

**COMMEMORATIVE ACCOUNT OF LISA WOLFF  
REGARDING ABBIGAIL LOUISE SMITH (DOD 16.2.22)**

**Kaleidoscope**

Abbi, my daughter, you were a kaleidoscope of everchanging colours and patterns. My little kaleidoscope. I loved sharing the colours of your life with you.

I remember when you were born, I had already chosen your name years prior, it came from a book I read and I recall the conscious decision to name my next daughter "Abbigail" as I thought it was the most beautiful name I had heard. It suited you well; you were the baby that charmed everyone you came into contact with and you were certainly adored by both your immediate and extended families.

When you were little we had the most fascinating conversations; I remember the time you asked me "Is [my friend] poorly mum? Does she have a bug in her tummy?... is it a spider or a ladybird!!! Or the fact that you struggled with some words – escalators were "alligators", a dressing gown was a "dressing down" and ornaments were "ordanments". You liked these words and chose to use them as you grew older and we often giggled about it with you insisting you were correct!

In primary school your fearlessness was legendary and despite your difficulties you still played an active role and were in the school nativity play every year. You developed a special bond with the teacher who was your 1:1 and stayed in touch right up until the end.

You had such a special bond with animals. I still have all your rosettes from the dog shows we went to and the gymkhanas you won. I remember you entering the beginners showjumping class in 2006 and winning 1<sup>st</sup> place on Bambam and I remember the same year you winning 1<sup>st</sup> place in "Best Child Handler" with Meg, our dog. I still have the trophy you won and I will keep it safe forever. You wanted a dog of your own more than anything and despite never realizing that dream, Greg and I have adopted a rescue dog for you. His name is Ted and he is a stray street dog from Bosnia and if anyone asks me – I tell them it is my youngest daughter's dog and that I am looking after him for her. I tell Ted all about you and how lucky he is to have such an amazing owner who would simply adore him unreservedly.

You were always so sporty and I have smiled through tears at finding all of your British Gymnastic awards for trampolining. You attained all the levels from 1 to 10 and I remember watching how free you looked when you were taking part. When I took you rock climbing, the instructor said to me that you were a natural at it and again, you seemed so free. The more adrenalin inducing the activity, the more you seemed to revel in it. You came alive at these times and lived for the moments of freedom you could find. You actively searched out these activities and were constantly chasing that next wave of emotion and life – there was one week alone where you had me trying to arrange scuba diving , hot air ballooning and bungee jumping; I was

tired just trying to arrange it all, never mind actually doing it!!! However the sheer childlike delight you displayed when taking part in these activities, always filled my heart with joy.

After we moved down south we set out on our "best life" together and shared so many adventures. There are lots of them but some of the memories that will always enable me to both smile and cry at the same time are...

- Watching you at Adrenaline Quarry when we were on holiday in Cornwall. You scaled and dived from about 40 foot up a rockface into the flooded quarry. You swung out over 170feet above the quarry on a zero gravity swing and reached over 40 miles per hour coming back down on the zip line.
- Going to Alton Towers together. I had to get up at 5am to get ready and drive us there. It was only when we were there that I realised that I needed to go on all the rides too! 13 of them Abbi! And I have vertigo!! Oblivion / the Smiler / 13 / Nemesis / Air / Rita ... the list went on. I remember wobbling off the Smiler and needing to hold on to a tree to keep myself upright and I then remember violently being sick by that tree. You stood and laughed at me! And after that I still needed to drive us home and I seem to remember you had the audacity to sleep most of the way!
- You completed the Race for Life 3 times and earned over a thousand pounds in sponsorship money. On one run alone you raised over 700 pounds. I would always stand in the crowd cheering and be waiting for you at the finish line. You always crossed – jubilant and delighted with yourself. You were such a giving person.
- I remember you meeting Greg, who was to later become your step-dad, for the first time and how much you liked him. We settled into a routine and our little family was never more complete than when we did things like playing Disney Trivial Pursuit and other games together and when we took you out for meals. I remember the day we took you to Cosmo and your complete delight at being able to choose anything and everything you wanted to eat. More than anything, I remember your face when you saw the chocolate fountain and how you came back to the table for your camera. You recorded your whole life through pictures and videos. You stood and recorded the chocolate fountain on your camera, not caring who watched. You always ended our visits together with such meaningful hugs; Greg always said you gave the best hugs and always held on so tightly.
- Our movie days were legendary. Sometimes we would go and spend all day in a cinema and bounce from movie to movie. We would enter when it was light and go home when it was dark. There were so many times we sat and watched DVDs at home together; you had a collection of 100s and 100s of them. I remember visiting you in one of the hospital units and turning up with a duvet, portable DVD player, DVDs, chocolate, popcorn and milkshakes. We lay on the floor for hours under

