

## **Liam Brennan**

### **Commemoration Account for the Lampard Inquiry**

My son, Liam Patrick Brennan was born on 10<sup>th</sup> August 1983 and was the eldest of three children. His birth at the Whittington Hospital in Archway was a moment of joy for us. There was nothing unusual in his birth other than he was delivered by a male midwife which was then regarded as so novel that he had been featured in an episode of Women's Hour on Radio 4 as a man doing what was regarded then, as a woman's job.

His Mum and I who had been married for two years at the time lived in Barnet where Liam, his sister Lucy and brother James were brought up. Liam attended the local Catholic primary school and went on to Finchley Catholic secondary school. I think its fair to say that Liam found his primary school to be fun, whilst looking back, secondary school probably felt very restrictive to him. He found the necessary discipline and rigid structure of the school day particularly when attending classes of subjects that didn't interest, him to be demotivating.

Liam had an open personality and whilst it was often obvious to some of his teachers that he had little time for their subject it never led to personal dislike between them which was a credit to their professionalism and his engaging personality.

It is also fair to say that Liam was starting to struggle in his teens which can be a challenging time for any young person. On the one hand he was a carefree and funny lad, on the other he could not work out his place in the world. He was finding it difficult to define what he wanted to do with his life and his own self-worth – a theme that unfortunately ran to the end of his life. Responsibility did not sit comfortably with him but hard work on anything he was interested in, did.

His rebelliousness increased and his behaviour became more difficult as he sought the friendship of those who he hoped had a better understanding of how he felt. His relationship with his siblings in their words "became more complex" which they found difficult to understand as they were from the same family, had the 'same life' but appeared to be on different paths.

Yet during his childhood we remember Liam playing football in the garden with his sister who was two years his junior. James was born six years later. They built dens, celebrated their birthdays with bouncy castle parties in the garden and holidays at Butlins, Pontins, Ireland and Corfu. Upon returning from our holiday in Ireland, Liam used to our tape recorder to recreate the programmes we had listened to on the local radio station when we were driving around enjoying what he saw as the relative simplicity of rural life in that country. In those tapes, he was able to display his creativity, humour and sharp observation.

Liam and I shared a passion for sport in particular for supporting Chelsea as well as going to occasional matches at Barnet and later on the odd game of snooker that always had to be played positively. I remember in particular phoning Liam straight after the match when Chelsea won the Champions League final in 2012 to compare notes. I was in Ireland at a family event, Liam had watched it somewhere local to where he was living in Harlow. He excitedly explained that he had watched the penalty shoot out through his fingers and that he could hardly watch it. Over the call, his excitement and most of all happiness was obvious.

Later that year, our last conversation took place when Liam rang me to check when Usain Bolt would be running in the Olympic 200 metres final. Bolt was precisely the kind of top class, apparently relaxed and unfazed sportsman that Liam would look up to.

Liam left school at 16. Any further academic studies were not for him, so he worked for a while for a plumber, and then had a brief job in a printing works. He had done some work experience in a pizza parlour and appeared to enjoy it and eventually he had a series of chef jobs until he died.

Liam had a good relationship with my wife Susan, and I remember we went to visit him at a gastro pub in Wales when he spent a few years as chef and enjoying the rural life there in 2000 at the time of the Sydney Olympics. By all accounts, he was a talented chef and enjoyed the creativity and camaraderie of the kitchen despite its notoriously intense working environment. I know from conversations with Liam that he loved nothing more than having one of his recipes included as a 'special' on the menu.

After the evening sessions, Liam found it difficult to wind down choosing to resort to alcohol and what are euphemistically termed 'recreational drugs' to try to relax creating its own cycle of increasing dependency.

Even though Liam's hours were unsociable I remember us visiting him in later years at another pub/restaurant where he was working in Hertfordshire. A local choir used it as their post practice watering hole, and they treated us to a couple of songs. That evening saw Liam at his most relaxed and content. Liam joined us for Boxing Day lunches and once took me to Borough Market to be shown how to 'shop like a chef' and he treated us to a meal prepared by him. A bit of a busman's holiday but very much appreciated, nonetheless.

Liam just wanted to be happy, earn enough to fund a social life and live a relatively unhindered life. When he had money, he was incredibly generous with the gifts he would give at Christmas.

Liam was not at all materialistic.

There were a lot of times when he achieved the equilibrium, he was looking for but there were also times when he struggled with living. Things just didn't make sense to him, he could not be persuaded to see the positive side of life. He had talent, friends that enjoyed his company, the camaraderie of the kitchens he worked in and the love and support of his family.

