be a bit late, so I called her, texted her, but nothing. She always answered her phone, so I just had this feeling. I got onto the family chat, asking if anyone had heard from her. Everyone was then checking in but with no response. That's when I knew I had to go home and check on her. I drove the nine minutes home and walked into the house, it was deadly quiet. It was really weird.

THE MOST HURTFUL PHRASE IS 'TIME'S A HEALER'

There's usually always a radio on. Chloe always had Magic FM on, to my disgust, having one-man concerts with George Michael and Elton John. The house felt weird. I just remember, as I went to go upstairs, I got my phone out of my bag and took it with me. Chloe hadn't answered me and I was scared. When I got to her bedroom, I saw she was laying on her side in bed, and I thought phew, she's asleep. Then I thought but it's 2pm, so I walked around to her, and just looked at her, and saw that she was blue.

She hadn't fallen on the floor. She was literally on her side like she was asleep. That was it. I shook her, asking her to please wake up and then I called 999. They were trying to talk me through CPR and I just knew that I couldn't. I was trying to explain to them that I was scared, and that I didn't know how to do it and I was scared to touch her. I was all on my own and I can just remember sitting on her bed thinking I don't know what to do – what do you do?

The ambulance crew were so kind; one came in to tell me that they could see she'd had a seizure. I remember feeling numb and in total disbelief it's like being on another planet. I just couldn't believe it. I kept wanting to go back in because I couldn't believe it. We'd had this experience, two years previous, where her life had been saved, I couldn't believe it.

Because of the circumstances we then had police at the door. At this point I was still on my own. Mike her father was away in France. No one else knew, I just thought "what do I do? How do I tell someone?". A young lovely police officer

GUILT IS SOMETHING YOU GO THROUGH, BUT IT WASN'T IMMEDIATE, IT COMES DOWN THE LINE, THE WHAT IFS AND BUTS

was trying to explain he'd be my liaison, I remember giving him my sisters' number and then I looked up and saw Brandon pull up. He saw the ambulances and the police cars and when he came in we just held each other. I don't even think I even told him, but he just knew.

Then I remember my daughters coming soon after, my sister must have called them. I remember sitting in our lounge and one by one the family began to arrive. We just sat together; we didn't really know what to do. Parts of what happened next are a real blur. I remember the police stayed with us because the next step was for Chloe to leave the house with the undertaker.

I didn't want her to go, but they had to take her away. That was horrible, that they have to come and take her away like that. Her coming down the stairs and going away was just awful, I am not sure I will ever forget it.

The police were so compassionate, so before she left we were able to be with her. I sat on the bed and stroked her hair and had a cry, it's good to cry. I'm so sad I didn't get a lock of her hair though, I wished I'd done that. I didn't know that I could have some, no one tells you that's what you should do. It would have been a piece of her. Her hair was a huge part of her – it was her thing – she had great hair.

The most painful thing was calling Mike. I couldn't have anyone else tell him, I didn't want the police to tell him but I couldn't get him to come home without telling him, so I had to tell him the truth. He got home in the early hours of the morning and we were sat in the lounge waiting. He came in the door and there were no words spoken, just devastation at what had happened. Then he needed to say goodbye to her, so we went to the mortuary at the local hospital. All I can remember is the hair – why didn't I take a lock of hair? Her hair was so beautiful, they'd made her look so beautiful on this bed. But we did take some out of her hairbrush, so I have got that, weird I know, but I have it.

As a family we'd spoken and we were happy to donate her organs, she would have been happy with that. So she donated her brain to a team for research. We wanted to try and stop this happening to another family. For us that was really important.

In those weeks afterwards I was very transactional. I was thinking "What do I have to do?" "What do I need to do?". I needed to have a job. I remember thinking I must tell people, I needed to tell the bank, all those types of things. I think I even messaged the dentist.

Guilt is something you go through, it wasn't immediate, it comes down the line, the what ifs and butts. I was at work and I should have been at home. Why was Mike in France? Why wasn't he at home then he could have saved her. It's all about the whys and the what ifs. I know I was thinking it and I know he was too. "Why weren't we here?". You feel such guilt.

When Chloe was sick in what we called her 'mad' days, she bought a set – she called it her 'Five piece'. It contained pjs, a dressing gown, slippers and a quilt, all with the same pattern. After she died it felt important to hold onto it, so we refashioned the quilt cover so that everyone got a cushion made of it, meaning we all have a piece of her.

Chloe's since gone on tour: she's too young to be sitting in boxes or to have ashes buried in a church yard, so she's all over the world. A little piece of Chloe with a little bit of 'Five piece' has been tied in places all over the world. She's everywhere: she's been to hen dos, stag dos, weddings and honeymoons. She is scattered in some of the most amazing places around the world. When we do something as a family it's "have you got Chloe?" and I'll say yep, she's in the bag! She has even 'run the marathon'.

Maybe people think that's mad, but she was 22 years old and she wanted to travel. Plus, it makes us smile and it makes us laugh, because there's an incompleteness to the family when she's not there. But when she's in the heart shaped canister in my handbag, she is there. And she's not forgotten.

That first Christmas was bloody hard, Chloe loved Christmas. We had a lot of tears but just being together was helpful. Weirdly one thing I found difficult was music. There are those trigger songs,

that piece of music that comes on and leaves you an absolute mess. For Mike it was 'Driving Home for Christmas' and for me 'Last Christmas' by Wham, the memories of Chloe singing these at the top of her voice are so strong. That Christmas we had tears, but we also laughed. It was different. I didn't like it though, and at the end of the day I remember standing up and thinking 'thank God it's over'.

For her birthday in January me and the girls went to a spa on a beautiful cold day. Then the family came here in the evening for a birthday toast. We always celebrate occasions. We always do something. You can't let them go by without acknowledgment.

On the first anniversary we all went to Devon, spent the day at the beach, swam in the sea. It had rained while we were in the sea and we were all having a champagne toast on the beach and then a rainbow appeared above. We couldn't believe it, everyone was in tears, but it was so special and we raised a toast to our wonderful Chloe.



For me what really helped was having information, we were given the chance to talk through a copy of her post-mortem (the post-mortem that arrived on her birthday) with her neurologist. I only had one question about the post-mortem – because I didn't understand it really – and that was did she know? Because her biggest fear was being on her own and a seizure happening. The neurologist said no she would not have been aware of it, and that was all I needed to hear. I didn't care about all the other bits. I think just knowing that she wasn't in pain or aware, it's such a relief to hear that. I couldn't change what happened, but this was so important to know.

The thing I found so weird after Chloe died was that there's people who you expect to be there that aren't and then there are random people who are. They just do the right thing; they don't ask questions. They don't say anything, they just do it. For example in those early days you don't think about food or eating, so opening the door to see a lasagne on the doorstep just means so much. Also, the people who just reached out, and still to this day message me to show me something that reminded them of Chloe, that really makes me smile and helps me see the wider impact Chloe had. She meant so much to so many people. The police have been amazing – they don't forget. They have a yearly memorial for all their colleagues who have died. We light candles and we all sit and talk together and it's lovely.

SOCIETY THINKS FORGETTING IS BETTER, LIKE THERE IS AN EXPIRY DATE ON GRIEF... I DO STILL SMILE, BUT I'M DIFFERENT. I'M NOT THE SAME ME, THINGS HAVE CHANGED.

doesn't look the same. So, we need to find a new way to stand. Oh, and just a note about a popular messaging service, a few weeks after Chloe died, we all woke up to a notification that said, "Chloe has left the group". Who knew that happened? It was because her phone had been disconnected but it was like a kick in the stomach. Every single group we had had that notification. Not knowing that that happens, how horrible is that? For a notification to tell you that your daughter who has died has left the family chats. It was tough and it was out of our control. Something similar happened on another social media platform, but at least they offered a memorial page.

We never want to forget. You cannot forget. But society thinks forgetting is better, like there is an expiry date on grief. Like you must start smiling again. I do smile, but I'm different. I'm not the same me, things have changed. People, some of my closest friends, find that a struggle, that you're not the same person and they almost miss you. They miss who you were and they struggle with that.

There were things that I couldn't talk to Mike about, because we were both hurting, and there were things I couldn't talk to girls about because they were hurting. We were all hurting, but there were things deep inside of me that I needed to share, I needed to tell somebody.

I'd got to the point where I wouldn't leave the house, I remember being so worried to see people. I didn't leave the house unless I was with Mike or one of the girls or my sister. It felt so important to feel safe and not see people. This one time I went to the local supermarket and I got down the first aisle and saw someone that I worked with. I literally had a panic attack and found the furthest corner in the store and hid there. My poor sister had to follow him around the store to make sure he was gone before I would move. I think that was when I realised I needed some help and sought therapy, although I don't look at it like I had therapy. I sat down with a woman and had a cup of tea, my version of a 'bath chat', although I definitely had my clothes on!

I remember something that the therapy taught me, the best advice I was given. My biggest fear was not being prepared if someone out and about asked me about Chloe and what had happened. She told me to prepare an answer a bit like a politician. So I prepared my answer, my story, and to be honest, I never needed it. But I remember the feeling of being prepared brought such a lightness, a weight was lifted. As well as realising it's personal and I didn't have to answer or tell people if I didn't want to.

The support I got meant I was able to return to work. Did I want to go back? No. But I knew if I didn't, I would never go back. I knew I needed to start taking steps forward again. My employers were great and set me up with a slightly different role within the company which worked well for both me and them. I also needed to go back to know that I didn't want to work anymore, you come to realise how short life is. Plus I think I still have so much fear that I could lose someone else I love, you know the worst thing has happened and it makes you so protective of your family.

I THINK THAT WAS WHEN I REALISED I NEEDED SOME HELP AND SOUGHT THERAPY, ALTHOUGH I DON'T LOOK AT IT LIKE I HAD THERAPY. I SAT DOWN WITH A WOMAN AND HAD A CUP OF TEA.

I keep myself safe. I don't make myself feel uncomfortable anymore. I did do a lot of overcompensating to make other people comfortable. I had to put on a brave face and make them feel okay, but it exhausted me. So, I don't do that anymore.

I have realised that grief and that journey is so personal. My journey is different to Mike's and different to the girls'. We still have the same loss, but we all deal with it so differently. So don't be too hard on yourself. And get that lock of hair. Also, it's so hard to plan a funeral for someone who wasn't meant to die. You'll be upset you got all the wrong songs, but don't beat yourself up about those things.

You might think it's just easier to stay in bed and pull the covers up and not wake up and not see anyone. But that's really hard, because whether you stay in bed or get up and face the world, it doesn't change what's happened. It's devastatingly sad.

We're three and half years down the line, and society thinks we should be done now. But that's not how it works. Sometimes you think and smile. Sometimes you go to a different place. Sometimes

you might want to sit on the sofa and not talk to anyone, sometimes you want to walk for miles. Go and do what helps you.

The most hurtful phrase is "time's a healer". It doesn't heal. But you learn to live with your grief. You can still go to bed crying and wake up crying. You can still think about her 100 times a day. There can still be that trigger music. There could be a date or a memory that comes to mind, the smell of her favourite perfume. You could be in a supermarket and see 'Reece's Cups', her favourite, and be taken somewhere. So, you learn to live with it. You have so much love to give, but they're not there. So, grief is love. That's a nice way to look at it. It's all your love which has nowhere to go. This is why grief should never stop.

When you think about what happens after, we're all different and everything's changed, but we've got so much to live for, and we can smile. You don't have to feel guilty about smiling or living your life. As a family we love talking about her, it makes me smile and it makes me cry, but it means she was there. We don't forget her and to me that's the most important thing.

A tribute to Jim
as told by his Wife



IN MEMORY OF JIM

I first met Jimmy when I was 19 and from the moment I met him it just felt right. We married three years later and our son Chris was born the following year.

Jim was a decorator by trade and could turn his hand to most things. He was a quiet, selfless and very kind man. I know it is easy to say these things when someone has gone, but he genuinely was all of those things and more. We enjoyed live music, being in nature and the simple things in life. Jim loved sea fishing and we had an allotment where we would spend a lot of time.

Although Jim was quiet he did surprise me sometimes. Whilst on holiday in Lanzarote, a Spanish musical trio were playing at a local restaurant and Jim just got up, picked up some maracas and joined them with a great big grin on his face.

The day Jim died was just an ordinary day. He got up for work and brought me up a cup of tea before kissing me goodbye. I can remember looking out of the window and seeing him walk along the road with his workbag over his shoulder.

THERE WAS AN ACTUAL PHYSICAL PAIN IN MY CHEST AND TUMMY, AS WELL AS TREMENDOUS SHOCK AND UPSET

I was working for the local authority at the time and was running a workshop that day so wasn't going to be home until early evening.

When I got in I remember thinking it was strange that Jim wasn't home but thought perhaps the trains were running late. I noticed that the answer machine was flashing and something prompted me to go and check it. There was a message from his boss Bill. He sounded very upset and said how sorry he was and then I heard Jim's name mentioned.

I immediately called him back. He told me there had been an accident. I asked him how Jim was and he said 'oh Michelle, he is dead'. Poor man had no idea I didn't know. The police had been trying to get hold of me but couldn't. I was amazed how calm I was, so calm in fact that Bill said 'you have heard what I just told you Michelle?'. I asked him where Jim had been taken but he didn't know.

Jim had fallen from height off a ladder whilst at work. Nobody had seen the fall so it was being treated as a criminal investigation. Despite the best efforts of the paramedics and doctors who had attended the scene, nothing could be done to save his life.

For me the hardest part was telling Chris. I called him and asked him to come over. He knew something was wrong straight away. I desperately wanted to see Jim but didn't know where he was or where to start looking for him. Chris is a police officer so thankfully knew who to contact, otherwise I am not sure what I would have done. Eventually we found

THE HOUSE JUST WASN'T THE SAME ANY MORE WITHOUT HIM

him. He was at a local mortuary in the area where the accident had occurred. Sadly we couldn't visit until the next day as it was late and it was closed. The waiting was extremely difficult. I just wanted to see him and be with him. It is hard to describe exactly how I felt. There was an actual physical pain in my chest and tummy as well as tremendous shock and upset.

We travelled up to London the next morning and on arrival at the mortuary were asked to wait before going in to see Jim. I had been told because a post-mortem needed to happen, I would be seeing Jim as he was brought in after the accident. His body was covered up to his neck by a cover which was attached to the

table. Jim still had blood on him, as well as tubes and his face was very swollen. It didn't look like my husband at all. I remember thinking if I could have looked at his hands I would have recognised those for sure.

Because of the investigation the police had to take all his possessions including his phone and it took a long while to get them back. When we did get them, some of the key items were missing. We had to go and collect them from the police station and when we got there, we were asked to wait outside in the street. Chris discreetly told the officer that this was not acceptable for me to receive my husband's possessions in this way in a clear plastic bag. The whole thing was just so difficult.

Communication throughout with the coroner's office was challenging and on top of this, the interim death certificate had a number of errors including the wrong date of death. I am very easy going but these things were not helpful and were extremely upsetting.

I was later provided with the chance to talk to the medical professionals and the health and safety team regarding the circumstances surrounding Jim's death. Even though this was painful I finally had some clarity and the answers I had been looking for. It was lovely to know he got the best care he could possibly have had to try and save him. For that I am very grateful.

GRIEF IS LIKE A SIMMERING POT: IT IS THERE ALL THE TIME BUBBLING AWAY AND EVERY NOW AND AGAIN IT BOILS OVER

Jim had agreed just six weeks before he died to finally retire and I too had requested early retirement. We had started to look at houses with a view to move by the sea. Sadly, this did not happen for Jim, but I decided to carry on with our plan as I know that is what he would have wanted. To be honest the house just wasn't the same any more without him there. It was a massive change as we had spent the whole of our married life in that house.

I wanted to help myself and to try and understand the grieving process. I had some counselling and read a book on grief, and I also found it really useful to meet someone else who had been through a similar circumstance.

It is good to keep busy, but I think it is very important to let the emotions out too. People say to be strong, but to me that is more damaging long term to your health, holding it all in. Chris and I agreed to be open and honest with each other about how we were feeling. Of course as a mother you want to protect your child but it did help us doing this. People mean to be kind

with advice but you must do what is right for you. For some time, I felt a sense of detachment, loss in confidence and anxiety. This would come and go. Someone said to me that grief is like a simmering pot, it is there all the time bubbling away and every now and again it boils over. It isn't always on special occasions like birthdays, it can happen anytime and there is no time limit to grief either. Knowing those things has helped.

I am positive and happy go lucky by nature and it felt strange being sad. Listening to music again was very painful but all these things do get easier. It is a big adjustment suddenly being on your own. It is almost like you have to re-programme yourself. I loved every part of being a whole family unit and I miss it. The dynamics do change.