that duvet watching those movies – I think one of them was Finding Nemo.

- You were an accomplished horse rider. Every week for years we would go together. I would drive, no matter what the weather, and sit in the shed in the cold, usually wearing mittens and a hat to try and keep warm and would watch on proudly whilst you rode the horses and enjoyed yourself. Your magical bond with animals was always so evident at these times, you were always so absorbed in trying to simply be at one with the horse. I always took the camera and sometimes filmed you or took a photo of you with all the different horses and I am so relieved I have all those memories. Even if I am not in the pictures, I know I was there.
- You enjoyed watching soap operas such as Coronation St, Eastenders, Casualty, Waterloo Road and Wentworth. You used to be so worried if you came to stay with us - that even though you had set your Sky box to record them, you might still miss them and so Greg and I had to double record them at our house for you, just to reassure you that you would be able to watch them! You liked reality TV and deciding who to vote out on Strictly, I'm a Celebrity or Britains Got Talent. You would always phone me straight after and we would sit there and chat like 2 old ladies about who we wanted to stay and who we thought should be voted out and we always laughed about Greg thinking he was the best judge on the planet; he hadn't even watched these kinds of programs until he met us!!
- You adored singing. You created and uploaded so many tiktoks of yourself singing and had a facebook group of "good times" that included you singing. I think it brought you avenues to express yourself when you struggled to find the words. We used to sing together so often and collapse in fits of giggles or we would wind the windows down in the car and sing on a summer's day, usually on our way to horse riding or on one of our days out. We used to have singing competitions on the wii until our voices were hoarse! All of your many friends would comment on your beautiful voice and now this is lost to them too. I stay in touch with lots of them and they always talk about your kindness, gentleness and lovely voice.
- On your 16<sup>th</sup> birthday I arranged to take you to London for the day. We did so many things together! We explored London, visited the 4D cinema and we went on the London Eye. I remember you being fascinated by the statue artist we met on the bridge and you had your photo taken with him; you had no idea that he held a pretend gun to your head and were quite indignant when you looked at the photo when it was developed. We sailed down the Thames and the Captain allowed you to choose the seat you wanted and with a big smile on your face you chose the very front of the top deck in the open air. But the best bit of the day was surprising you with a trip to the theatre to see the Lion King. I remember your horrified face at the cost of the sweets and the drinks but we still bought lots – along with ice cream at the

interval! As we sat in the theatre, I looked across at you and you were enthralled. As the actors and puppets started to enter the auditorium and make their way to the stage, I heard you exclaim "WOW" so loudly and afterwards when we chatted about the performance you giggled at the fact that you thought you had said WOW in your head and didn't realise you had said it out loud, but I am glad you did Abbi, because I know it was a magical and memorable day for you and I was delighted to share it with you and to be able to carry that memory in my heart forever.

- We sat for hour upon hour creating memory books together of all our adventures. They are littered with photos, tickets, postcards and cutouts of all our special days. I took a couple of them to the reception following your funeral so that all your friends, family and acquaintances who were there from near and far (and when I say "far" Abbi, [your uncle] came all the way from the USA especially for you) to celebrate your amazing technicolour life, could look at them and see some of the memories that I am standing here recalling with you.

