

IMPACT STATEMENT FOR RICHARD HARLAND ELLIOTT

FROM HIS SISTER, CATHERINE PECK.

My parents had struggled to successfully bring up 8 children but through their hard work and care Richard survived whooping cough, tonsillitis, bouts of asthma, where he could barely breathe, chicken pox, measles, mumps, an operation to remove his adenoids and almost drowning in the sea at Walton at the age of 8 and being rescued by a lifeguard. When Richard emigrated to Canada in his 20's my parents never stopped worrying about him.

When Richard had a breakdown in Canada my parents found the money to pay for him to come home, nursed him while he re-learned to talk, to eat, to dress himself. They did everything for him and with him, until he felt confident enough to be independent. They supported him through several breakdowns and visited him every week.

Richard had confided to me and Mum that he was fearful that he would die when being forcefully restrained in the hospital and this made him very reluctant to seek help. The evening before he died, my mother persuaded Richard to voluntarily go with the hospital staff and police to Clacton Hospital so he wouldn't have to endure this, only to be told that he had died within 12 hours of being admitted.

I not only lost my brother, and my children their uncle, who we were very close to, but we also lost our mother and grandmother as we had known her. Instead of Mum being our support, we became hers, watching her grieving and wracked with guilt for the things she had said and done to persuade him to go to the hospital and ultimately his death. If it hadn't been for her faith in God, and belief that she would see him again, I'm not sure how she would have coped.

Dealing with the funeral, sorting out his finances, emptying his home of belongings, selling his property etc. took their toll.

The day after Richard died my parents were visited by hospital staff who apologised for Richard's death in their care but at the Coroner's Hearing, six months later, instead of an official apology, they were blindsided by false accusations, hearsay and speculation which further traumatised them. My mother's life was never the same again. Losing a child is bad enough but feeling that you had failed them, hadn't protected them, was something she never got over. His fiancée was devastated by his sudden death and still talks about her love for Richard, her only true love, and how her life might have been had he lived. She still goes to sleep cuddling his T-shirt.

Richard fought for change in the Mental Health Services and this is our wish now, so no-one ever has to endure what our family, especially our mother and Richard's partner, had to go through. Mental Health Hospitals should be a safe place for people, a sanctuary where they have your best interests at the core of their service. It should be a refuge when you're at your most vulnerable, to offer advice, support and strategies to cope with life, not a place which you fear having to enter.

I have once again started to read Richard's poems, letters, write ups, papers, articles and correspondence. It is heartbreaking to read now, even after all these years. He so wanted to make a difference to the care which patients received but his life was cut short, he died far too early and in a very distressing way.

The Lampard Inquiry cannot bring Richard back but I am hoping it will bring about changes, like involving the families in the treatment of their loved one. And answers, I need answers.