I will always miss Jim. I do count my blessings and I am making a new life for myself. I have joined a choir, help out at an animal rescue centre and love my beach walks. It was only once he passed that I realised how precious our time here on this earth is.



A tribute to Saffie
as told by her
Mum and Dad



IN MEMORY OF Saffie

Lisa (Mum)

We were a normal family really, always together, never did anything apart. We worked together, living above the chip shop we owned. We were just always together. That's why we lived above the chip shop, so we didn't have to work far away from the kids. The kids were regulars in the shop, especially Saffie, mingling with the customers. Although believe it or not, they didn't even like chips!

Andrew (Dad)

Being together was our main focus as a family because you can easily get wrapped up in work and never see each other.

Lisa

Saffie loved being around people, she could not sit still. She had so much energy – constantly singing and dancing. Xander, her brother, would happily sit in his room, but Saffie had to be with people all the time. People have commented about how it felt like she'd 'definitely been here before' in that she just knew things and was wiser than her eight years.

Andrew

She was shy but she had a big personality that took her forward. She never held back. It's very hard to describe Saffie: in one way she was shy. She had a heart of gold, she would never hurt or upset anybody. But she knew who she was even at a young age. I admired how she held herself, she was beautiful from head to toe, but she didn't use it, she knew she had a presence.

Lisa

You'd watch her walk through a room and everyone would be talking to her. She was one of those people who people just gravitate towards - at eight! She used to frighten me to death how she had the ability to speak to anyone. She had no stranger danger, she had no fear, of anything. Which was scary for me.

Andrew

I remember once when we were in New York, we walked the legs off the kids and they were tired and hungry – particularly Saffie, as she loved her food. So, I said 'c'mon let's go back to the hotel and get a pizza'. We walked back but the restaurant didn't open for another half hour, we were starving! Next thing, Saffie got up and went over to the woman behind the counter. She told the lady we'd been walking the city all day and she was really hungry. Ten minutes later she was eating a pizza, yet the restaurant still hadn't opened!

Lisa

She was my shadow: she followed me everywhere. Sometimes if I had to nip to the shop, Andrew would tell me to tell Saffie even though it was just across the road. If she knew I had gone she'd be at the chip shop window crying, saying she couldn't believe I didn't take her with me.

Andrew:

We had a proper daddy/daughter relationship, but she was always Lisa's shadow.

Lisa

There was three years between Saffie and Xander and they were inseparable. She used to wind him up sometimes. I remember his first sleepover at a school friends house, we dropped him off and on the way home, Saffie sobbed her heart out. They would argue, but then they would be cuddling soon after. Her more than him, she'd hug him, and he'd tell her to get off. Typical brother/sister relationship.

She was very competitive and always had to win. If someone did 100 jumps on the po-go stick, she'd do 120. When Xander was learning the drums, she'd sit and do it straight away. She was good at everything and she was enthusiastic about everything. She wouldn't give up on anything.

Andrew

She had a can do attitude. She was a very special person. She was one of those people who you had to know to understand. There was just something about her. I always describe it like when you watch an actor or musician and as soon as they come on stage, they are captivating. There's no school in the world that can teach you that, you're just born with it. As a parent, her free-spirited nature used to worry me so much, but never failed to make me smile too.

Lisa

We'd always buy them equal amount presents. For the main present that Christmas we got them a games console and then we heard Ariana Grande was touring and thought, 'why don't we get tickets'. Saffie was mad about her. I didn't really want to get her the tickets as I thought she was a bit young to be going to concerts. Andrew said if she found out Ariana was playing in Manchester and we hadn't tried to get her tickets she would be devastated. So we got three tickets, one for my elder daughter too. It was going to be a girly night out, our first girly night out.

Andrew

When she opened that envelope she couldn't believe it, it was like a dream come true. On the night of the concert, as Saffie was so young and it was going to be busy, we had organised for someone to drop them off at the arena and then I would be there to pick them up. Once I knew they were inside I knew they were safe.

Lisa

We all had cat ears and Ariana t-shirts on. Saffie had asked to have her hair in a high ponytail like Ariana. I set her out her lovely pink converse boots with diamantes on and when we were leaving, I noticed she'd changed shoes. She'd put on these wedged boots instead, maybe to make herself look a bit taller. She loved shoes. She'd buy shoes over toys any day.

When Ariana Grande came on, Saffie was beside herself with excitement. To be fair I had little interest and if I could have got out of it, I would have. I only went along for a girly evening and for Saffie. Saffie was dancing around with Ashley, her older sister, having a great time. I remember filming it all.

As Ariana left the stage, I knew she was going to come back on for an encore, but Saffie didn't know this. I thought shall we try and get out ahead of everyone, but I knew Saffie would never forgive me. So, we stayed and sat it out. A few people were moving and getting up. Saffie said, 'aren't we going?' and I explained she was going to come back out. She did come back on and performed her main hit at the time. I cannot listen to that song now.

Then it finished and we started walking out. Ashley was ahead of us, and I remember Saffie pulling on my hand, trying to get out as quickly as she could. That was it, next minute, bang.

Then it just seemed like forever. I was in and out of consciousness, I was trying to stay awake. I just kept thinking keep your eyes open. I wanted to close them and go to sleep but I was willing myself not to. I kept thinking, Ashley was ahead, quite a way ahead of us, she'll be alright. But where's Saffie? I kept thinking about Saffie. I tried to move but I couldn't move. Nothing was moving at all. The only things I could move were my eyes. It seemed like forever just lying there. I kept thinking where are they? Where are they? Will they come? I remember lying there and then someone came and asked me what my name was and all I could say was Saffie. Look for Saffie. Sometime later I was moved, I remember my body rocking. Someone asked me my name and date of birth and I just said my age. That was it. I remember my jeans being cut off me and my jewelry being taken off, and that was it.

Andrew

I rang Lisa at 10:29pm – the detonation was just after that. That was when Ariana Grande was singing the last song. Xander and I were literally just outside the arena in the car and we also had our dog with us. We parked



about 20 yards outside the entrance and I told Lisa to let me know when they got out. The next minute we heard screams. Kids running everywhere, frenzied. We were just trying to work out what was going on. I thought maybe it was a fight at the time, I was trying to stop someone to ask what was happening, but they were hysterically just running past. I managed to speak to a lady, who was sobbing, and she said she didn't know what had happened but thought maybe either balloons had gone off and everyone's panicked, or maybe a bomb had gone off. I told to Xander grab the dog and we started walking towards the arena. When we got to the main entrance, it was just carnage. There must have been about 200 people on the floor injured. People in hysterics. We continued round the corner, where we spotted Ashley on the floor injured, in and out of consciousness. There were two trainee doctors with her, who said they thought it was a bomb. Ashley was talking and the doctors said she was injured but stable. The doctors said they would stay with her and so I went to look for Saffie and Lisa, from person to person on the floor. There was so much screaming and you couldn't see the actual person on the floor because of all the people around them. I had to go up really closely to each one to look and see if they were Lisa or Saffie. I remember approaching two police officers saying I was looking for my wife and daughter and they basically advised me to keep looking.

We walked around for a good hour looking at each person on the ground. I again managed to speak to a police officer who told me everyone was out of the arena, but some people had exited out the other side. I had tried ringing Lisa multiple times too, but the phone lines were dead. At this stage I knew they'd got caught up in it because of Ashley. Now I was faced with the reality of my loved ones being injured and missing.

Around an hour after detonation, a police officer suggested that I should try the hospitals as some of the injured had been taken there. At this point we went

back to Ashley who was still with the two doctors, they very kindly agreed to stay with her whilst we went to the hospital.

Xander and I arrived at the hospital around an hour later and parked outside A&E. I started asking staff outside the hospital for Saffie or Lisa, they said they had no one there

THERE'S NO RIGHT OR WRONG WAY TO DEAL WITH THIS

with those names. The ambulances were arriving and there were families crying and screaming. It was chaos.

They said they couldn't allow me inside but advised me to sit tight and they would let me know if they heard anything. So, we just sat there, in the car park opposite A&E.

Ambulances would arrive and I would approach them to see if it was either of them. All the time I was checking in with Craig, Ashley's boyfriend, who by now had made it to Ashley. We sat outside the hospital until around 03:40. It was at this point we managed to locate Lisa – she had been taken to another hospital in Manchester. We were hoping Saffie was with her, but the hospital confirmed that this was not the case.

When we arrived to see Lisa, we were met by two nurses and taken into a room. They confirmed that Lisa had been brought there and that the doctors would come to speak to me. I asked about Saffie but heartbreakingly, nobody knew anything. The doctors told me about Lisa's injuries and that they'd stabilised her but due to the severity of her injuries she would benefit from being moved to another more specialist hospital. They were talking about risk of spinal cord injury and amputation. Luckily Xander didn't hear this conversation, but now I had a very sick wife being transferred and a missing daughter.

At some point someone mentioned that some kids had been taken to local hotels. I knew I needed to be with my wife, but at the same time I needed to find my daughter. It was a complete nightmare. All I kept thinking was if she was in one of those hotels she would be absolutely petrified. We needed to find her. The police offered to call the hotels and a friend offered to physically go and check each hotel to allow Xander and I to stay with Lisa.



We arrived at the now third hospital at about 06:00 where we were greeted by two surgeons who had just finished operating on Lisa. They told us that they had carried out an operation to hopefully avoid her needing an amputation but only time would tell if it had worked. They told me that she had a foreign body in her spine and there was a chance she could be paralysed from the neck down. I went in to see her and stayed for what felt like five seconds. I couldn't look at her, she didn't look like Lisa, there were tubes everywhere. I went back out and just couldn't believe it, my wife was in a critical condition and our eight-year-old daughter was still missing. I was getting very frustrated, so I approached one of the detectives who was there at the hospital and said, 'listen, even if the worst has happened, she's somewhere. Either she's still in the arena or she'll be in a hospital or hotel by now. Either way someone should know, and I need to know'. It was at this point I was asked for a picture of Saffie.

The detective returned at about 11:30 and called me into a separate room. It was then that it was confirmed that Saffie had sadly died. I will never forget hearing those words. I knew I needed to tell Xander, who was outside, so I brought him in and sat him on my knee and told him she didn't make it. I remember after I told him he asked, 'what we do now?'. I said 'I really don't know'. It seems like from the moment I told him he just became a different person, like a switch flicked in him. He could write the perfect book on how to stay calm in your worst ever nightmare.

Lisa

It's almost as though he went from being a 12-year-old boy to a man in that exact moment.

Andrew

About 15:00 in the afternoon, once I had seen Lisa and received all the updates about her surgeries, I decided that Xander and I should go and see Ashley as I knew we needed to tell her about Saffie: I knew this wasn't a conversation to have over the phone. When I told Ashley she told me she knew something wasn't right, I think she knew before I told her. We just hugged.

We went home after that to get a change of clothes and attempt to get some sleep. On arrival home I couldn't believe what I was seeing. I could count seven media vans and over 30 people all outside the fish and

chip shop with radios and microphones. I remember someone had to physically move people aside so we could reach the front door. As soon as we went upstairs the first room I saw was Saffie's and I just looked at Xander and said: 'Shall we go back to the hospital?' He said yes, and we stayed there for the next three months. We never returned to our home.

We went back to the hospital and told them that we couldn't face going back home. The nurses were fantastic, they found a room for Xander and I on a neighbouring ward. It had two single beds. My dad flew over from Cyprus and there was dad in one and then me and Xander in the other. Other members of family slept on the floor in between.

When I finally went to bed that night, Lisa had 20% chance of surviving, 95% chance of being paralysed from the neck down and pretty much 100% chance of having an amputation of her hand and leg. It was touch and go. I went back to my room and had a large glass of vodka and tried to lie down with Xander to try and get him some sleep. At 02:00 there was a bang on the door, a nurse had two police officers there who wanted to speak with me. I thought Lisa had died. I was shaking when they sat me down, only for them to tell me that Saffie's picture was going to be on the front pages of the national newspapers in the morning. After 24 hours of hell, I had just fallen asleep and they thought it was important to wake me to tell me that. I understand their concern, but did I need to be woken at 02:00 to be told this? It felt very procedural.

We made it clear to the police that we didn't want to know anything about what Saffie went through, but again, procedure dictates they had to run everything past us that was likely to appear in the press. We didn't want to hear it, I lost count of the times we had to repeat this.

People had asked if I wanted to see Saffie, but I didn't want to see her. I feared seeing her like that would never leave me. Due to the ward location we had to walk past the shops with newspaper stands and every single newspaper had Saffie's face on it. I used to look at it and think only you would get yourself in every paper. The whole thing was just so surreal. I couldn't even begin to describe it. On one hand my heart and soul were with Saffie. On the other I had an 11-year-old son whose heart was broken but was still managing to squeeze my hand and smile at me. Lisa was still very unwell in ICU and Ashley was trying to recover in hospital. In the midst of it all, I was being contacted all the time by people who needed information, my signature and even Saffie's toothbrush. It was pandemonium.

I THINK PEOPLE ASSUME THAT WHEN SOMETHING LIKE THIS HAPPENS, A ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL APPROACH TO SUPPORT WORKS

IT FEELS IMPORTANT TO TAKE HER INTO THE FUTURE WITH US AND CELEBRATE HER FOR THE WONDERFUL LITTLE GIRL SHE WAS

I was advised to see a psychiatrist. I said I didn't want to, what can they give me? Can they bring my daughter back? No. Can they give me my wife back today? No. People were amazed by my strength, but I had to be strong. I didn't have an option. I had to for Xander. I never knew how I would react in a situation like this, and in truth, I don't think you will know what you want or need until it happens to you. You might want a hug, you might want a cry, you might want a private moment.

I met other families, whose loved ones had been at the arena, we didn't speak a lot we were just respectful of each other's grief. If you're injured, you need emergency treatment. If you go through something like this, it helps to be around or meet others who have experienced it.

Three weeks later they woke Lisa up. I knew I had to tell her, and I was dreading it.

Lisa

I thought I had died and was having awful dreams, like I couldn't get out. I thought I was in limbo. It was really horrible. I didn't want to fall asleep. People

don't talk about that, but it's horrendous. These big black clouds would come towards me, like a horror film nightmare. I remember waking up and Andrew was sat next to me. He had my hand and I looked at him. He asked me something and I just looked at him and I thought why is he not mentioning Saffie?

I said 'she's gone hasn't she'. I just knew. I knew straight away.

It sounds strange but I always knew Saffie wasn't mine. Not biologically I don't mean it like that, but I always felt like she didn't belong to me, like she was lent to me. I always knew she would never always be mine. Faith comes into it a little bit. Something or someone wanted her more maybe. My other two, they were normal children, but she, I don't know maybe it was her personality. It's difficult to describe.

Andrew

She was a special character, a special person. When I was walking around the arena, I was thinking it can't be her, because she can't die, because she's too special for the world.

IT WAS NOT THE SYSTEM, BUT HUMAN KINDNESS INSTEAD THAT WORKED AND LEFT INDELIBLE MEMORIES

We were offered psychological support, but I was keen to keep Xander with me. I was happy if he wanted to engage with anything offered to him. He had an initial session but said he didn't find it helpful and didn't want to go back. We met a child bereavement charity who asked Xander what things he enjoyed doing. Soon after they returned with a big screen and I left him to play video games. I remember being nervous to leave him, but when I came to pick him up, he said 'you're back quick'. It was then I knew that it was helping. So, every day we would give him the opportunity to escape it all and go and spend time playing video games.

I WAS THINKING IT CAN'T BE HER, BECAUSE SHE CAN'T DIE, BECAUSE SHE'S TOO SPECIAL FOR THE WORLD

The first few months were unbelievable. The thing that kept me going was the incredible ICU team, they were heartfelt and kind. It was not the system, but human kindness instead that worked and left indelible memories.

We spent nearly four years from 2017 telling ourselves 'the bomb went off and Saffie shut her eyes'.

We thought that Saffie had died at the time of detonation. It later transpired that she was alive for a long period of time. To know that she was alive, speaking and asking for Lisa is devastatingly painful. It's clear Saffie fought for her life, until the very last second. Saffie died of blood loss, not one of her injuries was life threatening in isolation. Knowing this makes me want to do good, to change the world. I want to give our little girl justice, for what she did that night to try and stay alive.

Saffie's determination to stay alive that night is what now drives us to want to make a difference for those affected by terrorist attacks. People message me on social media all the time saying they don't have anyone to go to and I try and do a good job advocating. For four years I've tried, but it's very hard. I nearly had a nervous breakdown because people kept letting me down. All I wanted was a legacy for Saffie.

Obviously, our experience was part of a wider tragedy. I think people assume that when something like this happens, a one-size-fits-all approach to support works. It's so wrong, because although we all share the same experience, we are 22 families, made up of individuals from different backgrounds, who have different beliefs. I think we were expected to feel and react the same. We often all had differing opinions on what works for us and that's okay, because what works for us as a family has nothing to do with anyone else.