I loved the way you created and kept your memories, this was how you processed and made sense of life. Diaries, videos, cutouts, quotes and lists. You kept lists of everything. Gifts you had given people and presents that you had been bought. I have found it all so carefully documented and lovingly stored with meticulous detail. I have even found videos on your camera of you dropping various bath bombs into the bath at different times and filming them fizzing away into nothingness. All of your letters and cards from people have been equally lovingly stored and kept safely. I have read all the diaries that you left and I promise you that where you have expressed concern at the things you have seen and been subject to, I will do my best to be your voice. I was so happy when I found one of your diaries that recorded how you had made a ladybird and a hungry caterpillar ornament (no it's not an ordament – I can hear you correcting me now and chuckling), you were so pleased that you still had them. Well I have found them Abbi and I promise that Greg and I will keep them safe forever too.

During your funeral, the Celebrant made reference to your time at Columbus School and College and it gladdened my heart to see so many teachers and students present on the day, after all that time. There are many more that sent me messages Abbs, telling me how amazing you were, how much they learned from you and how they, like I, will carry your spirit of goodness with them. You had such a great time at Columbus and I remember some of the famous people you met: the Countess of Wessex, Frank Bruno, Shane Ritchie – where we teased you about being Mrs Shane Ritchie because he called you "Blondie" but your favourite encounter was with Jet – the Blue Peter pony. You sailed round Britain on a schooner called the Queen Galadriel and I have photos and a video of you at the helm, steering the course true and holding her straight. You visited the farm with the school weekly and you learned to surf on trips to the beach. I have the photos of you wading out into the sea at Clacton in your clothes and having to be brought home dripping wet. How you enjoyed that day though – I have pictures of you dancing on the beach with your arms open wide, laughing.

The staff at Columbus were so quick to talk about your empathy with other students, how much you cared, how much you gave of yourself. You never had the opportunity or insight to realise how multifaceted and incredibly special you were. All the many people who attended your funeral were there because of you Abbi, you were the common denominator in that gathering. You were such an old soul, a magical, gentle and incredibly loved person and I wish you could have understood that. I hope you are shining down on us, smiling in delight at so many people loving and caring about you; well I need to tell you Abbi, that this is only a fraction. You touched so many lives, like a stone being thrown into water, the ripples went far beyond your direct interactions.

Do you remember how much you looked forward to our barbecues? I can picture you sitting in the sun, wearing your sunglasses and laughing with everybody. I can hear Greg saying to you "another burger Abs?" and you replying "oh – go on then!" with a big grin. That was your standard reply on barbecue days "Oh – go on then!"

Something else that was standard for you – pyjamas!! You were a girl who loved her PJs and her dressing gown, and for this one time I will relent and call it a dressing down. You loved to feel comfortable and snuggly and I hope that you like the Tigger pyjamas we chose for you to wear at our final goodbye – they said BIG HUGS and they felt right, comfy and cosy.

It breaks my heart, along with the hearts of all those who loved and cared for you, to think that there will be no more memories, no more barbecues, no more movies, no more games and no more family. It seems totally unfair that you had to die in order to be safe and at peace, when you should have been supported to achieve this when you were alive. The saving grace is that at least now you are no longer a slave to Dr's and clinicians who never truly understood you and who fought to be right about their diagnosis and treatment of you, you are no longer a tool for their learning nor an inconvenience to their working day. No more will you be given countless drugs which dulled your sparkle and took away your fabulous colours.

I wanted you to be in an appropriate facility that could offer you bespoke personalised care, appropriate for your diagnosis of autism, learning disabilities and mental health needs

Perhaps you needed some medication, but I always felt clinicians were trying to "fix" you with medication; no one wanted to know what you were like before the medications and I believe some of your behaviours were simply your autism, but every behaviour was laid squarely at the door of mental health.

You became a mere shadow of the person I have so far described and I am still no closer to understanding how, over a period of 10 years you faded before our eyes, following what was supposed to be a 2 week assessment when you were simply a teenager. This ultimately led to your death. You took your life when you were only 26 years old, as you were stripped of support,

empathy and understanding by those who were supposed to deliver those fundamentals. You fought. You fought so hard and I wish beyond the stars that we had been able to find the support you needed. You had the majority of your life ahead of you and I desperately wanted to see how that panned out and to be able to share it with you. I feel cheated.

