

COMMEMORATIVE STATEMENT FOR RICHARD HARLAND ELLIOTT

FROM HIS SISTER, CATHERINE PECK

I started to write this Commemorative statement about my brother Richard's life but kept remembering things I had missed or forgotten about. How to include everything about someone who was a larger than life character. Once you met Richard he was never forgotten. There was much more to Richard than the label of Bi-polar, or Manic Depressive as it was more commonly known then. He was a fiancé, son, brother, uncle, nephew, cousin, friend, advocate and supporter to many.

Richard Harland Elliott was born in Southend on 1st December 1953. He was just 48 years old when he died in Peter Bruff Ward, Clacton Hospital.

Our parents, Colin and Barbara, were Anglo Indians who had chosen England as their home. When Richard was 6 months old, and I was 18 months old, we both contracted Whooping Cough. Richard was quite ill and was left with bronchial asthma and breathing problems which plagued him for the rest of his life.

When Richard was about 3 years old we moved to Colchester. This was where he made some lifelong friends [personal/sensitive] . There were 8 siblings, I was the eldest and Richard was the eldest of the 6 boys. Richard had a good childhood, part of the baby boom years there were always friends to play with, enough for an impromptu football match, cricket, rounders, or just playing games in the woods, making dens and go-carts. The children always looked out for one another, going out to play early and returning when dinner was ready. He learned to play the trumpet and joined the boy scouts attended church on Sundays and joined the St John's Ambulance Brigade, taking many of their exams and I still have his Certificates.

Richard was a sensitive child and I remember when he was about 8 coming to me with tears in his eyes on Christmas day. He had heard a news report that a family of children had been killed in a house fire on Christmas Eve. Richard could only imagine how excited they would have been on going to bed; he was deeply affected.

Richard was an intelligent boy, passed 'O' level examinations, and was Head Boy at Alderman Blaxill School in his final year and was highly thought of by the teaching staff and pupils too. He attended college to train as a television, radio and telecommunications engineer, passing the exams and eventually being employed by British Telecom as a Telecommunications Engineer.

He married his teenage sweetheart when he was 21, bought a house in Colchester and got two springer spaniels, Boots and Snoopy. Realising it was going to be difficult to raise a family in England, with only one wage coming in, they made the decision to emigrate to Canada where they had recently been on holiday and had a friend they could lodge with. Unfortunately, Richard's [personal/sensitive] marriage broke up, Richard had to leave the house, with his two dogs. He was badly affected by the divorce, [personal/sensitive]. There was probably nothing that Richard wanted more than to be a father, something that would affect him throughout his life. He soon spent his savings on finding accommodation for himself and dogs, eventually having to give his beloved dogs up too. He sofa surfed, had a job as a doorman in a nightclub, then as Manager. He ended up living on the street it seems, and that is where he had his first episode of mental illness and was hospitalised. In hospital in Canada, thousands of miles away from family and friends, he was treated with Electro Shock Therapy, ECT, we believe he had several treatments. Eventually a doctor made contact with my parents, who sent the money for his plane ticket home. When he alighted from the plane he was just an empty shell and had to relearn how to hold a conversation, feed himself, dress himself, use a remote or the phone, everything. However, his inner strength fought through and eventually, after several years he returned to work. He said later it was as if he was a toddler and had to 'grow up' all over again.

The first time he had a relapse all his siblings attended an appointment with his hospital doctor and requested some kind of counselling or talking therapy but we were told they didn't treat mental illness in that way, only with medication! Richard came home from hospital over medicated and barely functioning. He went to work, ate, slept, that's all. He couldn't hold a conversation, could just listen and respond if he had time to gather his thoughts, couldn't crack a joke, couldn't participate. This resulted in him ceasing his medication, which he called a 'chemical straightjacket'. Over the years he continued to have episodes of illness, for which he was hospitalised, but was soon balanced out with appropriate medication and was home again. For years he came to my house every week to play with my children, have a meal with us and play scrabble. He always bounced back until the hospital changed his treatment to his detriment.

Richard was over 6' tall, with black hair and often sported a beard or moustache, well-dressed when going out, he was an imposing figure. He was sociable, with a good sense of humour and a ready smile. He loved music, anything from Pink Floyd, to soul, to trance, and anything in between. Music was always playing in the background. He loved to dress up and go dancing, which he was very good at, and to meet people. He was an extrovert really, a good conversationalist, where he was interested in the person he was conversing with, he had empathy. He was very interested in mental health care in the hospitals and the community, having been a key member of CHUMS, Colchester Health Users of Mental Services, part of Colchester MIND. He loved cars, driving, nature, the county side, camping, loved his dogs and people. He once camped near a river in Canada for days watching beavers building a dam. He had cameras and took many slides and photographs of his travels.

And poetry, he loved to write poetry. Poems to women in his life, for his family on a special occasion, poems about people, places, mental illness, needs, emotions, hopes and dreams. And I'd like to read you one now.....

PAST FRIEND

Hello dear friend, what has happened to thee?
You're a shadow of your former self, half the one you used to be.

I've often wondered what has become of you,
We don't see you around town like we used to do.

I've heard many tales, I've heard you're on drugs,
so I've not kept contact as it's a game for mugs.

You say you're on medication, well that's a different story,
I see from your face You've lost the power and glory.

You used to set the town alight with your panache,
nowadays it appears to me you're very short of cash.

I'm glad I met you today but I see you struggle with living,
Your eyes lack their lustre but your soul is ever giving.

Mental breakdowns take their toll but recovery from drugs is the worst,
take your time to get better but please put yourself first.

RH Elliott

On 23rd May 2002 my parents, Colin and Barbara, along with Richard's fiancée, went to Richard's flat in Dovercourt. They hadn't heard from Richard for a few days and were concerned. They found a police presence outside the flat and were told that he was to be sectioned and transported to hospital. Richard was reluctant to go with the doctors or police so Mum spoke to Richard and calmed him down. She could see that he needed medication but were told that he was being sectioned and police had been called to force him to go to hospital. About 8 police officers in riot gear turned up at the flat, along with another police dog handler. Fearing Richard would be forcefully restrained Mum reasoned with him that if he went with them voluntarily, he wouldn't get hurt. He finished his second cup of coffee, got dressed, firstly in his Elliott tartan kilt, his best outfit, then changing his mind and changing to a pair of trousers, he smoked another cigarette and voluntarily walked to the police car, then moved to the transport vehicle when it arrived and walked into the hospital. Richard had previously attended the day hospital and wandered over to see the staff, however he was coaxed into the correct area and lay down voluntarily, apparently in the seclusion room to receive the 3 intermuscular injections the nurses administered. Within, it seems, 15 minutes of being admitted he was sedated and was left, apparently face down on a mattress on the floor. Within 12 hours Richard was dead, the facts of which will be investigated by this Inquiry.

When he died Richard owned his own flat in Dovercourt, he was engaged to a young lady ^[personal/sensitive] and was planning to get married. [She] still goes to sleep cuddling Richard's T-shirt.

Richard loved people, he helped others in the mental health system and contributed to the local service users' magazine, 'Wit's End'. Richard had for many years advocated on behalf of mental health service users, writing many letters and articles. He wanted to change the way patients were treated and lobbied for reform.

Richard died too soon, in the care of the people who were meant to look after and protect him.

A larger than life character.