WE LIVE FOR HER. WE'RE CARRYING ON OUR LIVES FOR HER.

I would say that whatever your feelings or thoughts are, they're not right or wrong. You might feel like killing yourself, drinking or screaming, like you're losing your mind. You're going to experience feelings that you've never experienced before and you've got to understand that it's okay to feel that way. Other things around you are going to get you through the minutes of the day, to the point where days will pass. Not for things to get better, but for you to get to a point where you can start to process what's happened. You've got to allow those feelings to embrace you, however hard that is, and you have to give that time. Not for time to be a healer but for it to allow you to work out what you need to do from then on.

Lisa

There was a point where I wanted to die, and I was at peace with that. I didn't want to be here anymore. But then I started thinking about how this would impact my family and I knew I couldn't leave them and put them through more pain. I went to see my doctor and I said, 'I'm not depressed, I'm just overwhelmingly sad'. Looking back, I think it's normal to feel like this, it was about wanting to escape the feeling of sadness.

I have come to realise that not thinking of her won't happen. So, I have had to accept that I'm going to feel like this forever. Because this is my life from now on and I wouldn't have Saffie not in my life. So, this is how I want it to be.

You do have the fear of people thinking you've moved on. I have a couple of friends who visit often, so they know me. They talk about Saffie, whereas others won't. We've made up a bedroom for Saffie in our new home. From time to time, we change it round, so

that it reflects the things she would like as a teenager. To some people it might sound bizarre or not right, but those kinds of people have never lost an eight-year-old daughter. You've got to do what is best for you.

Andrew

We don't keep the room like a shrine. When friends stay, they stay in Saffie's room. People stay in it all the time, she'd love that. We live for her. We're carrying on our lives for her.

Lisa

The first for everything is hard. There will always be those first times. It's the other losses you lose. The 16th, the prom, the 21st, the wedding. All of those.

You have to try and channel a negative into a positive. Like building a puzzle, putting those pieces back. When you look at a puzzle, it's never perfect because there are those lines across it, but putting it together anyway really helps.

There's no right or wrong way to deal with this. I found I have to take each minute, hour and day as it comes. The turning point for me was to accept that this pain is with me forever and that's okay. I'm okay with that, I want it with me forever because I want Saffie with me forever.

I have realised now you do come to learn to live with the sadness, you just know how you're going to feel sometimes and accept it's okay to be sad. We do laugh and we do cry. We make plans for Saffie's birthday – for her 18th we are going to go to New York. Xander will be 21 that year. It feels important to take her into the future with us and celebrate her for the wonderful little girl she was.

A tribute to Dave
as told by his Wife



IN MEMORY OF DAVE

I met Dave in July 1984 on a girl's night out at a pub in Stratford. We locked eyes and a conversation started up about our love of old music. I had been dating someone else for a while but when I met Dave I just thought 'this is how it should be'. After seven years together we had our first baby, Layla. I was expecting again a short while later with twins, Tom and Fay. We bought a house, the same house I still live in today.

Dave loved life, he was a joker, always playing tricks, and teasing and tormenting friends and family. There was always laughter when he was around. He would often hide the television remote when visiting his brother, or tie his boot laces into 1,000 knots, or wear big silly hats and glasses. He had a massive cowboy hat, which he wore once to collect his nephews from school – their classmates asked "Is he a real cowboy?!" He would pick our kids up from school and bring them back home with friends all sitting in a trailer attached to the back of a car. They loved it. He was a brilliant dad, encouraging and supporting his children in all their pursuits. He was just so proud of them.

With Dave everything was spur of the moment, seizing life at every chance he could. He loved music, nature, animals, family and of course motorbikes. If he was here now, the jukebox would be on and we would have a glass of wine in our hand; every day was a party for him and we were all invited, the more the merrier.

He worked hard and always supported his family, but never wanted work to get in the way. He would rather spend quality time with his family and friends, and he couldn't wait for us to both retire. People knew he was a skilled motor mechanic and would often knock on the door asking to see him for advice and help on any odd jobs they had. He wasn't materialistic; he wore broken glasses with tape wrapped around them, secondhand clothes and

had a very old-style mobile phone. To him money didn't matter, people and life did.

Later in his life, he and his friends starred in a parody of 'The Fully Monty', called 'The Fraud Monty'. It was so funny, they toured across Europe and it really was good fun. I even mentioned it in his eulogy, saying 'maybe some of you here saw a bit more of Dave than you bargained for!'. That was the kind of man he was, always wanting to make people laugh and enjoy themselves. He would say it's about the quality of life, not the quantity.

That Thursday, Tom had been off work, so Dave suggested that they go to the gym together as he liked to help Tom keep fit for his rugby. He decided to take the bike – Dave loved his bikes and always had done. Apart from his family, the pride

and joy in his life was his Harley Davidson, which he loved to ride around. As they left, I was about to cut the grass, when Dave told

**THE REALISATION THAT DAVE
WOULD NEVER WALK BACK INTO
THIS HOUSE SUDDENLY HIT ME
AND I SCREAMED**

me that cutting the grass was his job and he would do it when he got back, he said 'If you cut that grass today, I will never cut it again.' How true that statement would turn out to be.

Whilst on the way to the gym with Tom, a pickup truck changed lanes and clipped the back of a car, which sent it spinning off course, directly into the path of Dave and Tom, hitting them head on.



I was still in the garden when a friend came running to the back gate, shouting my name, saying her husband had driven past the accident and recognised the Harley Davidson as Dave's. She was able to tell me that Tom had suffered leg and arm injuries, but nobody could get to Dave, because the emergency response teams were working on him. Then the police arrived and took me to the hospital where they would be taking Dave and Tom. We still had no idea how injured they both were.

I arrived in the relatives' room without any family, accompanied by a policeman. He asked if I wanted to call anyone, but I said no because I thought it would just be a case of a few broken bones. Then a doctor came in and said 'we're fighting for your husband's life'. That's when I realised how serious the situation was. I then called family and word got round. There were 23 of us in the ED relatives' room. We were in the room for hours and hours, although we didn't know the time, nothing felt real. I had seen Tom and knew he had broken bones but was going to be ok, so my thoughts went to Dave.

After a while a doctor walked into the relatives' room, accompanied by a nurse, and immediately I could tell from the look on their faces that it was bad news. 'I am very sorry to tell you that we couldn't save him'. Dave's sister screamed, but I just stayed calm and said 'okay, thank you', it felt like a dream, then we all just sat there in that room.

They asked me if I wanted to see Dave, but I said no, because I didn't feel strong enough and my legs were like jelly. It was like I had been hit with a wrecking ball. It was all so surreal, one minute he was alive riding his Harley and the next minute I was being asked if I wanted to see his body. We all just sat there in shock, until I said, 'we better go home then'.

Once home, I walked through the front door and the realisation that Dave would never again walk back into this house, our home, suddenly hit me, and I screamed and let out a hysterical cry. The hospital is an alien environment and it was easy to compartmentalise there, but this is our house and he's never coming home again.

Two days after the accident, Tom had had his operation and was recovering on a ward, so I knew it was time for me to tell him that Dave had died. Tom just looked at me and said 'I know mum, every time I ask someone they avoided the question, and I could hear what was going on next to me and what the medics were saying when they brought us in.' Within 48 hours I had told my three children on three separate occasions that their dad had died. Looking back, I just wonder where I got my strength from.

Because of the potential of a post-mortem, which didn't end up happening, it was two weeks before Dave's body was taken to the Chapel of Rest. The funeral was five weeks after he died. We knew there would be lots of people attending because he was such a big character and so well liked. There was about 300 people paying their respects. Dave was a big West Ham fan and at his funeral someone's phone went off and it was playing 'I'm forever blowing bubbles'; I didn't mind that at all, I thought Dave would have loved it. We had no black at the funeral – Layla wore a Rolling Stones T shirt, Tom wore his West Ham shirt and Fay wore a Woody Guthrie T shirt. Everyone dressed appropriately, wearing Elvis T shirts, tops with guitars on, leather biker jackets etc. They were swapping stories about funny things that they remembered about Dave.

In terms of the practical things, my sister did all the sorting out for me, pages and pages of probate forms and lots of communication with the police and statements to be prepared for court. Then years of dealing with the solicitors. We only had an interim death certificate for months and so I couldn't sort out Dave's pension, until the formal certificate came through 10 months after his death, which took endless phone calls to get.

I FEEL THAT I WILL NEVER BE TOTALLY HAPPY IN MY LIFE, NO MATTER WHAT IS HAPPENING OR WHAT LOVELY THINGS ARE GOING ON, AS THERE WILL ALWAYS BE SOMEONE MISSING

I feel that I will never be totally happy in my life again, no matter what is happening or what lovely things are going on as there will always be someone missing. I hate going anywhere where there are couples because I am on my own now. When we were out, Dave would always be at the bar with his friends and I would be dancing, then when I came off the dance floor, he would be there with a drink for me. Now when I go out, if I am dancing, and step off that dance floor, there's nobody there for me anymore. I just think, 'Where do I go now?' My base has gone. If someone said to me, 'you can go to your best place in the

world, you can have your favourite food and listen to your best music', it still wouldn't be enough to make me happy. Some people want to find another partner when their loved one dies and that's fine, but I don't think so, not for me, no one would ever match up to Dave, I had the best. My family and friends are my life now.

When Dave died, I couldn't change the bed sheets for a long time, because I couldn't bear to lose the smell of him and his body had touched those sheets. I washed some of his clothes and then I wished I hadn't. I wanted to keep as much of him as I could. He had a big pile of junk in the back garden that I had moaned about, so when he died, my sister made it nice and neat, and I ended up crying and asking her to move it all back into a mess again because I just didn't want to change anything that reminded me of him.

Initially I would only watch television programmes that he used to watch, to feel closer to him. Music was very hard to listen to, especially songs that reminded me of Dave, even now music can still really get to me. When he first died, I would go to make a cup of tea and I would get two cups out of the cupboard, before remembering that I only need one now. Then gradually you think before reaching for the cups, and now I always just take the one out. It's a gradual process. I used to go shopping and reach for his favourite beer and even look on the shelves for items he liked. You have to almost retrain your brain and your body completely. I always have to have the television on or the radio as I can't bear the silence in the house.

I would encourage people to talk about how they feel – it's like having a knot in your stomach and when you talk about it, it's like that knot loosens a bit. It doesn't go away, and it will get tighter again, but it really does help to talk about Dave and how much I miss him, every time I do the knot gets looser. I know it's better to have loved and lost than never loved at all. I just am sad that I will grow old on my own now.

I don't feel that I could ever leave this home that we lived in together; I am very attached to it. I enjoy the memories and seeing him in my mind dancing by the jukebox and outside his garage when he had his music on. Neighbours were always knocking on the door, friends and family coming round, it was like Piccadilly Circus in this place. Everyone says it's a really happy and welcoming house. But sometimes I do like those calm nights by myself, I'm getting a bit older now and having some quiet time to myself can be a blessing.

**I WOULD ENCOURAGE
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They call it baby steps and it really is like that. You wake up in the morning and you have no plans, so you sit back and think, 'right, what am I going to do today then?' Then you might call a friend or see the kids. Then you go to bed at the end of the day, and just keep repeating that cycle until you start to feel a little bit stronger, and capable of planning for more than one day at a time. The support does tend to die down after a while, at the start everyone is there and helping and offering all sorts of things, but eventually people end up getting on with their own lives. You must accept all the practical help and try to keep busy. See people as much as you can.

When you have children, your priority in life is looking after them and caring for them when they are sad or unwell, whatever they need you are their parent and are there for them. But this is a pain that I can't help them with; I can't just take it away. To see them in pain, grieving and suffering is one of the hardest things. You're hurting for yourself and your own loss, but you're also hurting for your children. Grief is very different for everyone, even within your own family; I lost my partner, but the kids lost their dad, Dave's siblings lost their brother. His mum lost her son, it's different feelings for all of us.

When there's a sudden death it's even more unbelievable because Dave was so fit and healthy, the loss was out of the blue. Your life changes forever. Whenever there are any happy family moments, they are tinged with sadness because Dave should be here for them and sharing them – he should be here for all our futures.

Sometimes I do have regrets, like on the days when he would say 'Oh let's go out for the day' and I said no because we had jobs to do at home and I put obstacles in the way. I wish I had done those things with him now, but who knew what was round the corner. I try and enjoy the life I have now, it's not what we planned or hoped for, but it's mine and I still have it. It's what Dave would have wanted for me. He was never looking forward to getting old and we will always remember him as he was and not as an old man. If you had ever asked him 'how do you want to leave this world?' he would have told you 'riding my Harley Davidson'!

A tribute to Joe
as told by his
Mum, Dad and Sister



IN MEMORY OF JOE

Celia (Mum)

Joe was a lovely boy. He was very funny and very kind: he cared for people. He loved animals, especially our dogs. When he was younger, he was terrible at doing his homework, he would always leave everything to the last minute, but he was one of those people who would always manage to get it done and excel. He always managed to pull it out of the bag and get good grades. He was that sort of person. He was also a very charming person with a really cheeky face, quite loveable and affable and consequently, he had lots and lots of friends.

Ivan (Dad)

He could get on with people. He wouldn't have survived nine years working for Global Radio Stations if he couldn't get on with people.

Celia

He wasn't hugely athletic, he would play tennis, but he wasn't very good at it. When he was about 12, he stepped in to help his friend in a tournament and they won. The people who were expected to win were really annoyed. That was Joe, he succeeded at most things he put his mind to.

Ivan

Whilst at Capital, Joe won multiple awards including a 'TRIC' award for Producer of the Best UK Radio Programme, which is a highly coveted radio and television award. We collected all these awards in a cabinet in our living room, not as a memorial, it's just where we put them.

Celia

He was incredibly hard working in fact a bit of a workaholic really. He should have taken more annual leave, but he wouldn't because he was always busy working on something. He'd worry about getting the show absolutely right. He was very meticulous in that respect.

Ivan

Whilst studying Psychology and Management at Leeds University, he joined the university radio station and found he quite enjoyed it. He reported on sports at the university and did the first ever live radio broadcast for them from a rugby game between two professional Leeds teams. He was always thinking of new ideas and pushing boundaries.

When he came back to London, he applied for an internship rotating between the Global radio stations. He was very soon offered a job as his employers really liked him. It was hard work and long hours, but he loved it.

Joe also did his MA in Radio Production and Journalism at Goldsmiths University of London, because he wanted to know more about media law and what you can and can't do on radio. He always strived for the best and in doing so ensured his work was of the highest standard.

Joe worked his way up to become the Senior Creative Producer of the Capital Radio Breakfast Show, presented by Roman Kemp. He and Joe had a great connection. Roman hadn't done radio at all when he joined Capital and Joe really helped him in those early days. At the beginning, it was just the two of them on the Evening Show and this led to a very close presenter/producer alliance. I think that's where the persona "Producer Joe" was formed: they had banter. Joe worked hard to ensure the show was successful, often writing scripts as well as constantly thinking of fun and interesting topics for the show. It's a hard job being the producer of a show. You have to think of new things as you can't just repeat the same themes or topics.

Louisa (Sister)

We all describe him as a genius in his own right. I didn't fully appreciate the level at which Joe operated from, especially because he always underplayed it. He always made it seem like anyone could do it, but it was so far from that.

I NEVER THOUGHT FOR ONE MOMENT IT WAS GOING TO BE SUICIDE

Celia

Joe did quite a bit of travelling. One of his last holidays, in 2019, with one of his friends Olly, they hired a red sports car and travelled on an American coastal road trip. They had a fantastic time and got up to all sorts of things with a car that kept breaking down. Olly was shocked when he heard what happened, he said “we had such a great holiday, there had been nothing to indicate there was anything wrong at all”. However, because of COVID-19, he had to cancel holidays to Venice with Ivan and Lou, and trips with friends to Italy and Germany.

Louisa

Obviously, we're each other's only siblings and there was a six-year age gap, so I was the annoying younger sister, and he was the cooler older brother. We were quite cute as kids, there are lots of pictures of us hugging, but I don't remember that. As teenagers, if I walked in to watch tv with him, he'd say “get out, we can't watch tv together because you're annoying”. We'd prank each other too. We had dog crates when we had puppies and so we'd do the classic prank of ‘I bet you can't fit in the crate’ and then lock each other in. It wasn't until he went to uni that I started to miss him and realised he wasn't as annoying as I thought he was.

After some years of doing our own thing, he suggested that we live together in London because financially it made sense. I'm so grateful we had those two years before he passed away. I've now lived in the flat on my own longer than with him which is weird considering we bought it together. He was very cheeky growing up. He got away with a lot, but he'd say the same about me as I was the youngest. You could never get angry at him. We would never shout or argue or fight. He would give the impression of being laid back but in hindsight, you'd realise he'd fixate on things, especially with work. Attention to detail was his strength.

