

Adam Rowe: Commemorative Statement in respect of his mother Amanda Hitch

Date of Birth: 20 October 1962

Date of Death: 12 February 2022

Amanda Hitch was my mother.

As a child, I lived with my mum and dad in Ongar, Essex. When my younger brother was born, we moved to Clacton on Sea. My mum worked as a Lunchtime Assistant at my primary school. When I was 8 years old, we moved to Chelmsford for my father's work. My mum then worked as a Teaching Assistant at a primary school. She loved her job and worked really hard at it whilst also running the household.

My parents separated in 2011. My mum's mental health started to deteriorate shortly after. My mum who was not usually an angry person, she started to get angrier about everything. She also became increasingly hyperactive.

In and around 2010 my mum left the family home with my brother. She moved into a barge boat in Chelmsford. One of the reasons for this was that she didn't have much money but to my mind this was also an indication that things weren't quite right.

She also left her job during this phase because she felt she was being pushed out. I recall her very angry about the fact that she had been told by her Line Manager that she was not performing as she used to. After she left that job she had various jobs such as waitressing at a pub and working in a park café. I remember an air of financial uncertainty during this period; my brother who was living with mum at the time and studying for his A levels also had to work part time.

My mum's condition continue to deteriorate. She became increasingly anxious, and rarely left the house because she was nervous about other people seeing her.

My mum was admitted to the Linden Centre, Broomfield Hospital in Chelmsford in 2014. I understand that she was suffering with psychosis. She told me that she was hearing voices in her head and she thought buildings were moving and talking to her. She bit her nails until she did not have any left and the nail beds were bleeding. When I visited her in hospital, she told me that someone was trying to kill her. Even when I was able to have more 'normal' conversations with her, there was an undertone of psychosis. For example, she would mention that the buildings were moving midway through a conversation. It was clear that this was

extremely distressing for her. It was heart-breaking for us as her family to see her level of distress.

By this time it was very clear that my mother was seriously unwell. She had always been so very independent, had held down multiple jobs and had been such a stable force in my childhood. It felt like the roles had been reversed: I was now the carer. I wondered whether she would ever recover.

I felt extremely frustrated by the failure of staff to listen when I tried to convey to them all that my mum had been able to do i.e. to run a household, look after her children, do well at her job and live independently. She had also obtained a qualification from the University of Cambridge which she was very proud of. I did not feel like the hospital or community staff understood or appreciated the rate of decline in her condition.

After about 9 months, she was discharged. With my help, she sold her house in Writtle and bought a house in Clacton on Sea, which was where I had spent most of my childhood and this was probably where my mum had her fondest memories. However, it became clear to me that my mum could no longer live independently. For example, when I would leave her house, she would phone me about 20 times after and tell me that she was worried that the walls were going to fall in.

Shortly after her separation from my dad, mum had actually found a partner,^[personal/sensitive] who cared for her a lot. [He] started to stay at her house to care for her, but this was not enough by way of support and so then mum soon moved into [his] house.

Mum had about 3 further hospital admissions during the next 5 years. She was admitted following suicide attempts. For the majority of the rest of her life, she remained in what was clearly a very depressed state; and actively suicidal or, consistently expressing a desire to die.

I had a very close relationship with my mum. As her mental health declined, I viewed her as someone in need of my support. When I was a child, she had provided me with an infinite amount of support. For example, she planned every day of our summer holidays, she ensured our homework was always completed. Even as I entered my mid-twenties she would book my favourite restaurant with cake and decorations for my birthday each year. Her love for my brother and I never wavered and was about the only thing that gave her some happiness. I felt like I could rely on her if I was going through a difficult time. As she became more unwell, I felt like it was my turn to step up.

When she lived with [her partner], I saw her about once a week, or at the least, once a fortnight. We went out for the day to places like Epping Forest. I was conscious that she would not organise activities for herself and that when I left, she would remain depressed and mainly stay in the

house until we next saw her. As such, there was an undertone of sadness to our trips and there was an element of it being a chance to check-in on her mental health. My mum would sometimes cry when our day out came to an end.