All that that was never enough for him.

Liam died on Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> August 2012 four days after his 29<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Liam had a throaty laugh that could easily be heard across a room, a wicked and sharp sense of humour, a love of sport, animals, music and computer games.

Anyone who met him, remembered him fondly.

## **Impact**

In terms of the impact of his death on our family, it has been profound.

The first feeling is an almost overwhelming sense of failure, that we have outlived our child or sibling. This is against the natural order of life.

For us as parents, it is a basic duty to look after our children, set them up to make the best of life and watch them develop in our old age. In that, there is a feeling we have failed Liam.

I should make it clear that whatever the outcome of this Inquiry, nothing will change that feeling.

In the couple of years after Liam's death I felt faced with an incompatible choice. Not only was I, along with other members of the family, trying to come to terms with my grief but also trying to get through the corporate defensiveness of the North Essex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust in a quest to understand how Liam had died, why he had died, what had been done for him and what had not – all compounded by their contribution to the Coroners hearing into Liam's death. This was an incredibly difficult time and almost unbelievably, made worse, by the Trust.

Having got so far in my correspondence, discussions and meetings with the Trust, I felt I needed to make the choice between continuing to pursue more information about why Liam died which was beginning to feel all-consuming or to try to concentrate on supporting my family. In feeling isolated, I chose the latter only to find all these years later that so many others had found themselves in similar situations.

Our hearts go out to all the families involved in this Inquiry – an Inquiry from whom so much is expected.

Elaine, Liam's Mum, is frankly still so impacted she still cannot bring herself to articulate how she feels other than how much she loves Liam and misses him every day.

Lucy, Liam's sister, would point to impacts as simple as answering the question "how many siblings do you have?" The issue is not to deny Liam was her brother, but having to deal, not only with the explanation, but often having to assuage the questioner's embarrassment or even judgment. That is certainly an experience I can identify with and have had to wrestle with it many times.

Liam will never meet her son <sup>[personal/sensitive]</sup> who is now three years old. I have no doubt he would have been a mischievous and generous uncle.

Lucy has been taken completely off guard when she sees Liam in [her son's] physical similarities and looks. There was a phase when they looked so alike, she had to say to her mum that he looks a lot like Liam at the moment and to prepare herself for that when she next visited them. Whilst Lucy is happy to see him live on through our future generations it can be extremely hard and is a constant reminder that he is not here with us. She knows one day she is going to have to explain to [her son] why his uncle is an angel.

During Lucy's pregnancy, 8 years after Liam's death, she was asked by a health visitor if she had suffered any depression. Her answer was truthfully "no". She was then asked why she was signed off work for 2 weeks in 2012 and whether it was due to depression. She then had to explain to the health visitor about her brother's death and justify that she did not have a history of mental health issues. This was completely irrelevant to her pregnancy, and she made a complaint to her GP and

health visitors organisation. This also, was handled completely insensitively. Pregnancy should be a positive experience and yet the worst time of her life was being discussed when the two were not related.

Lucy also had to dig deep to trust the hospital with her own and her baby's health as the previous times she was in that particular hospital she was visiting her brother in the mental health facility and subsequently the mortuary.

For Lucy, there are practical impacts that she has to manage, including helping to maintain Liam's grave, supporting her parents and brother on the hard days such as anniversary's, birthdays, mothers and father's day. She will never forget thinking on her 30th birthday that she shouldn't have been the first child of mum and dads to turn 30. That was Liam's job.

For my part, the 14<sup>th</sup> August, Liam's anniversary, is very much a day in the diary when I cannot work or do anything that would involve personal enjoyment. That would simply be disrespectful. That is a day for going to his grave in Finchley.

James, Liam's younger brother shares many of the feelings expressed by his sister and other members of the family.

It may be a cliché, but it feels as if Liam has been robbed of his potential as a person. We did not feel that his condition was hopeless. The good times gave us encouragement that with the right help and support, Liam could find his place in the world. We were desperate for help which is why we turned to the NHS for the answers we could not find for ourselves.

No parents like us should have to bury their child, his hopes and his dreams.

At family events there is always someone missing whether it be at weddings [his sister's son's] baptism, birthdays and many other excuses for getting together. Our family and Liam himself, have also missed out on whatever personal celebrations he might have enjoyed as he would have progressed through his life. Since Liam's death our family get togethers matter more and yet will always be enjoyed less than they should be.

Liam is always remembered; we hope he is always there in spirit casting his welcome shadow among us.

May Liam Rest in Peace.

**Patrick Brennan**  
**20<sup>th</sup> July 2024**