Joe also loved trying new things. He would go through phases, almost like a bucket list. In lockdown he bought a banjo. Thankfully it was a very short-lived phase. Another one was playing spoons. He bought specific spoons to do that and taught himself to play. So many random things.

Celia

After he died, we realised how much he compartmentalised things. He had kept all his friends together in their groups. College friends, uni friends, he kept them all separate. All his friends met each other for the first time on his 30th birthday. He was so stressed about them all meeting each other, goodness knows why. That was one of the things that came out after his death, how he'd kept all his friends in different compartments. Which was strange because some of them already knew each other.

Louisa

I remember at Joe's 30th – which he only invited me to because we lived together – everyone came up to me jokingly touching me to check I was real, as they had never met me before.

Celia

We feel now, what we didn't realise then is that he obviously suffered from anxiety. We just put it down to tiredness, or that was just Joe, but obviously there was more to it than that. Looking back, we think maybe the writing was on the wall and we just didn't see it. When you're close to someone you sometimes don't see the bigger picture.

We always asked him if everything was okay. He would always say everything was fine.

Ivan

Everything seemed to be in place for him. He was happy in the flat and things were good at work.

Celia

He had lots of plans for the future. On the back of his bedroom door, he had a plan of all the things he wanted to do, his to-do list. It's still there now.

Ivan

COVID-19 really changed things. Suddenly, like most people, Joe had to work from home, which meant doing some live radio shows from his flat. We noticed that he was getting more tired than usual and he started cancelling things. Looking back now we think there must have been something going on. He was the only one of the Breakfast Show team that had worked at Global for nine years and there was a lot of pressure building up.

In addition, I was having cancer treatment at the time, which meant I had to self-isolate, but he knew I was improving. It was very hard not seeing Joe as regularly as we had done previously.

Celia

What people have said to us is that they could talk to Joe about most things, but if you got too close to a subject he didn't like, he would immediately shut it down or change the subject.

Louisa

He would do that to me. Because I was six years younger, I always felt like I needed to be guided by him to know what was right or wrong in our sibling relationship. Like I would never hug him because I thought I'm the geeky younger sister and he'll think that's weird. Then I remember a time when he broke up with his girlfriend and a few weeks later I asked him if he would have appreciated a hug and he said, “well yeah that would have been nice”. But I didn't know that at the time because that's not what we did. I didn't think he would want a hug.

It was difficult to get him to open up, so as soon as he did you just had to go with it, otherwise you'd miss your chance. Once he talked about mental health with me after he'd broken up with his girlfriend just before Christmas. He was really struggling and said he wanted to go to the flat on his own to think about things. When I got back, we chatted and he told me he had been to see the doctor because he couldn't sleep well. Now I realise a lot of it has to do with chemical imbalances. Now and then after that, I would ask him about it, but he'd just say he didn't want to talk about it. And he never went back to the doctor. That was the only time he opened up to me on that level. He definitely didn't want people to worry about him. He would tell me off for worrying about him.

Celia

Looking back, you'd say to Joe “how are you, are you okay?” and he'd say, “yes I'm fine” but I think what he was actually saying is “no I'm not fine but I don't want to talk about it.”

Louisa

The last time I saw Joe was on the Friday. I had left the flat to see some friends, I was anxious because Joe was at work all day and I was worried I wasn't going to see him before I left for the weekend. Which is weird because I often wouldn't see him,

but for some reason I was anxious this time round. When he got home, I told him I was going out for a few days and he said, “I'll see you when I see you”. I remember closing the door and stopping outside the flat as I had this feeling that all I wanted to do was tell him I loved him. I had never had that before as it was not something we did. I considered going back and telling him, but I thought he'd think I'm really weird, so I didn't. The last thing he said to me was therefore “see you when I see you” and that's a strange phrase. Of course, you overanalyse all these things afterwards.

The weekend came and went, I was at Mum and Dad's that Monday working from home. I needed to sort out the energy bill so I rang Joe to get the meter readings from the flat. We were all sat around the table when I rang him and he gave me the reading. I asked him if he was okay because he sounded a little quiet and he said he was fine. Then I said do you want to speak to Mum and Dad and he said no he was fine. I said I'll be back tomorrow, which again is something I never would normally detail. He said, “I miss you, love you” and I said “Oh Joe, I miss you too, I'll see you tomorrow.”

Celia

On Tuesday morning he didn't turn up for work, they called him, and he didn't pick up. So, thinking Louisa was in the flat, they called her, this was around 8am. Once they realised she wasn't in London they said they would send someone round to the flat.

Louisa

One of his colleagues had messaged me on social media to say Joe hadn't come in. It was about 7am and the radio show started at 6:30am. It was completely out of character for him. Joe would normally be in an hour before. I didn't see the message until 8am when I woke up to the phone calls. I remember telling mum, but I didn't tell dad as I didn't want him to panic.

Celia

I wasn't anxious about it, that's what was so strange. I just thought he'd overslept. But Louisa was worried, she wanted to get in the car and go straight to the flat. I said, “no we can't, someone is going round, it'll take too long for us to get up there.”

Louisa

Dad was outside watering the plants whilst mum was doing some ironing. But I was so anxious I took my laptop and sat at the front of the house. Then I saw the police car. I screamed and ran to the front door.

I know the police officer probably gets it all the time, but I just started crying at her.

Ivan

I just thought they had come to the wrong house.

Celia

As she came down the steps I just knew. I said to her "You're not going to tell me my son is dead? You can tell me he's in hospital, but I don't want to hear he's dead." I was almost physically pushing her away. She was very calm and she established our names to make sure she had the right people. Then she brought us inside and said those words you never want or expect to hear:

"I'm so very sorry, but your son was found dead in his flat this morning". She didn't know why; she couldn't give us any details.

Ivan

The police in London were dealing with it, so she didn't have any details. She was from Surrey Police.

Celia

We didn't want her to leave, so we asked her to stay. She chatted with us, and we told her about Joe. We thought maybe he'd slipped in the bathroom and banged his head, or maybe choked on some food or something. I never thought for one moment it was going to be suicide. That never crossed my mind.

Louisa

She took witness statements from us too; while we were talking, she was taking notes.

Celia

It was only later in the afternoon when the police in London phoned us that they explained how he'd been found, on the floor, with a ligature round his neck.

Louisa

It turns out his colleague found him. She stayed with him throughout, holding his hand until the police arrived. I can't imagine just how difficult that was for her, but we are and always will be so grateful to her for staying with him.

We were desperate to understand what had happened, it was a challenge to get any information from the police. So, I ended up trying to investigate things myself, like sourcing the CCTV from the flat to make sure no one else was involved.

Celia

The police took his laptop and phone and kept them for about three months.

Louisa

He had a work laptop, a personal one and a phone and they kept all of that. We sent as many passwords as we could think of to them to help access the devices. In the end they gave us back the laptops and phones, but they warned us we might find something which might upset us. I told them we were well past that point by then and it was causing us more anguish not being able to look. It was very frustrating.

Celia

A lot of our interaction with the police felt very disjointed, which made an already difficult situation feel a lot worse. We ended up doing a lot of our own detective work, with the help of some great friends.

Louisa

We didn't know the password to his devices which had all his photos. To access the devices, I was told we needed a court order which would have meant finding a solicitor to help us.

I fortunately somehow finally managed to access one of the devices and reset the password, so we got access to his photos. You don't realise the lengths that you have to go through to access simple things like photos. Now as a family we have a list of passwords in case anything happens.

Celia

You have all this admin to do, alongside grieving and post-mortems and inquests. It is horrendous. You've also got to start cancelling things like mobile phone contracts and we found everyone at the other end of the phone unhelpful. It often felt like they didn't know how to help or it wasn't in their remit to do so.

Ivan

There's no standard procedure. Except for state-related matters, such as pensions and benefits, those things



seem to stop almost immediately. There seems not to be a similar process to cancel a phone contract. There was a lot of back and forth because you end up speaking to different people all the time.

We couldn't register the death before the inquest which meant there was a few months where it felt like everything came to a standstill and no one was prepared to do anything. We got an interim death certificate, but some companies accepted it and some didn't. You would have thought that any form of death certificate would be enough.

Celia

In those early days, after Joe died, lots of people visited us. Work found out first, then word just spread rapidly. It was also on the radio and then it was in the papers. We had a newspaper reporter round here a few days later. He came to the house and knocked on the door with his pen and notebook. We knew instantly he was a reporter. You could tell he felt embarrassed even being here.

Ivan

With the coroner's office, it's very procedural, you never have contact with the coroner. It goes through an officer who deals with the family and then once you have the death certificate, which took three to four months for us, you then speak to a different officer for the inquest. You deal with two coroner officers.

We asked the police if we could see Joe in the hospital, but they said we couldn't. They told us because of COVID-19, we were only allowed to see him once he'd been collected and brought to the funeral home.

The only time we saw the coroner was on video at the inquest. We never spoke or saw her before that. She read the post-mortem results out on video. It was very detailed and it was really hard hearing the information. The conclusion of the inquest was that Joe took his own life.

Celia

Those first few weeks/months were difficult. We weren't sure what Joe wanted, as it was something we had never talked about. Did he want to be buried? Did he want to be cremated?

We had to go back to the flat and choose clothes for him to be buried in. I couldn't bear the thought of him being cremated. I couldn't go down that route with Joe.

I CALL THEM GRIEF ATTACKS. YOU NEVER KNOW WHEN THEY'RE GOING TO COME.

We decided to have him buried at the small church around the corner from our home. It's on a National Trust trail, so people walk through and stop and read the gravestones. It has fields all round it with horses and sheep. Then you have a pub opposite so a lot of his friends will come down for a walk, visit Joe and have a drink. They always stop to pay their respects to Joe. We have a bench there too, in front of where he is. Other people sit there too when they're visiting the graves. It's very peaceful there and I know Joe would approve of the pub being opposite!

As Joe died in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, organising his funeral with restrictions still in place was really difficult. For instance, we weren't allowed to have it inside the church. It had to be outside for only 30 people.

We couldn't hug outside the 'covid-bubbles' or shake hands. I did worry someone would get covid from the funeral, but no one did and it was all okay.

THEY SAY ONE SUICIDE DEATH AFFECTS APPROXIMATELY 150 PEOPLE BECAUSE OF THE RIPPLE EFFECT

Because the funeral was so restricted, a year later we held a memorial service for him, with about 150 people as some restrictions were still in place. It was 90 minutes long, recorded and available to others on zoom, people said such wonderful things about him.

We held the reception at the pub, round the corner from the church, and we even had a mariachi band

ALWAYS ASK ARE YOU OKAY TWICE come and play for free – Joe had helped their career and they wanted to do something. That day was also our 40th wedding anniversary. It was a lovely and moving day. Everyone had a good time. I am sure Joe was there in spirit.

Louisa

It was nice that we were able to do that. I think after a year, a lot had changed, so lots of people were able to get some closure from that. It was a good chunk of time to come back together to pay respects to Joe and to celebrate his life.

Ivan

As time goes on, you ebb and flow. Sometimes you're in control and sometimes you're not. For instance, one of Joe's friends did a Joe's Buddy Line charity football match at a Premiership Football Club. I thought it was a great idea and I was ready for it. At the end of the match, they asked me to do a little speech about Joe and the charity in his legacy, but a few minutes in, I started crying. It hit me out of nowhere. Louisa had to take over my script.

Celia

I call them grief attacks. You never know when they're going to come. Sometimes they last just a minute and sometimes an hour or two. Sometimes they last for a few days. It's just the way it is.

Louisa

Obviously, it's incredibly sad and our lives will never be the same. What helps is that Joe had such a lovely network of people. They stay in touch and pay such lovely tributes to him, and I know not everyone would have that – it was because of Joe and his extended network through his job. We're really grateful for that. The charity would definitely not have the presence it has if it wasn't for Joe. It's nice because through it we've met a lot of his friends we otherwise wouldn't have met and heard stories we wouldn't have heard.

Celia

The reason we chose schools as the main impact point for the charity was because we realised there was little education about mental health in schools. We wanted education for the whole school family to be the starting point: be proactive instead of reactive. There didn't seem to be a charity or organisation that was mainly focused on that.

Ivan

We started doing new things and soon people were coming to us for opinions as well as advice. We started having discussions with bigger organisations and the momentum has just grown and grown. For instance, we have garnered interest from an international publisher who is going to do a Joe Buddy book – a mental health book for schools. That's just started and will take about a year, but it came from nowhere. It will be great if we can use the book to extend the reach of Joe's Buddy Line and what we are trying to achieve.

Celia

Joe would always call people Buddy. He'd always say, "Hey Buddy, how are you doing?". Hence the name Joe's Buddy Line.

Ivan

The charity wouldn't be in the position it is now without Roman Kemp. He does a lot of PR work, including giving talks about mental health and wellbeing. He uses his platform, as do his parents, to promote the work of Joe's Buddy Line which really helps with the fundraising aspects.

Celia

"Always ask are you okay twice" came out of a BBC documentary Roman did when he travelled around the UK and Ireland and spoke to youngsters who had lost a friend. They said that's their rule now, they ask once but ask at the end of the conversation again. Always ask twice, just to check.

Louisa

Every grief is unique. I knew someone who lost a brother and her coping mechanism was running. She set up a network for runners in tribute to her brother and it was nice to chat to her. After Joe died, I didn't know what to do in terms of losing a sibling, so I looked up Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SOBS). They have a forum which is broken down by who you have lost. I followed the sibling part and even now I still get notifications when people share their stories.

I wrote a post once, but mostly I just read other peoples. It is sad to see another bereavement from a sibling point of view, but it was informative and helped me understand my loss.

Initially I shut down to anyone who didn't know Joe. I didn't want to speak to anyone who didn't know Joe. I just wanted to speak to people who knew him and who had stories to share. I got quite selfish I think, I just wanted to know more about my brother.

They say one suicide death affects approximately 150 people because of the ripple effect.

Just hearing Joe's stories was what I wanted. I also had it in my head that my responsibility was mum and dad, and I just wanted to look after them.

I think I was introverted with my grief, whereas mum showed her grief. You would know I was having a sad day because I would go to the gym or for a drive or would go quiet, because I didn't want to show it. I preferred it that way because I didn't really want to talk about it.

We all had bereavement counselling individually. Dad and mum did six sessions and I stayed with Cruse Bereavement for about a year. I found comfort in the counsellor's voice as it was all done over the phone due to COVID-19.

Celia

Now, when people talk about children and ask how many I have, it can be very tricky. I have to say I have a son, but if I do, then I have to explain that he's passed away and then have to go into how he did. I have to be open about it, but it's heart breaking every time.

It's a very strange one, because I don't want to deny his existence – that would be awful and unthinkable – but what do I say?

Ivan

We have found a lot of comfort in our family and friends who have been of great support. They would come round in twos or threes so as not to put too much pressure on us which was nice.

Louisa

When people send messages but say at the end "please don't feel like you need to reply" that was really helpful because you knew they were thinking of you but not putting any pressure on you either. Often, I would just reply with an emoji because there wasn't anything I could say at that time.

JOE WOULD ALWAYS CALL PEOPLE BUDDY. HE'D ALWAYS SAY, "HEY BUDDY, HOW ARE YOU DOING?" HENCE THE NAME JOE'S BUDDY LINE.

On anniversaries and key dates, it is nice when people remember and send messages or flowers. From a friend's point of view, people taking five minutes to send a message means so much.

Joe's things are still here in the house, we've kept all his clothes and his bedroom is pretty much the same too. We still need time to adjust.

Ivan

I don't know what I would say to another dad. For me, I don't know what I would have done without us creating the charity. It allowed me to think about Joe more than I probably would and more importantly gain some positivity from a dreadful situation. It is nice being able to help others, but a charity is not an option for everyone. I therefore don't think I can give general advice, it would depend on the dad. It's all very individual.

So, to another father, I wouldn't give advice. I would just answer the questions they wanted to ask me. Tell them about the things they might need to do, not because they want to, but because they have to for the person they have lost and for the family.

When I did that presentation at the football match, I said "I'm here and we're here on behalf of the charity, but it's not a place we wanted to be." It was very overwhelming.

Louisa

I found myself writing a lot of poems. It was a way for me to express myself without having to speak which was incredibly cathartic. I also somehow ended up making some wooden side tables, which I sold for the charity. That was fun. I think I made about 20 odd tables but who knows if they're still in one piece as I didn't know what I was doing! It provided a real distraction, especially in those early days.

Celia

Lots of Joe's friends sent us lots of tributes, pictures and messages, which Louisa put into a book for me, which we read over time. There are so many photos of Joe and in most, he is laughing and smiling. Equally lots of his friends felt they needed to come and see us and talk about Joe and we heard stories we didn't know, and some we probably shouldn't know! That was so lovely.