You have left a hole, not just in my heart, but in the hearts of a multitude of people, that simply cannot be filled; not that we would want to, because the agonising pain serves as a continuous reminder that you are no longer here.

I wish I were articulate enough to paint your particular kaleidoscope of colours inside every persons head here, so that they could truly see, like those who love you, you, your individuality and the shifting facets of colour that danced along a rainbows edge. It may have been far too brief but I was privileged that you were my youngest daughter and beyond proud to have been your mum.

I still can't say goodbye as it hurts too much, but I will say that I love you lots pumpkin, which is the same way I ended our many, many phone calls. I know you are safe, I know you are peaceful and I know that Rocky, your ever present Teddy who was with for over 20 years, through thick and thin, is looking after you. I washed him and dressed him in his best clothes to be by your side in your coffin and to accompany you on your last journey.

I will miss you beyond eternity as will Greg, [your sister, your step-brothers, your nephew and your niece along with all your aunts, uncles and cousins and your many friends (who still stay in touch with me, even to this day!)]

### **How my daughter's death has affected me**

I struggle to enjoy family events or gatherings because I am acutely aware that Abbi is absent from them and I am constantly thinking about how she is "missing out" because of how much she would have enjoyed the day and I therefore cannot relax and enjoy them myself.

I find it difficult to watch my favourite TV programmes any more. If I watch Casualty or Silent Witness, I see Abbi's face on the cadavers being autopsied or the bodies being resuscitated and I am transported back to the day I identified her body.

I have surrounded myself with her belongings; her jewellery, her teddies, her furniture and even her vacuum cleaner and feather duster, just so that I can feel near to her even when I am doing my housework.

I had some of her clothes turned into memory bears and have had 4 made for myself and family.

I kept some of her clothes and wear them to feel closer to her.

When alone in the house I speak to her and beg her to send me a signal to show she is still with me or that she is "happy" wherever she is now.

I have kept Abbi's ashes. I moved house recently and even had a special bag that I used to sit with her on my knee for the whole journey and I held her tightly to make sure nothing further could hurt her. I cannot drive alone on the occasions she is with me and I insist my husband drives and that she travels on my knee.

I work for the NHS as a Social Prescriber and it can be tough trying to offer support to those who are bereaved and especially those bereaved by suicide. I have to disassociate myself as it is important that I simply listen and offer my patient appropriate support and not bring my experiences into the conversation.

I had to complete a basic life support course as part of my work and having to perform CPR on the mannequin was incredibly difficult. I kept seeing her face and imagining what had happened the night she took her life and what had happened when she was discovered.

I still keep her on my "Find my Friend" (a tracking app, which would have allowed me to know her whereabouts) and I have her messages "pinned" on my phone so that I see her picture every time I open my messages app.

I will never forget having to identify her body. I can still see the purple shroud that covered the mound that was to the right of my vision and knowing I needed to turn my head and that the mound was Abbi's body. I was not allowed to identify her body until after the autopsy as the Police needed to rule out foul play. It was 5 days before I got to see her. The mortuary staff had to warn me "not to move her hair from her neck" where they had wrapped her long blonde hair round her neck.

Whilst at the funeral parlour Abbi's body continued to degrade and the funeral director had to phone me to ask permission to embalm her. Her hair was full of brambles and mud and I asked the funeral parlour to wash her hair and they advised me it was difficult because her hair had degraded so much. They offered to cut some off for me and take a finger print but I only ended up with a tiny lock because of the degradation and also only a tiny part of her finger print, again because of decomposition I presume.

In short – I cannot articulate how badly this has affected me. I live with it every day. The pain in my chest and the lump in my throat never leave, I simply learn to live with them.

To sum up I would say that I am only being given this forum and being listened to now, and more importantly heard, because my beautiful and caring daughter is dead. If she were alive she would still be facing the same battles and prejudices she faced on a daily basis. There would still be no support and she would simply be existing and not living.

I would like to show you four videos. Three of which was taken during happier times and the other taken whilst she was in hospital on 13.2.22. She was discharged from hospital the next day on 14.2.22. Within the next few days she had taken her life.