I felt like I was the only one who was pushing her to get better. On several occasions, she stopped taking her medication and I felt that this was not tackled by the mental health teams. I also implored the mental health services to find an alternative to the oral medication which she was taking and as a result of my challenge, she was offered a depot injection to form part of her regime of medication. I felt that the clinical team should have been more proactive in this decision, rather than responding to a suggestion from a non-medically trained patient's family member.

My brother went to university ^[personal/sensitive] and then moved to ^[personal/sensitive] complete his postgraduate degree. As he lived far away, I did not want him to share the burden of our mum's condition. I felt that it was my responsibility to ensure that she took her medication and attended medical appointments. I tried to shelter my brother from as much as I could ^[personal/sensitive]

. This inevitably put a lot of pressure on me, not only to support my mum on a practical level, that is deal with appointments, life admin and phone calls with the care team, but it was also emotionally draining and lonely.

In and around 2020, I realised that my mum's condition was not improving and that [her partner] was unable to meet her needs. I felt that my mum would never get better again. I thought that if she lived for the next 10 to 15 years, it would be a miracle. It felt like I was dealing with someone with a terminal illness as I was convinced that she would die from suicide. As such, I wanted to make the most of our time together. I organised a trip to Ramsgate with my brother and mum in September 2021. This was the first time we had been away together since I was a teenager. My mum brought board games and we went out for walks. It was so nice to spend quality time with her and see her enjoying herself.

I started to research into sheltered accommodation for her to move into. She was encouraged by this idea because she wanted to regain her independence while being supported. My mum chose accommodation in Ongar which we felt provided an appropriate level of support.

My mum had mixed feelings about the supported accommodation. I think she knew she was not going to get a better place but it was difficult for her to be surrounded by people significantly older than her - mum being in her late fifties at this time. She often made comments such as 'who knew you would be doing this for me when we used to do this for nanny', referring to her mum who lived in a care home with dementia for the latter part of her life.

We had some good times together during this period, yet her severe depression and suicidal intent never lifted. In 2021, she hosted us for Christmas. She put up a Christmas tree and bought us sacks with presents in them. This was a really important event as it gave her some independence and was something she used to do for us as children.

However this was a rare event for the majority of the time up until her death, mum remained very unwell and suicidal for much of the time.

My mum's death and the impact on me and my family

On 12 February 2022, I arrived home around 9:30pm. I was alone in my flat as my partner was away. I heard a buzz at the door around 10:30pm. When I opened the door and saw British Transport Police (BTP), I knew immediately that my mum had committed suicide. The BTP told me that there had been an incident that had resulted in my mum's death. I went into shock. The BTP stayed with me until my partner arrived at the flat.

I did not sleep that night. I had images of what happened in my head. I had long anticipated that moment, but it still felt surreal. I had so many questions – was this time any different? Did she leave a note? Did she try to call me.

My brother was at a friend's house that evening so I decided to contact him the next day because I felt that it would be detrimental to his welfare to tell him that night. The next morning, I drove to my brother's friend's house and told him of our mum's death. He went into shock too.

My brother, his partner, my partner and I stayed together for 4 days to support each other. We then relocated to my father's house to sort out the practical things, such as organising the funeral. [personal/sensitive]

the rest of the family feel a huge gap left by the loss of my mum. I often sit and reflect on how sad her life was and how, with better support, this needn't have been the case.

Before she was unwell and during her occasional periods of wellness, my mum was the perfect mum. If I ever had friendship or relationship issues, I could talk to her as a friend and source of support. She wanted me to do well in school, but if anything went wrong, I could always go to her. I could call her any minute of the day and she would be there for me. She always wanted my brother and me to go to her house to spend time with her. She was so proud of us; she would light up when she spoke about our work and university achievements.

She pushed herself out of her comfort zone for us. When I was at university in Birmingham, she drove there to see me even though she hated driving. On another occasion, she organised a surprise birthday dinner for me and arranged for my closest friends to attend. I remember these times with great fondness.

Mum's death has not only devastated me but has left a hole in our family. Both my brother and I miss her terribly.

Please find attached to my statement pictures of Amanda I would like to submit to the Inquiry.



Adam Rowe -
Commemorative Exh