Louisa

Joe would take silly photos with friends and in the studio. So, after he died, I messaged his friends and asked them to share any pictures of him they had. Now we have a nice big batch of him.

Celia

For any mum, it's difficult. I would certainly say talk to people and to try and keep yourself busy and see friends. I found my good friends were on my case all the time, checking in on me. They were just there and it helped. They made it comfortable and safe for me to cry, laugh and talk. I could just be me. Even now, all this time later, they still phone or text on a regular basis and many still pop in often, to keep tabs on us. Having a network of friends to lean on is helpful.

The church community where Joe is buried has also been of great support. I'm not really religious but I do get a bit of comfort belonging to that church. I go every Sunday and I know their stories and they know mine. I now often ring the bells and I'm also on the flower arranging team. Ivan and Louisa have the charity and I have the church as my little outlet.

Joe won't be forgotten.

JOE'S BUDDY LINE

Set up in the legacy of Joe Lyons, Joe's Buddy Line is a Registered Charity within England and Wales. Our Charitable Approved mission is to promote and protect the mental health – particularly but not exclusively – of young people from primary school to university, throughout England and Wales. This is by the provision of finance, support, education, practical advice and assistance, including workshops run by certified mental health professionals and a range of other initiatives.

We are currently working in 10 schools across London and Surrey. There is not a "one size fits all" solution to mental health issues and concerns, so we speak to each school on an individual basis, understanding what their main mental health concerns are and, then together with qualified practitioners, propose an action plan. With assistance from mental health therapists and other appropriate individuals we have created a range of initiatives to implement a "Whole School Approach to Mental Health".

You can follow our journey and find out more at the following links:

- 🌐 www.joesbuddyline.org
- ✉ joesbuddyline@gmail.com
- 📷 [@joesbuddyline](https://www.instagram.com/joesbuddyline)

SOME OF THESE INITIATIVES INCLUDE:

- 1 Workshops provided by mental health professionals that can be tailored towards specific needs.
- 2 "Buddy Ambassador" workshops for pupils who are trained on the main mental health issues that pupils face in schools.
- 3 Approved mental health CPD courses for staff.
- 4 A Buddy Board illuminated lightbox, placed on an internal wall to help open up conversations.
- 5 A Buddy Bench - a semi-circular teak seat for students to sit quietly, reflect and talk openly with others when ready.
- 6 A Buddy Box (small, locked metal box) - placed on a wall for pupils to post confidential suggestions and requests.
- 7 Leaflets on specific wellbeing and mental health issues - placed on walls or handed out.
- 8 A draft Mental Health Policy for guidance.
- 9 Support to provide a Calm Room within a school to help teachers support students' needs in a suitable environment.

YOUR MENTAL HEALTH IS AS IMPORTANT AS YOUR PHYSICAL HEALTH AND WE MUST FIGHT TO ENCOURAGE OTHERS THAT THEY ARE NOT ALONE, STARTING WITH STUDENTS.



A tribute to Sian
as told by his Wife



IN MEMORY OF Sian

Sian and I met in February 2003, at the Japan Grand Prix International Orchid and Flower Show. It didn't take long for us to appreciate what we had was special and we wanted to spend the rest of our lives together. Sian was a brilliant scientist, a keen cyclist and he loved his bonsais. More importantly, he was a loving father to both his pride and joy, Caelyn and Elijah, and a wonderful husband.

On the Saturday before the accident, we had a beautiful family day out. We went to Brighton, where Sian used to study, but I had never been. There was a fair by the beach and Sian was going on all the rides with Caelyn. I was holding baby Elijah in my arms, watching and listening to all of their laughter. I can recall telling myself how lucky I am to have this family.

The day that changed everything – Sunday morning – Sian went cycling at the Richmond Park with a friend, I was at home with the children. Around 10am someone rang the doorbell and initially I thought it was Sian coming back. But when I opened the door, there was two police officers telling me that Sian had had an accident and that I needed to go to the hospital with them because he wasn't doing very well.

I asked the police what had happened, and they said he had fallen off his bike and bumped his head. I must admit, at this point, I didn't comprehend how serious it was. The police car could not fit us all in, so I decided to take Elijah with me as he was only 10 weeks old, and Caelyn could stay at home with my mother-in-law. As we were about to leave, something told me that I should have the family with me, so I arranged a taxi for my mother-in-law and Caelyn to follow behind us.

We all arrived at the hospital pretty much at the same time. The nurse who came to greet me was so apologetic. I didn't understand, as in my mind Sian had just fallen off his bike. I thought, let's get him patched up so I can tell him how reckless he was for scaring us. When I asked the nurses how he was doing everyone just said, "he's very sick at the moment." But what does sick mean?

More police officers joined me in the waiting room and the liaising officers were incredibly kind in keeping Caelyn entertained: they were drawing and singing with her. Sian's boss, a close family friend, came as soon as he heard the news, and he was with us every step of the way and we were later joined by his wife. She was very kind in helping me arrange for a baby cot so I could put Elijah down to sleep and rest my arms intermittently.

Finally, I was allowed to see him. I went into the bay and he looked like he was just sleeping. Everyone had done a good job in keeping him looking clean and dignified. I didn't get it. The injuries looked superficial, he was ventilated and looked asleep. A doctor then came and spoke to us, he explained that Sian had really injured himself and suffered a brain injury when he fell off his bike. His pupils were dilated. Those words were profoundly devastating and definitely more insightful than "sick".

I can't remember what led up to the point where they said he's only breathing because there's a machine doing it for him. He wasn't breathing on his own. I didn't believe it because his toe was twitching, but then they explained it was just a reflex. I was in denial at that time, he had only fallen off and bumped his head, how could this be possible? I went into the room again and this time, I was told that I should say my goodbyes. I think someone mentioned that I shouldn't take the kids, but you just go with your instincts: I wanted Caelyn and Elijah to say goodbye to Papa. Caelyn gave Papa a kiss on his cheek and I held Elijah close to Sian so that their faces touched one another – that was our goodbyes.

The police drove us home from the hospital. I remember the guilt that I had from not spending much time with Caelyn and felt the urgency and need to explain to her why Papa was not coming home. We did bath time and I read her the dragonfly story. She asked why Papa didn't come home and I said Papa is very sick and can't come home. I didn't use the word die. Looking back, I probably should have, perhaps I was still in denial. I said "Papa has passed away and gone to heaven. God is taking care of Papa and it's a wonderful place up there, even better than Disney Land". Never did I think my four-year-old would have a comeback, but she then asked "well, if it's that great why can't we all go together?" Taken aback, I proceeded to say that "Papa had gone to prepare a home for all of us. One day, when you are all grown up, lived a long healthy happy life, travelled the world, have had all your adventures, and made all your memories on this earth, you can go there, and Mama and Papa will hopefully be there to greet you". Then, it hit us both... the moment of realisation... we both hugged and cried on the bathroom floor.

Bank Holiday Monday – it was a strange day, we had so many visitors, police, friends and family. I answered so many phone calls, but truth to be told, I was in a haze and felt numb. Caelyn had a pre-arranged playdate with her friend and I remember her mom was in total

shock when I told her what had happened. But she was incredibly kind to have Caelyn for the day and relieved me to attend to all the other matters I had in hand.

Our car was still at Richmond Park, so I needed to get it back as it was my only mode of transport. My friends wouldn't let me get behind the wheel, so they took me there and brought the car home with me.

The rest of the week was pretty much the same, with more visitors and more statements taken by the police. I got very used to putting on a smile and saying we're well and okay. I don't recall crying much as everything was moving at quite a rapid pace. What I found particularly helpful was keeping a journal and writing down three things I needed to do each day, which ranged from feeding the kids, buying milk, cancelling subscriptions and funeral arrangements.

PAPA'S GOODBYE PARTY – THAT'S WHAT I TOLD MY CHILDREN ON THE DAY OF THE FUNERAL

Papa's Goodbye Party – that's what I told my children on the day of the funeral. I knew that this was a day that Caelyn and Elijah would have more questions about when they were older. I therefore wanted to remember all the details correctly. I asked a friend of mine to kindly video the day. Being the amazing friends they are, they made beautiful keepsake DVDs for my children. It was a very special day: the eulogies, the music, the wake, the memory slides and balloons for all the children to release at the end. It was beautiful and I was incredibly overwhelmed and touched by how kind everyone was to us and how fondly he was remembered.

Things started to quieten down after the funeral. Caelyn was back at school and having a three-month-old baby who needed feeding and changing constantly definitely helped me establish a routine. Day by day passes and you are ok, you are fine but some days, all it takes is one memory, one photo, one scent and it will bring you to your knees, you relive the moment again.

Reality soon kicked in too. There were so many things that needed looking into: finances, mortgages, school, coroners court, documents etc. Fortunately, I had a lot of help, I was touched by how many people reached out to me. Caelyn's school moms are my rock. They helped me with the logistics, playdates, uniforms, meals and groceries. Some helped me by going through my bills via comparison websites, some turned up to help me with DIY in the house. For this, I am forever grateful, to the school, the community, our friends and family.

WHAT I FOUND PARTICULARLY HELPFUL WAS KEEPING A JOURNAL AND WRITING DOWN THREE THINGS I NEEDED TO DO EACH DAY



Sian was in the middle of writing a book and it was published a year after his death. It was incredibly kind of the publisher and Sian's work colleagues to add a special note in the book and dedicate the book to his memory. Caelyn and Elijah were given a copy each and in their copies there is a beautiful note that reads 'A small token to remind you what an exceptional man your father was'.

Caelyn and Elijah are my heart and soul. I am so grateful to have these two beautiful children in my life. They give me the strength and courage to carry on. We talk about Papa all the time, one of our all-time favourite questions is 'what do you think Papa is doing in heaven right now?' It's pretty hilarious when their imaginations run wild!

Looking back, I can say that what I have today is purely by the grace of God and the goodness of the people around me. They say it takes a village to raise a child, well in my case, it definitely takes two. I am very fortunate to have such a solid support network. For the people who love my children as if they are their own and who will always be there for me.

They say time is a healer, but I think you just learn how to cope with it better. Milestones are the hardest, but it is very comforting when others remember him. Life is short, shorter for some more than others, we will never be able to understand why tragedy happens, but we must prevail and never give up. Know that your loved one will always be cheering for you.

A tribute to Lillian
as told by her Mum,
Aunt and Cousin



IN MEMORY OF *Lillian*

Tash (Mum)

Lillian – Lil – was gorgeous, she is gorgeous. She was 14 years old when she died. Lil was an easy child, out of the four of my children. She was very happy go lucky and really enjoyed adult company. She used to listen in to adult conversations, taking it all in. She was no bother at all...whilst she was mature in some ways, I would say she was still a young 14-year-old who was just starting to get into her make-up and mobile phones.

Michaela (Aunt)

I remember one time when I saw her coming out of school and she had some mascara on and badly-applied blusher that hadn't been blended in properly. She was just learning all these things, although other times she would be so dishevelled and look more like 'Stig of the dump' with her hair all over the place!

Tash

She had started at secondary school which she was so keen to go to because of their performing arts department. She loved seeing her cousin Emily performing in shows and it was brilliant that she got in. She did well there initially but had to transfer to another secondary school due to a difficult time. She was only at the new school for three months before she died, but it was the happiest I had seen her in a long time.

She really loved singing, performing and dancing. Looking back on some videos that the school had recorded of her performances, I found myself thinking, "Gosh she really was good". She wasn't a drama queen though, very sensible. She took on a parental role for her younger brother. She brought out a calmness in people, she would mediate and peace-make. She was so caring, especially with

younger people or anyone who was a bit vulnerable. She would always see the funny side of life too; she had a great sense of humour.

Emily (Cousin)

I had to do a photography project for school and I asked Lillian to be the model for me, she did it so well. She was the best person I could have asked to help. The pictures I took were the last ones that were ever taken of her and so after what happened I went straight to school and begged them for my photography book so I could see those pictures and keep them safe – it's still upstairs now. She loved spending time with her cousins and family, I know she really looked forward to the time she spent with me and my sister Meg.

Tash

It sounds bizarre but my whole life I just had this feeling that one of my children might not grow old. I know that sounds terrible but it's just this feeling that has always sat with me. Lil was often described as an old soul by people who met her, you had this feeling that maybe she had already done life once before.

Tash

I had just started trusting the kids to go out together and on that particular weekend, it was baking hot. I needed to get a few bits and pieces from the shop and she very kindly offered to go and get them for me with her brother Olly, which was just so her. I've still got her purse that had the shopping list I gave her and the loose change. On the way they found a ball that needed pumping up, so they brought it home with them. I still remember what we had for dinner that night – chicken, mash and beans. Olly wanted to go out after dinner and play with the new now pumped up ball.

**MY WHOLE LIFE I JUST HAD
THIS FEELING THAT ONE OF MY
CHILDREN MIGHT NOT GROW OLD**

Lil wasn't too keen on going out because she had already spent all day with him. We encouraged her just to go for a short while only at the front of the house in the driveway and not to go onto the road. This was around 18:20. Her dad Gary and I were sitting out in the back garden chatting to our neighbour, England were playing football. I went back into the house at 19:00 to check on the football scores. I remember looking out of the living room window at exactly 19:00 and seeing Olly on the driveway behind Gary's car, Lil was in front of him, waving at me. As I walked back through the house towards the garden, just seconds later I heard three loud thuds. I don't remember hearing breaks or a screech, but there must have been something because now whenever I hear a car break loudly, I freeze and just expect those three thuds to follow.

Gary and I ran to the front door. Nick (her older brother) ran downstairs. We opened the door to see Olly standing by the car, bright red in the face, pulling his hair, saying "Lil's been hit, Lil's been hit". I could see a car parked at an awkward angle and I went running out trying to look for her. A few other people had started to come out of their homes. I eventually saw her lying on the other side of the road, she wasn't moving. Gary and I got to her and we could see her lips moving slightly, as if she was trying to say mum, but no sound was coming out. People around us were calling for an ambulance as Gary was cradling her in his arms. It was like I had been picked up and was just hovering above the situation, I was calm. Then I saw all this thick, red blood coming out of her ear and I realised that this was serious. Everything seemed to take forever.

By this time there was a huge crowd of people gathering around and I learnt later that someone was even filming it on their mobile, which was so upsetting to think that it could have been shared online. The police arrived and shut off the road and told everyone to go inside. What really sticks in my mind is an elderly man with his shopping getting off a bus and not being able to access his house, he kept trying to lift up the police tape. We found out later he wanted to get home to make sure his wife wasn't worried it was him. It's the ripple effect when something like this happens that you don't appreciate and the number of lives that are impacted.

It's crazy to look back now, knowing what I know, but at the time I kept thinking "Oh, I hope the poor driver

is alright, I hope they're ok, they must be traumatised by this". Little did I know the true circumstances, that he had just run away and fled the scene. At some point one of the paramedics informed me that the air ambulance team were also on their way, and I was so grateful. I had seen so many documentaries on TV about the work they did and I was pleased that Lil would be getting that advanced level of care and treatment. I knew it was really bad.

I remember she had to have her clothes cut off and all I could think of was how embarrassed she would be with her friends living locally and when she recovered what they might say to her. I remember the doctor then saying that they would be intubating her and talking about giving her ketamine for the procedure. Again, because I had watched so many programmes about medical emergencies like this, I thought that these were all good things and everything would be alright. I was so convinced that she would be okay that only when we ran inside to get our shoes on before leaving, did I realise I had been barefoot the whole time. I also got some of her clothes to bring with me for when she woke up. Lil went into the ambulance and we followed in a police car being driven to the hospital.

When we arrived, Lil was already in resus bay number 5, I stood there on my own looking at her and then they started doing CPR. The air ambulance doctor came up to me and said "You have a very unwell little girl, and we aren't sure if she is going to survive". I just couldn't compute what she was saying, I thought it was a bit harsh to be honest, I didn't realise. I am grateful that she said it though, because until that moment it was never a possibility in my head. You watch all these programmes about trauma and major accidents but everyone always survives, they rarely show people who don't.

Gary and I were then taken to the relatives' room where we sat. I tried to drink a glass of water but could hardly hold it up. It's the smallest details you remember, I couldn't stop looking at this drain on the floor in the corner of the room. It felt like we sat there forever. A nurse came in and told us that Lil had internal bleeding and was too unstable to go to theatre so they were operating on her in A&E. She later returned to say that they had found a tear in her aorta, but they had been able to control the bleeding and they would be taking her for a CT scan. She advised we think about calling family to come and join us. This was all less than an hour after we arrived at the hospital.

PEOPLE TALK ABOUT THE FIVE STAGES OF GRIEF, ANGER CERTAINLY CAME FIRST FOR ME, I WAS SO ANGRY

hold it up. It's the smallest details you remember, I couldn't stop looking at this drain on the floor in the corner of the room. It felt like



Michaela

My husband and I were having a day out in London when we got a call from Rhiannon hysterically screaming "She's been hit, she's been hit!" We couldn't make out what she was saying so we hung up and called her back to try and clarify what was happening. When we eventually found out it was Lil and that the air ambulance team were on their way, we realised how serious it was and started trying to get to their home as quickly as possible. I called our dad who lives in Eastbourne to tell him to come up too, but to drive safely because I was so worried he would drive too fast and hurt himself. Eventually my husband Trevor and I made it to the road by their house which had been taped off by the police and Nick came up the road to meet us. I could see the car at an awkward angle with a bullseye on the windscreen and blood all over it. Rhiannon came out and she was absolutely hysterical. Olly had been crying so much he looked such a mess. I remember asking the police "Is the driver OK?". We were all thinking this was a terrible accident.

Lil, Natasha and Gary were already on the way to the hospital, so we didn't get a chance to see them. Around 20:40, Mum and Dad arrived from Eastbourne. At 21:10 the phone rang, it was Natasha telling us that Lil had been bleeding from her aorta, but they had managed to stem the bleeding. Dad had recently had surgery for his heart so he was able to give some reassurance that if the bleeding had

stopped then Lil would be in a much better position. I gave Rhiannon a job to keep her calm, so I told her to bath Olly and get him to lie down in bed. At 21:30 Natasha rang again and was clearly in shock. I remember her exact words: "We have been told to call you to bring in the family so you can say your goodbyes to Lil". I asked what should I do with the kids and she said "I don't know". Then the call just ended. I had to tell the adults in the room and my mum and Trevor immediately became extremely upset. I remember trying to work out how we were all going to get to the hospital. We eventually all arrived at A&E and found Tash and Gary sitting silently in the relative's room.

Emily

I was relaxing at home with Meg when we got a phone call from our mum to say that we shouldn't panic but Lil had been hit by a car. I immediately wanted to drive down but because the road had been closed I couldn't, so we just asked our mum to keep us updated. We had another call later to say that the family were going to the hospital and mum said that she didn't know what she would be telling us on her next phone call. I had this feeling that it was really, really bad from the very start. At 23:20 a call came from Natasha saying that Lil was in theatre and we had to keep praying that she was going to be alright. I was supposed to go to work the next day, so I told my sister to go to bed, but I wasn't sure what to do with myself.

I CAN ONLY DESCRIBE THAT FIRST 24 HOURS AS NOTHINGNESS

Michaela

Eventually we were moved from the A&E relatives' room to the Paediatric Intensive Care relatives' room. We all thought that this was a really good sign, that she would be out of theatre and into intensive care, hopefully through the worst of it. Once we were there one of the nurses, who was amazing, came in and introduced herself and explained that Lillian would come back from theatre shortly. She kept popping in to make sure we were comfortable. It was now about 23:50 and the adrenaline had started to wear off and I began to feel really sick, so I went to the toilet. As I came out, Lil was coming into the unit, I could see lots of equipment and machines beeping so I ran to the relatives' room to tell the rest of the family. It was just past midnight and Lil's grandmother turned to Tash to wish her a happy birthday.

The nurse then came back to tell us that they were just going to settle Lillian and that once that was done, she would bring Tash and Gary to see her and then the rest of us could come in. We never thought that this would be a goodbye conversation. Tash and Gary left the room, we thought to go see Lil, but soon after we heard muffled sounds coming through from the room next door. We then realised Tash and Gary were next door and Gary was crying. Suddenly Gary came out and walked back into the relatives' room and told us all, "She hasn't made it". It felt like someone had just separated my soul from my body.

Tash

When we spoke to the consultant in that room, he was trying to explain what had happened to Lil. She had suffered severe brain damage and her heart was failing and her body was only being kept alive because of medications and the ventilator. This was quite hard for

Gary because he just heard "she's being kept alive". The use of clear language at a time like this is so important. They said something about her brain stem but I didn't quite understand what that meant at this point. I came out of that room and went back into the relatives' room in absolute shock. It was like the shell of me was still there but all my insides had been removed. Even the nurses were shocked and upset; you could see it affected them too. They asked us if we wanted to see Lillian. They were going to time it so that once we were there, they would not give her any more of the medication that was stopping her from going into cardiac arrest and then she would slowly pass away.

When I saw her she was so swollen and looked as pale as anything. There was a tube in her mouth and all these machines and pumps everywhere. She had a huge bandage around her head and she was the most unwell looking child I have ever seen. Grazes everywhere, I tried to clean them with the sheet at one point. She felt cold to touch. I sat on her lefthand side and the monitor was on the right, which was later turned off. Rhiannon wanted to kiss her but she felt scared that it might hurt her. Eventually the consultant felt for a pulse and listened with a stethoscope and then it was all over. I don't know if anyone actually said the words "she's dead" or "she's gone", but we just knew.

We spent 15 minutes with Lil at the bedside and then we went back into the relatives' room for another two hours because the police wanted to speak to us and told us to stay there. My dad wanted to leave the hospital straight away, but we didn't know what we were allowed to do or if we could see her again or not. All this time I was still holding her clothes that I brought with me, and I wish someone had told me that I could have put those clothes on her because I would have done that. We sadly didn't hear anything about organ donation and we weren't offered a hair lock or handprints.

At 03:00 we just decided as a family that we were going to drive home. We didn't hear anything from any professionals until two days later when the police called us to identify Lillian's body. We couldn't believe it. There were police with us on PICU when she died so why would she need identifying? They then said that we didn't need to identify her body, but we later found out the identification was done by a police officer. I was horrified as I didn't want anyone else to see her like that, Lil wouldn't have wanted it and I'm sure the police officer didn't want to do it either.

Michaela

The next day it felt like everyone came out of the woodwork to pay their condolences. Some people that we hadn't spoken to for years were suddenly in our dining room and garden. It was 24 hours after the accident that I think it all finally came crashing down for Tash. She was in the living room with our mum and this absolutely awful sound came out of her, like an animal wailing. We told everyone who was visiting that they needed to leave because Tash needed space.

Tash

Before I had that moment of wailing, I was in a zone of absolute nothingness and emptiness. There were no feelings that I could express. I just knew I had to stay calm because I felt I was no good to anyone if I was hysterical. I can only describe that first 24 hours as nothingness. Suddenly I just started to think how mortified and upset Lil would be that this had happened to her, she wouldn't have wanted to die. You start putting yourself in their shoes. When I began to think of it like that, it was like the switch had been flipped and whatever my brain had done so far to control my emotions couldn't be contained.

Michaela

The hospital rang on the Monday to say that they were going to release her body to the coroner. Until then all we had been given was a booklet from a police officer about what happens when someone dies from a road traffic accident. On Tuesday another call came from the coroner's officer who finally answered all our questions.

THE WORDS "SHE HASN'T MADE IT" FELT LIKE SOMEONE HAD JUST SEPARATED MY SOUL FROM MY BODY

I asked her to make sure that she took good care of Lil when they did the post-mortem and asked her not to hurt her. I was trying to take on as many jobs as possible to help Tash, because she had gone back into this emotionless zone that we described earlier on. We were told we would be issued with an interim death certificate to allow Tash and Gary to go ahead and start planning the funeral. Gary walked into the room and I

told him what the coroner had said and he just collapsed in a heap on the floor. He said "How can I bury my daughter? I just can't. I can't even afford a funeral for her". These are the things that nobody tells you.

Whilst all of this was happening at home, everyone in the community had found out what had happened. We had the newspapers on the doorstep. It was carnage really, and it felt so strange being the centre of attention amongst all of these people. Terrible things always seem to happen to someone else, not to you, so it feels very surreal when it's you that everyone is talking about and sympathising with. You feel like you are the centre of a disaster documentary, everything feels like such a process. You never see this side of things on medical documentaries.

Tash

The final death certificate was issued a year later. We were told that we would only have an interim death certificate until the case went to an inquest, but because the police were prosecuting, we had to wait until that process had happened. The only phone call I remember making was to the child benefit office and they were very good about it and sent their sympathies. They then made all the relevant calls to other services so I didn't have to.

I know we were only given that one leaflet that we mentioned earlier, but in reality I don't know if we would have looked at anything we were given at the start. You are in such a void and the leaflet just sat on the side. It's only later, during the different stages that you start to think about picking those things up. It's the 'what happens next?'. I remember searching the internet looking up everything, I needed all the information I could get my hands on. I even looked up what embalming actually meant. I remember wanting to know how police calculate the speed of the car, so my mum and I went out and tried to make measurements based on the break marks on the road.

Michaela

We were told by the police officers that they had breathalysed the driver and that he was under the legal limit. Later the traffic police came round to the house and said that the driver had been arrested and charged with causing death by dangerous driving. He wasn't over the legal limit for drinking, but he told police that he had smoked a joint earlier in the day. Thankfully the police picked up on this immediately and took a blood sample, but this was at 03:45 which is obviously several hours after. He was released on bail conditions. People talk about the five stages of grief and anger certainly comes first for me, I was so angry at him.

The funeral was two weeks after Lil died and it seemed following it for everyone around us, life started to carry on. But for us life has never been the same since; our family story has changed completely. I now think that life is too short. I still drive, and I enjoy driving, but I think of it very differently now. I am always peering around the corners and checking my mirrors. I feel like this has made me harder. For me, I feel like I lost my niece and my sister on that day.

Tash

I am on medication now, have been for six or seven years, as I was really struggling to cope. When a disaster like this hits, families either come together or they fall apart, and I didn't want that for my family. Despite how hard you try, sometimes it happens. My sister says she lost me, and Rhiannon also says that she lost her sister and her mum on that day. I feel like nothing scares me anymore. Someone could pull a knife on me and I would just think,

“go ahead and do what you want”. The worst thing in the world has happened to me, so nothing else can ever be as bad. I don't

like bullies, and I think that this driver was a bully. He killed Lil and he broke our family apart. I don't mean it about my family, or my loved ones, but I am almost past caring about others. I feel like as a human being all of my emotion has been spent, I can't tolerate any more. Even when my mum died, nothing could hurt me more than I have already been hurt.

I almost feel selfish for saying that and I don't want to upset anyone. I wouldn't wish this on anyone. The only person who could ever relate to this experience is another bereaved mother. They say you bring your child into this life and you should be there at the end. In the beginning people say “give it time, time is a healer”. That is absolute rubbish. If anything, it gets harder.

We are a close family; we still talk about her freely as if she is still with us. On the other hand the men in our family are very reluctant to talk about any of it. I know Gary really struggles to talk about her, whereas I do all the time. I watch videos of her performing but Gary finds it too painful. I have a granddaughter now and even she will talk about Lil, even though she never knew her. We call her Auntie Lil. Florence, who is just seven, even said once “put your hand up if you miss Lil.” She tells us that she really loves her Auntie Lil.

After Lil died Gary and I found ourselves having long chats about which of us would die first, it makes you consider your mortality so much more. We even started to plan out where we would all be buried or cremated. I even know what side I want to be lying on so that

I am facing towards Lil. For a long time, we were so devastated that Lil was on her own. That feeling has given way a little since my mum died, because now Lil has her Nan with her to keep her company. They are even buried close to one another in the cemetery. Her Nan was buried with one of Lil's teddies that she had kept hold of all this time.

We moved house after Lil died. It upset me at first but I remember my dad saying that a home is just bricks and mortar; all the memories go with you.

Michaela

We talk about Lil at least once a day. When Megan got married, she asked both Trevor and Gary to give her away. If Lil was here she would have been her bridesmaid. Those big life experiences all keep happening and Lil should be here for them too, but she isn't. It was a very emotional day for everyone.

Tash

I think people think that it will get better, but it doesn't, life changes completely. It changes you as a person. You just wake up and survive; it's like groundhog-day. You don't have any other choice, so you just plod on. At the beginning you can never think ahead. I find New Year's Eve horrific, it's the worst day for me. It's another year that has driven us further apart, but perversely I do feel another year closer to being with her. I didn't even think that we could get past that first year. In two years' time it will be 14 years since she passed, and I only had her for 14 years, so she will be gone for longer than she was with me and I just know that will feel awful. We still think of Lillian as a 14 year old, not a 26 year old, which is what she would be.

I almost have to do the maths when people ask me how many children I have, or how old they are. I also think about it from Olly's perspective, who was 10 at the time, when he turned 15 how upsetting that must have been for him, that he had now outlived his sister. He's now 22, but his older sister will always be 14.

There are dark days, really desperately dark days when you lose a child, but eventually laughter does return too.

It's not a disrespectful thing. On the anniversary date of Lil's passing we have tried several different things to get through it. We have been away on holidays over the date; we have been at home on the sofa. But whatever we do, that day is that day, and it's my birthday too, not that I have ever celebrated it since. There's just one card that gets put up on the mantelpiece and it's the last birthday card Lil wrote me 12 years ago. It's the same card every year, and it always will be.

LILLIAN'S LAW

The speeding driver had been smoking cannabis, but because police did not carry drug testing kits, a test was not completed until nine hours after the incident.

By then there was not enough cannabis in his system to charge him with causing death by careless driving while under the influence of drugs, which carried a maximum 14-year sentence.

Instead, he was sentenced to just eight months, and after pleading guilty to causing death by careless driving, this was reduced to four. He served a total of eight weeks.

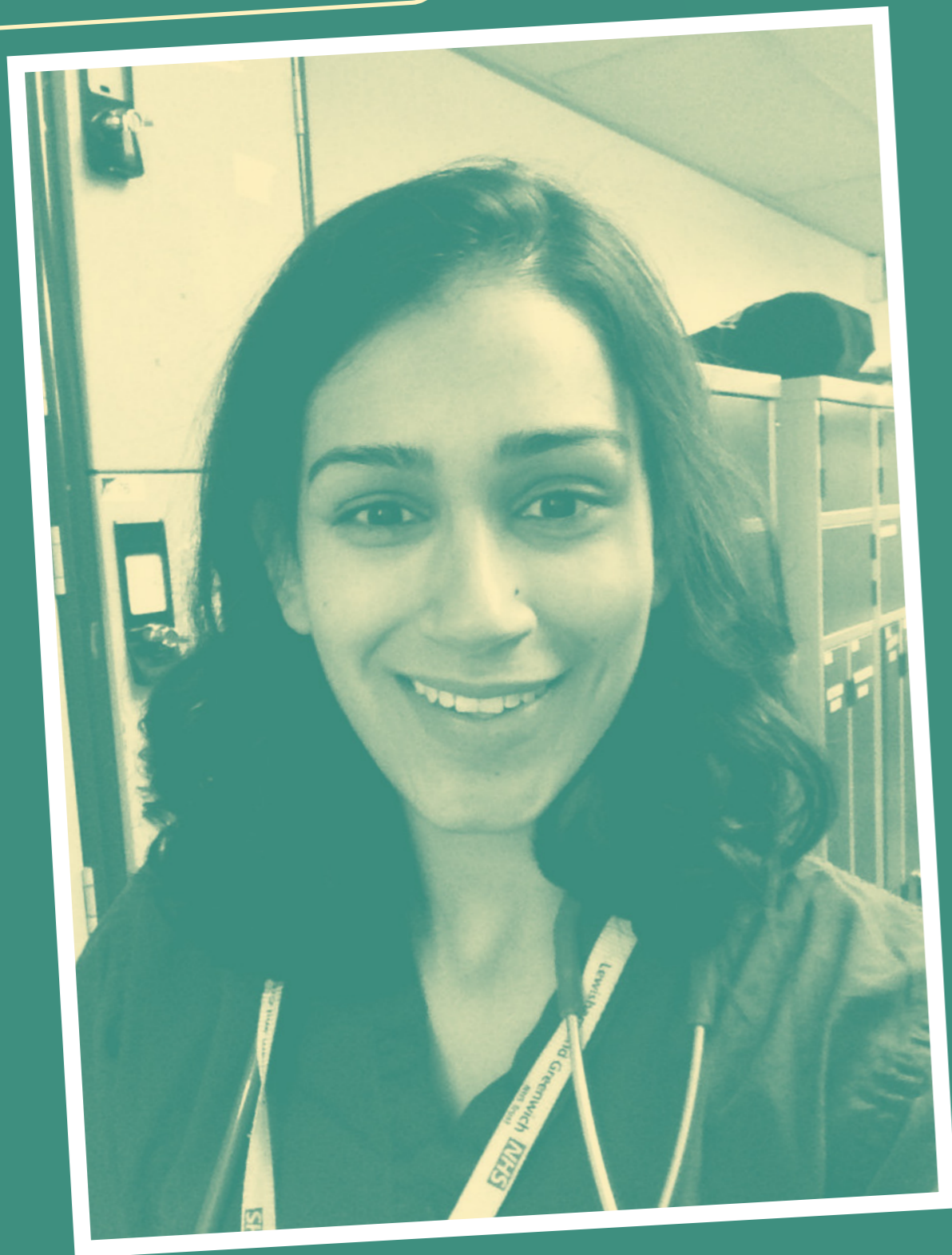
“We walked out of that case pretty disgusted,” said Lillian's aunt Michaela. “The sentencing day was a kick in the teeth. Our grief turned from emotional turmoil into anger.”

Lillian's family were determined to ensure that no other family would face the same ordeal. They demanded a zero-tolerance approach to make it an offence to drive under the influence of drugs.

The family collected more than 22,000 signatures in a bid to get the law changed and met then Prime Minister David Cameron at Downing Street. Michaela also wrote to every MP, encouraging them to back the changes as they went through Parliament.

In March 2015, dubbed Lillian's Law, The Drug Driving (Specified Limits) (England and Wales) Regulations 2014 became law. It carries an automatic driving ban and a potential prison sentence of up to a year. Police also now carry roadside drug test kits.

A tribute to Jas
as told by her Sister



IN MEMORY OF Jas

My sister Jas was one of those people who could do just absolutely anything she tried her hand at and not just do it, but do it well, which at times was infuriating. Jas naturally drew people to her and had a great energy: she was beautiful, funny and loyal. The wonderful thing about her was that despite being an all-round superstar, she didn't realise how brilliant she was.

She was my person and that's what is so frustrating about losing a sibling – you are given a gift that you take for granted as being a constant through your life. Sibling loss hurts so much because they go through life at very similar stages with you so there is much to share and learn together and the assumption is that they will continue to do so. They become that person you share both the significant and insignificant things in life.

Two weeks before the incident, I will always believe the universe gave us three sisters time together. This was very special as being able to spend time together, as a three, had started to become more difficult to coordinate as we had moved to different cities with different work commitments. I am so grateful we were given the opportunity to be together and talk one last time.

Looking back, I suppose I had become used to taking every moment for granted and in hindsight, of course, if I had known what I know now, then our last interactions and messages to each other would have been more meaningful and thought out as opposed to the more routine.

I recall the day so clearly, being at work when I received a call from a number that I did not recognize. I think now that my life is everything that happened before that phone call and everything that has happened since that call is my new normal.

At first, I didn't really know what the caller on the phone was saying, but eventually I understood a police officer was telling me that Jas had been hurt. My first thought was to assume that she had been cycling to

work, knocked off her bike and was sat in hospital with minor injuries feeling sorry for herself. My first priority in those moments was to try to understand the severity of the situation. Rather than fear, I felt desperation and frustration to find out more so that I could understand how badly she had been hurt and the urgency of the situation. Yet, each time I rang the hospital, I kept getting told that she hadn't come in yet. My husband who was working in London at the time had got to the hospital ahead of me yet wasn't able to get any information because he was not her next of kin.

On arriving at the hospital, I was led to a room near to reception at A&E where I just sat and waited. I felt helpless being in the same building as her and knowing something had happened but not actually getting to see her or having any idea as to the extent of her injuries.

Eventually, a doctor, who knew Jas from the hospital came to speak to me, along with another consultant.

I remember that the A&E consultant was standing with his head bowed. The doctor who knew Jas was talking to me and told me that she had suffered a head injury, but that they were doing their very best for her. Even at this point, I remember feeling convinced that we would all just do whatever we needed to do to get her better again.

However, my understanding of the situation changed after the first moment I saw her – that was when I realised the enormity of the situation our family was in.

SIBLING LOSS HURTS SO MUCH BECAUSE THEY GO THROUGH LIFE AT VERY SIMILAR STAGES WITH YOU SO THERE IS MUCH TO SHARE AND LEARN TOGETHER AND THE ASSUMPTION IS THAT THEY WILL CONTINUE TO DO SO

That was when it struck me that she hadn't just broken her leg and things for our family were going to change dramatically.

For the family meeting, we got taken into a separate room near the ward to meet some of the doctors who explained the situation to us. I don't recall how long the meeting lasted now, but it felt like it was done very quickly and in honesty, I wish it had been done differently with more input from the doctors involved. Walking out of that meeting felt like time had stopped and we were in the hospital for days, but in reality, we were only there for one more day.

The speed at which time moved over those first days was distorted, some moments felt like they went on forever, the waiting and the not knowing, and yet others where the tragedy pivoted our lives took mere seconds. I think that what made having to go through it so hard was how unprepared we all were for this day. We were thrown into a situation that we hadn't had the chance to slowly move towards or prepare for. Initially I was

not willing to accept the situation, so I moved through that time with a numbness at first. However, I was also very aware of the finality of what I was experiencing and very consciously trying to squeeze everything that I could out of those last moments where I would still be able to hold her hand and say goodbye.

What is really important to highlight is that you're not okay for a very long time, I reacted by pushing many people away, because I needed to make sense of what had happened and what my life was now about. Unfairly, with sudden loss you don't get given the time to slowly move yourself into the situation, instead, what happens is that you find yourself in a position where this life-changing catastrophe is thrown at you. I struggled managing work and caring for my son and each day was very difficult and exhausting. I remember there was sometimes no time to allow myself the space to just be with my grief, yet looking back, the need to get back into 'real life' was also what got me through to where I am today. I think it forced me to move forward with my loss.



MY SISTER WAS SUPPOSED TO BE HERE, BUT SOMEONE TOOK THAT AWAY FROM ME IN A SECOND AND THAT IS SOMETHING I WILL HAVE TO GO THROUGH LIFE WITH NOW

I found having a network, even if it was a very small one made up of people that I felt I could trust, was what supported me during that time. I saw true kindness from people where I least expected it but also found that there were those whom I had assumed would be there but weren't. Loss and grief are huge eye openers and I felt like I went through a steep learning curve in terms of understanding myself and my relationships with others.

Six months after Jas' passing, I think that's when things became very real in terms of that adjustment into a new way of existing without her. That was when I started to figure out ways of not letting her slip away: through keeping her phone number working so that I could still call her, keeping her music streaming account active so that I could listen to her playlists and trying to access more photos that none of us had because they existed only on her laptop and phone.

What added complexity to an already painful situation was that for us to be able to access any of these things we needed to give each of these companies a copy of the death certificate and like many families, we didn't get one for over a year. Having to copy, email and send it became a painful reminder of her absence each time I was trying to make her more present. Waking up one morning to a notification "Jas has left the group"

in our messaging app, was just awful. We didn't know that would happen and again felt like a kick in the stomach after trying to keep the mobile number alive.

Throughout this journey I have learnt a lot: you will find a new normal, there is no point trying to fix things to go back to what they were. I remember thinking in the early days "how am I going to do this?" but it wasn't a case of making a long-term plan, initially it was trying to just get through the day, hour by hour. Loss is consuming, I would wake up and it was the first thing on my mind, and it was what I fell asleep thinking about. I have slowly come to accept that you can't fix these situations or go back to normal.

I think with grief you can never truly understand how the person experiencing it feels, just as I will never be able to understand what my parents are going through, having to live through the loss of a child. Sibling loss – especially sudden sibling loss – is so rarely spoken about and there are so few resources to turn to that help explain how to get through it. I would have loved to have had somewhere to reassure me that what I was doing was right and what to expect and what the impact would be on my life. I had to figure my own way through it myself which was very hard.

My sister was supposed to be here, but someone took that away from me in a second and that is something I will have to go through life with now.

WAKING UP ONE MORNING TO A NOTIFICATION "JAS HAS LEFT THE GROUP" IN OUR MESSAGING APP, WAS JUST AWFUL

A tribute to Josh
as told by his Mum



IN MEMORY OF JOSH

Josh was the most kind, caring and loving son and brother. With a true heart of gold, Josh was athletic and good at all sports, loving his football and boxing. He was also an incredibly fast runner. He loved school and he had lots of friends. He was an avid gamer and a huge fan of Fortnite.

Josh was Chris and I's second born, loved by his older sister Demi and younger siblings Lois and Luca. Josh was my only son for 11 years, surrounded by all these girls. He was the best, so kindhearted and loving. He always went out of his way to make sure I was okay.

The children had broken up for easter holidays and I was nine months pregnant and due to be induced. In the first week of those holidays we were preparing everything for Luca to be born. I had been waiting for a date for induction, so when the day arrived, the children were so excited, especially Josh. But on arrival, the hospital told us it wasn't going to be possible and that I had to go home for the weekend

IT'S SUCH A ROLLERCOASTER OF PAIN AND EMOTION

and come back on the Monday. We went home to tell the children and I remember they were so disappointed. On the Saturday, Josh and his sister Demi asked if they could go to a funfair five minutes away with some friends. After the disappointment of the previous few days, we let them go. We were going to pick them up from there. When the time came to pick them up, they called to say they had walked to the local park with friends. We told them to stay at the park and we would pick them up from there. Their friends had to leave to get the bus home, so they walked with them to the bus stop. This was when Josh was struck in a hit and run, by an elderly driver who turned out to be unlicensed and had been seen in the pub just before the incident. Demi called us in hysterics and was screaming, saying Josh had been hit by a car. We ran to the scene and the emergency services were already there, fighting to save Josh's life. He was then airlifted to hospital.

We arrived in hospital at the same time as Josh and I got to see him very briefly before he was taken to have his scans. We were asked to wait in the relatives' room where – after the scans – one of the surgeons came and told us that they had found a bad brain injury for which Josh had to be taken straight for an operation. He also told us that there was a chance Josh might not make it. That was when we realised for the first time just how bad

it was. It was such a shock for us all. I constantly thought Josh was going to be okay, I don't know why but that's how I felt. Then we were told he would be lucky to make it out of surgery, but he did, so I felt like because he'd come through that, he was going to be okay. But that wasn't to be the case.

Following surgery, he was admitted to intensive care, where despite the surgery he continued to deteriorate. I remember seeing some members of the team reviewing Josh on their ward rounds. I asked them if he was going to be ok, I don't remember their exact words, but they explained that he wasn't. I just totally broke down. Screaming. In the corridor.

I think I collapsed against the wall. I ran away and hid in the toilet for a while. I don't know how doctors do it. It must be the worst thing you can ever say to someone. At this point they mentioned needing to carry out brain stem testing and they suggested getting all the family together to spend some time with Josh before they carried out the tests. The next day we had a meeting to discuss the brain stem test and plans for me to be induced.

We organised for Demi and Lois to see Josh. They were still unaware of the situation, they thought Josh was coming home. I remember Lois was only seven when she came into the ward and she didn't recognise Josh. She didn't want to go in, she said he didn't look like Josh. She just kept asking when he was coming home. I had to say he might not be, he might be going to heaven. That was the worst thing I have ever had to say. It was really hard to tell the children. After they saw their brother, they left. I wasn't thinking then but looking back, they shouldn't have gone home, they should have stayed with me. I don't even think they knew that was goodbye, but it was. They should have been there but I remember being in so much pain, I didn't know if I could deal with everyone else's on top of my own. It's unimaginably hard but now I so wish that we had all stayed together.

WE ARE PROUD THAT JOSH WAS AN ORGAN DONOR

The brain stem testing was done the next day which sadly confirmed our worst fears that Josh had died. I always thought Josh would survive. Even right to the end, even when I had to say goodbye to him. I kept thinking he was going to be okay. I got to lie with him for a bit. Then, I had to be induced to have Luca. I knew it had to be done, but it just felt like every decision was so rushed.

After he was born, Luca and I spent the day with Josh lying and cuddling. I got some pictures taken and I am grateful for that time. Josh had really wanted a brother. It's nice they got that time. That was another reason I wanted to be induced, so they got that time together, as well as my health – I was worried about the effect the trauma could have had on the pregnancy. I think I had forgotten about being pregnant. The hospital were really lovely though, even though I hadn't been booked to have Luca there they made it happen so we could be together as a family.

We had a priest come to see Josh as it was important to us and I remember him reading some prayers especially for children. The hospital gave Josh a beautiful blanket, which we still have, and a lovely memory box which I'm glad they did because I wasn't thinking about anything like that at the time. They did his handprints and his hair lock, and I really cherish that. It was lovely, I am so glad they did it.

We are so thankful for the time the hospital gave us together. I do think if we'd lost him at the roadside it would have been devastating. I now know it's likely Josh 'died' at the roadside, but they did get him back and I am grateful for that because we got that extra bit of time, and Luca got to be with Josh for a bit.



I can't remember what day we decided to proceed with organ donation. One of the nurses had approached my mum about it. She felt very uncomfortable about it as she could see the pain we were all in. Mum initially spoke to Chris about it and when he mentioned it to me, I remember thinking, 'why are they asking about Josh's organs when he was going to be ok?' Of course, I knew he wasn't going to be, but you try and hold on to everything. This was when Chris reminded us about watching a morning tv programme with Josh where a young boy had a brain tumour and he was going to donate his organs when he died. Josh had said at the time that he would like to do the same if he was dying. I know big decisions needed to be made, but I feel like I made a lot of massive decisions in a very short space of time. We are proud that Josh was an organ donor. We have since received two letters, one from a four-year girl and the other from a mum who was really ill on dialysis. She was thanking us and saying she's been able to go back home and be a mum again. Hearing this was a comfort to the whole family.

Once we had said goodbye to Josh, it was really horrible having to stay at the hospital. Luca was a little jaundiced and for his health we had to stay in. It was so hard because we wanted to go and see Josh, but he wasn't there anymore.

We left hospital three days after Josh died, which was not even a week after the accident. We didn't return to our house, instead we stayed with my parents as I could not face going home without Josh, it was just too painful. I wasn't eating or sleeping a lot. Waking up to the reality was the hardest. But having Luca was a miracle. I think he helped everyone. He brought us all through it, I don't know if I would have got out my bed without him. Such a blessing, he forced me to carry on.

I remember in the first few weeks, I would wake up and for a split-second things were ok. Then it would hit me in a complete panic, the soul-shattering pain that Josh was gone and the total disbelief of thinking this cannot be real. It's such a rollercoaster of pain and emotion, one minute thinking you and the family are going to be ok and then next feeling like you cannot go on.

The first few months, there was ongoing input from the police due to the nature of Josh's death, meaning we were assigned a Family Liaison Officer. As a family we had a challenging time with the police and the ongoing investigation added more unnecessary stress and anxiety. Because of the investigation there was a lot of waiting for updates, reports and his death certificate. We didn't get the final death certificate until 18 months after he died, following the criminal trial. We did get the interim death certificate which allowed us to have his funeral.

Josh's funeral was around two months after he died. I couldn't face seeing him at the funeral home, because I kept thinking it was all a mistake and maybe it hadn't been Josh. So Mum and Dad offered to check on him for us. It was reassuring to know he still had his blanket on and rosary beads around him. We had all written notes and they were still there, which meant a lot.

On the day of the funeral, we had a horse and glass carriage to carry his coffin which had 'Fortnite' pictures on it. Everything was Fortnite. There were so many people there. Josh was cremated and is now in his bedroom, probably playing Fortnite. We wanted him at home: where he should be.

I thought it best for the girls to try and go back to school for some normality, but they really struggled. With Lois, a bereavement charity came to help her for about a month at the start, they said she was coping and she didn't need further support. They said they would offer a follow up but that did not happen and I have never heard from them again. Lois just got on with it and is doing well at school. Sometimes she doesn't want to talk, I think she just wants to try and get back to some normality. But I do wonder how it will affect her as she grows up.

The Family Liaison Officer managed to get Demi support with a school counsellor. Demi is still seeing her now, but it will come to an end as she is leaving school. Demi was with Josh at the time of the incident so she saw everything. She still really suffers and accessing local mental health services has been a struggle. We waited two and a half years for them to call, but when they did we were just put on another waiting list for therapy. Because of the wait, I have had to pay for private therapy.

Everyone misses him. In the beginning it was very hard to go out and do anything. Everything I did just didn't feel right. You'd see people and they'd know, and they'd talk to you, and you'd just get emotional. It was the little things in the beginning, like when

you'd go to the shops and see things he would have liked. Another thing that was hard was going back to the school run, taking Demi to school, when Josh should have been there, he was so excited to go to secondary school.

We went to the whole trial, it was 10 days long and we went every day. That was very difficult. It didn't happen until a year and a half after he died and it was hard to listen to all the evidence, some old and some new. Despite the difficulty in initially obtaining information and evidence, the driver who hit Josh was found guilty of causing death by careless driving and driving a motor vehicle while unlicensed. He was sentenced to two years in January 2021, but he only spent one year in prison and was released in January 2022 without us being informed.

What happened to Josh has changed our family forever, I try to get through the day by still doing the things we would have been doing with him here and sometimes it even feels like he is still with us. But dates like birthdays, Easter and Christmas are so much harder. You don't look forward to them. You just know how much harder they are and how it's another one he's missed. I try to be happy for my other children and I think that is what has got me through, they still deserve to have a good life.

Saying that, sometimes it's hard, and I can't help crying. Whenever we are coming up to Josh's anniversary it's overwhelming and I don't stop thinking about it. What makes it even harder is that Luca was born the day Josh died. I try and keep Josh's death and Luca's birthday as separate as possible: Luca deserves that. It is hard though. When you have a baby, you remember everything about the day they were born but for us it's a hard day full of mixed emotions. I've started to plan things around that date, so you're not just sat there thinking about it. Last year we took Luca to a theme park for his birthday, he loved it.

We haven't been away since Josh died, so for this year I have booked a campervan at Camber Sands for Luca's birthday. We find it hard to go away, holidays feel like 'what's the point?', because it always feels like someone is missing but I'm hoping it'll be good, we'll make it good. Since Josh died, we've just tried to have lots of days out, at the beginning we tried to go to places we had been before and feel like we had him with us. But now we're trying new places. Nothing ever feels right, so you plan it and hope it goes okay. We talk of him a lot when we're out, saying what he'd like about what we are doing. We do like to talk about him, we keep talking about him, the words keep him alive. We will never forget about him. Our memories keep him alive and we will always speak about Josh.

A week before the accident Josh went mining looking for crystals and he loved it and found loads of different stones. Now every time we go to the spot, we bring a stone back. We've got a collection, we've got so many. The special ones are in his room. Josh's bedroom is still the same, we haven't changed it. I feel like it's his. The girls feel like that too. So, it's still how it was and that's how it will stay.

It's not just the family who have been suffering, it's really affected a few of Josh's close friends. One doesn't attend school anymore. I think the lockdown didn't help, as none of them were able to see each other. I do keep in contact with all his friends: for his 14th birthday we had an event at Brands Hatch with super cars with them all. It was such an amazing day. Because Josh loved 'Fast and Furious' and I just wanted to do something I knew he would have loved and enjoyed. Josh's school were very supportive, I was invited to his year's leavers assembly and they are planting a tree in Josh's memory in the school grounds.

I set up our charity Josh's Heart of Gold in November 2021, to support bereaved families following the loss of a child or young person. It aims to be there for people when they want or are ready to talk or receive advice and support. I don't know what I would have done without it. It's given me something to focus on. It feels like something positive has come out of this

whole thing. I'm hoping the charity will help others through what is an unimaginably painful time, it's definitely helped me.

When I look back and think of the early days after Josh died, I feel like I was in a totally different world. Like I was in a daydream and everything was just happening around me. To be honest, feeling like that went on for a year or two, it didn't go away after weeks or months. You ask yourself how are you going to go on without your loved one? You don't want to exist without them. I often still struggle to breathe with the pain that my son has been gone for four years.

People say it gets easier with time; it doesn't get easier, it gets harder. But you learn to cope with the pain, you learn to deal with it on a day-to-day basis. Some days it takes over you and some days you manage it better. It doesn't get easier; all you can do is take each day at a time and you will find a way through. If you can find a positive thing to focus on, try and focus on that.

What time has shown me is that my grief will last as long as my love for Josh, which is forever. I do feel like people think I should be better now. I know it's been four years, but it really doesn't feel like that. I don't know where that time has gone. I see Josh's friends all growing up and I miss him so much, Josh had so much kindness, love and joy to give, words cannot explain our loss.

**WHAT TIME HAS SHOWN
ME IS THAT MY GRIEF
WILL LAST AS LONG AS
MY LOVE FOR JOSH,
WHICH IS FOREVER**

JOSHY'S HEART OF GOLD

The charity Josh's Heart of Gold was established in memory of Josh Osborne following his tragic death on 13.4.2019.

Following Josh's family's first-hand experience of very little help or support in the aftermath of his death – particularly after leaving the hospital – Josh's mother Victoria Battman decided to set up a charity to offer what she felt was so needed and currently lacking.

The main aim of the charity is to provide support and help to other families affected by situations similar, for example child fatality or serious injury. This includes offering bereavement counselling and a one-off financial payment paid directly to the family to help with hospital food or parking costs. The charity can also contact (with the families' consent) various organisations that the family can be directed to following bereavement; saving the family from having to describe their situation repeatedly.

So far, the charity has helped several families through The Royal London Hospital with one-off payments. It has also funded the decoration of a family wellbeing room at the hospital, creating a quiet, safe and comfortable space where families can spend quality time while their child is an in-patient on the children's intensive care unit.

There is a support telephone helpline operating five days a week for families wishing to speak to someone, and Victoria has put together a podcast called Grieving Hearts to help bereaved families deal with grief and share their stories.

SUPPORT HOTLINE

**MONDAY-FRIDAY 9AM-5PM
TELEPHONE - 020 8090 0003**



 @joshy_heart

 Josh's Heart Of Gold

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ORGAN DONATION

Written by Emma Schoorl, a Specialist Nurse in Organ Donation

When someone dies, especially in sudden circumstances, it can leave a profound sense of shock and loss. Organ donation can offer comfort to bereaved families.

Only one in every 100 people find themselves in the unique position of being able to help save lives of others through the gift of organ or tissue donation after they have died.

When donation is a possibility, as a Specialist Nurse I will come and support a family through end-of-life care. I will discuss any known wishes a relative or loved one had and fully explore the option of organ donation. I will answer any questions a family may have.

When donation happens, I will gather personal information about a loved one and some blood samples are taken, in order to help ensure it is safe to transplant those organs into the adults or children who need them. Whilst the matching process takes place, I support relatives with any religious, cultural or individual needs and to make keepsakes such as handprints and hair locks. Organ donation does not affect funeral arrangements or end-of-life care given.

A specialist team of transplant doctors will travel to the hospital to carry out the operation and a team of specialist nurses and I will care for the donor throughout the process with dignity, care and respect. We will stay in regular contact with a donor's loved ones.

One donor can transform the lives of nine people and many more through tissue donation.

Following donation, family support continues with the Donor Family Care Service. Families can receive a commemorative pin, letter of recognition and some information about the success of the transplants that may have taken place. All recipients are hugely grateful for the gift of an organ and occasionally recipients may also write with thanks.

The Order of St John Award for Organ Donation honours the incredible gift donors and their families in the UK make by donating their organs to save and improve the lives of others. It is awarded by invitation to families whose loved ones donated their organs and honours the donor after their death.

The Donor Family Network contact details are provided to all our families. It is a national charity with a mission to provide the highest quality support for every donor family.

A time of tragedy and loss for one family could be a time of hope for another, with the knowledge that a loved one could help change the lives of others and leave a lasting legacy.

What families tell us, is that they wish they had talked about organ donation with their loved one before they had died. It leaves family members certain of what a loved ones' wishes were.

If you want to be an organ donor after you die, it's really important that you talk to your loved ones and make sure they understand and support your organ donation decision. You can also register your decision on the NHS Organ Donor Register.

🌐 www.organdonation.nhs.uk/register-your-decision

Donor Family Network

☎ 0845 680 1954 / 03330 129 025

✉ info@donorfamilynetwork.co.uk

THE ROLE OF A CORONER

Written by His Honour Judge Mark Lucraft KC, The Recorder of London

Who is a coroner?

A coroner is an independent judge who investigates and explains certain kinds of deaths.

What is the role of the coroner?

The office of coroner dates back to 1194. Over the centuries, the role has evolved and now it is to investigate deaths if the coroner has reason to suspect that the death was violent or unnatural, the cause of death is unknown or the deceased died while in state detention.

Why does my loved one need to be referred to a coroner?

Although the cause of death may seem to be clear to a family member, there may be questions raised about a death that need to be investigated. There are statutory guidelines about when a death needs to be referred to a coroner. A few examples may assist: firstly, the death of a family member who had been under the care of a doctor and taking prescribed medication, but who had not seen a doctor in the 28 days before death; or where someone suffered from an injury or disease attributable to any employment held by that person during their lifetime. In other instances where the death is from trauma or injury, the death will be referred to a coroner.

Why does it take so long to get the final death certificate?

In a few cases the investigations into a death are complex and the final death certificate must by law await the conclusion of an inquest. In most cases an interim death certificate is provided and there is no delay to any funeral or removal of the body overseas.

Can I speak to the coroner about my loved one?

Coroners, or in most instances their officers, will speak to the family of the deceased. In many cases the coroner's officer will need to speak to the next of kin. Nearly all coroners now have active websites that provide information for all interested persons.

What is an inquest?

An inquest is a formal hearing where evidence is placed before a coroner, or in a small number of cases, before a coroner and a jury. The vast majority of inquest hearings are conducted by the coroner with interested persons present but unrepresented by lawyers. Once evidence has been called the coroner will come to a conclusion about the cause of death.

What is an inquiry?

In a very small number of cases the death may lead to a formal inquiry. An example may assist: with the Manchester Arena terror attack it was necessary for a full examination of the background, which touched on national security issues, for the coroner to seek to hold a public inquiry to do so.

If a coroner is involved does this mean a funeral cannot go ahead?

If a death has been reported to the coroner, then as soon as the coroner is satisfied that any examination of the body is complete, for example at the end of a post mortem examination (or autopsy), then the body will normally be released so that burial or cremation and a funeral can take place.

Why does the inquest/coronial process take so long?

In most cases the inquest or coroner investigation will be conducted and concluded within weeks of the death. In some, where there are more complex issues to investigate, for example in some hospital deaths, there can be a delay to the inquest due to the extensive enquiries that need to be made by the coroner.

For further details see A Guide to Coroner Services for Bereaved People

🌐 www.publishing.service.gov.uk

POST MORTEM EXAMINATIONS

Written by Dr Ben Swift - Home Office
Registered Forensic Pathologist

An unexpected death can produce many questions for those left behind. As such, they may be investigated to help provide those needed answers.

Deaths that are unnatural (such as through trauma or accidents), those occurring within state detention or those where the cause of death is not initially apparent, will be referred to, and investigated by, the coroner (in England, Wales and Northern Ireland) or the Procurator Fiscal (in Scotland), often assisted by the police. Depending upon the circumstances, they may instruct a post mortem examination be performed upon the body of the deceased.

What is a post mortem examination?

Sometimes referred to as an autopsy, a post mortem examination is a specialist examination of a person's body after death and is carried out by a pathologist. Pathologists are medically trained doctors who specialise in identifying diseases, injuries and causes of death. As soon as is possible, the examination will be conducted in a hospital facility or public mortuary, usually close to where the death has occurred. However, sometimes it is necessary for a body to be transported to a different location. If this is necessary, the next of kin will be informed.

The examination itself generally consists of both an external and internal examination, the latter requiring cuts be made to the body such that the internal structures may be examined. The positioning of these cuts is specifically chosen such that, upon completion of the examination, the body can be viewable afterwards and the cuts not be visible. Following the examination, the body is cleaned and prepared by the staff within the mortuary (known as Anatomical Pathology Technologists {APTs}) for release to a designated funeral director.

Often the cause of death may be apparent during the examination, but sometimes further tests may be necessary.

Histology

Small pieces of tissue may be taken to be looked at under the microscope. In general, these pieces are the size of a thumbnail and only a few millimetres in thickness. From this tissue, ultra-thin slices of tissue are taken and laid on small glass slides, whereupon they are stained with chemicals that highlight different cellular parts when viewed under a microscope. This examination is referred to as 'histology' and allows a pathologist to identify microscopic changes within the tissues that may be relevant to the cause of death.

Toxicology

Samples of fluid, like blood or urine, may be kept and sent by the pathologist for testing for the presence or absence of alcohol, medications or drugs of abuse. These are done by specialist laboratories.

Specialist tissue examination

Sometimes the pathologist may wish to request the assistance of an expert in certain fields of pathology. Whole organs, such as the brain or heart, may be kept with the consent of the coroner or procurator fiscal and submitted for such specialist examination. This process may take a few weeks or months even to complete. If such further testing is necessary, the next of kin will be informed and kept updated. Following completion, the next of kin will be asked whether they wish the organ to be returned, disposed of in a lawful and respectful manner or donated for research.

Genetic testing

Advances in science are allowing us to better understand about diseases that may be passed on to children through genes. Sometimes samples may be retained for testing for such diseases, particularly when a child dies suddenly.

Minimally invasive post mortem examinations

Some areas of the country offer minimally invasive post mortem examinations, usually in the form of CT scans (often known as 'CAT scans'). These are not appropriate for every type of death and it may be that a normal post mortem examination could still be required after such a scan if the cause of death has not been identified. Currently, not every area can provide the option of a post mortem CT scan without charge to the family of the deceased.

Viewings

Sometimes it may not be possible to view your loved one before a post mortem examination, but if this is the case, it will be explained why.

Mortuary staff will be able to tell you if there are any visible changes or injuries to the deceased before entering the viewing area. Care is always taken to ensure that any cuts made during the post mortem examination may be concealed when the body is dressed and lying in a viewing suite.

Post mortem report

When all the tests have been completed, the pathologist will produce a report drawing together all the findings, including any additional testing performed and produce a cause of death in a format that is used on the final Medical Certificate of Cause of Death ('Death Certificate') issued by the registrar. The cause of death will be given in the following manner:

- Ia** - this is the immediate cause of death
- Ib** - this is the underlying cause of Ia
- Ic** - this is the cause of Ib
- II** - this is used for other conditions or diseases that may have contributed to death.

It may not be necessary to use all lines when documenting the cause of death; it may be that the cause can be given solely using one line (Ia).

The report is provided to the coroner/procurator fiscal and can be made available to the next of kin. In view of some of the medical terms that are inevitably within such reports, it can sometimes be beneficial for the next of kin to make an appointment with their GP, who may be able to take them through the report so that they understand the conclusions.

USEFUL RESOURCES

Child Bereavement UK

Child Bereavement UK supports children and young people (up to the age of 25) when someone important to them has died or is not expected to live, and parents and the wider family when a baby or child of any age dies or is dying.

☎ **0800 02 888 40**
(Monday – Friday 9am-5pm, except Bank Holidays)
🌐 www.childbereavementuk.org
✉ helpline@childbereavementuk.org
Live Chat via the website

Cruse

Cruse is a national bereavement charity, providing support and information to anyone who has suffered bereavement. They run a variety of different services including local support groups and 1:1 support.

☎ **0808 808 1677**
(Monday – Friday 9:30am-5pm, Tuesday – Thursday 9:30am-8pm and Saturday – Sunday 10am-2pm)
🌐 www.cruse.org.uk

Mind

Mind is a national charity improving lives of those with mental health issues.

☎ **0300 123 3393**
(Monday – Friday 9am-6pm except bank holidays)
🌐 www.mind.org.uk
✉ info@mind.org.uk

RoadPeace

RoadPeace is the national charity for road crash victims, providing information and support services to people bereaved or seriously injured in road crashes. It also engages in evidence-based lobbying and policy work to campaign for justice and reduce road danger.

☎ **0800 160 1069**
(Monday – Friday 9am-5pm, plus a seven-day-a-week answerphone service)
🌐 www.roadpeace.org
✉ helpline@roadpeace.org

Samaritans

When life is difficult, Samaritans are there, day or night, 365 days a year.

☎ **116 123** (seven days a week, 24/7)
🌐 www.samaritans.org
✉ jo@samaritans.org

Sibling Support

Sibling Support helps young people when their brother or sister dies, providing information, resources and advice. As a charity set up by siblings, they are aware of the unique challenges many young people face after losing a sibling.

🌐 www.siblingsupport.co.uk
✉ hello@siblingsupport.co.uk

StrongMen

StrongMen seeks to support men following a bereavement, acknowledging that grief can cause many emotional and physical conditions which can be overlooked in men.

☎ **0800 915 0400**
🌐 www.StrongMen.org.uk
🐦 [@StrongMenOrgUk](https://twitter.com/StrongMenOrgUk)

Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide

Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide exists to meet the needs of, and to overcome, the isolation experienced by people over 18 who have been bereaved by suicide.

☎ **0300 111 5065** (Monday – Tuesday 9am-5pm)
🌐 www.uksobs.org
✉ email.support@uksobs.org

Winston's Wish

Winston's Wish is a national charity supporting children, young people and their families after the death of someone important.

☎ **08088 020 021** (Monday – Friday 8am-8pm)
Text WW to **85258** (24/7)
🌐 www.winstonswish.org
help2makesense.org
✉ ask@winstonswish.org

“It has been said that you lose someone twice – the first time when they stop breathing, the second time when you stop talking about them”

anonymous



London's Air Ambulance Charity

Created by: Tara Nolan, Eleanor Boylan, Alice Kershberg
and Frank Chege

Designed by: GeoBrand

www.londonsairambulance.org.uk