

Commemorative/Impact statement

Christopher Thomas Nichols

What can I tell you about Christopher?

How can I get all that effervescent, enthusiastic, bubbly spirit into a short statement?

Or describe the whirlwind of energy that he was? It is going to be very difficult - but here goes...

I can tell you he was kind, thoughtful, considerate and he would do anything for anyone. He loved his family and friends alike. He loved animals, dogs in particular being his pet of choice.

I can tell you he was a pleasure to be around. He certainly was - most of the time.

He loved unusual words and sayings.

Discombobulated was one of his favourites; it described him very well too.

Follow me - I'll be right behind you, was one of his favoured phrases.

He was one of the funniest people you could ever meet, he just loved to make people laugh, could mimic any accent, and didn't have a bad bone in his body. When he walked into a room, everyone hoped he'd sit with them.

Most importantly, he was my son, a brother, a nephew, friend to many - he was just a wonderful, amazing, kind young man.

If you blend all of these traits together, add a pair of beautiful blue eyes, and a dazzling smile that could melt any heart, then you might get some idea of the Christopher we knew and loved with all our hearts.

Christopher Thomas Nichols was born on January 11th, 1978, at Royal Air Force hospital in Swindon. His dad Steve, older brother Terry and I lived at RAF Abingdon, which was about forty miles away.

When he was 6 months old, we moved to RAF Lossimouth in Scotland.

From there, we went to RAF Laarbruch in Germany for three years.

He started kindergarten while we were there, and bagged the part of King Herod in the Christmas Nativity concert - he was so excited!

However, a few days before the performance, he fell head-first from his bike, and scraped his nose & face. He looked a right mess.

This caused his brother to call him 'King Horrid' which didn't go down too well. Terry was always teasing him.

From there he went to Maas First School on the bus with his brother.

It was whilst living in Germany, that his lifelong 'bromance' with Kermit the Frog began.

Bought as a Christmas present, he loved that frog, it was never very far from his side. I believe his Aunty Beverley bought it for him.

On a visit to England to catch up with the families, we caught a ferry from Ostend.

We joked that Kermit might have to walk the plank, because he didn't have a ticket, but Chris was getting upset, so we left it.

As the ferry docked, we made our way down to the car deck, but before we reached it, there was an almighty scream from Chris - he'd lost Kermit!!

His dad ran as quickly as he could back up to where we'd been sitting, but Kermit was nowhere to be seen. We spoke to some of the crew, but they couldn't help. Kermit had gone.

He was inconsolable.

He was very reluctant to get into the car without his beloved frog, but we didn't have a choice- we had to go. He was so miserable the whole visit. All the family scoured the shops for a replacement, but couldn't find one.

When we arrived back home, I wrote a scrawly letter to Chris - from Kermit, which magically appeared in our flat!

It said, that as the ship was docking in Dover, Kermit had seen a lady frog in distress, so hopped off to offer his assistance. When he arrived back on the ship, we had left... Sad as he was, he knew that he didn't know his way to Nanna's house, and couldn't swim all the way back to Germany, so had gone off to stay with his new amphibian family. He knew that Christopher - being a very thoughtful little boy, would understand...

He was very suspicious, but he accepted it.

Many years later, when he was living in Milton Keynes, I found another Kermit. It made him laugh, and he kept it for the rest of his life.

In 1984, we came back to RAF Cottesmore, which turned out to be our final posting.

Both the boys settled into their new school, and soon made many friends. They always had lots of friends.

Chris always seemed to be in demand!

In '90, his father & I took different paths, which meant the boys and I had to leave our married quarter, and move into a house in the village. Neither of them happy at this prospect, but they soon adjusted and were able to keep the same friends. The base was only a ten-minute walk away, they went to the same school, on the same bus, so life carried on as normal.

In the meantime, I'd met someone else. The boys were ok with that, and Iain eventually became their stepfather.

The Christmas before Iain and I got married, he took us all out for dinner, something my boys weren't really used to at the time. All Chris wanted was chips! Alas, chips weren't on the menu, so he reluctantly settled for Christmas Dinner.

Iain had bought Sky television for them as a Christmas gift, and Chris was miffed at having to leave it! We'd been watching Christmas films before we'd gone out, in particular, National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation, starring Chevy Chase as the haphazard Clarke Grizwold.

We'd all enjoyed it, and chatted about the funny bits whilst eating our meal. As we stood up to leave, Chris caught the tablecloth, and sent everything flying! This prompted Terry to say, "YOU are like the entire Grizwold family rolled into one!"

That name stuck with him forever...

This wasn't the first nickname Terry chose. As a baby, he was known as Fir, because Terry couldn't say Christopher. That lasted a couple of years. If you asked him his name, he would tell you he was 'Fur'

The boys were at school in Stamford, around 10 miles away. This meant an early start - he wasn't impressed with that, even though the bus-stop was right outside our house!

His enthusiasm for school started to decline at secondary school. He became the 'class clown' imitating teachers and pupils - no one was safe. This was much more entertaining for him instead of learning!!

As he got older, we started to ask him about his plans for the future. He said he wanted to be a chef!

Really? Interesting...

He got himself a job in a very prestigious restaurant in a nearby town, but it was a live-in position. Even the fact all his roomies were girls, didn't impress him - he missed his friends.

Come Christmas time, he left the job - he couldn't believe they expected him to work over the festive period, when all his pals were out enjoying themselves!

Despite his quitting the job, he did actually learn something whilst he was there, and turned out to be a very good cook!

While he worked at the restaurant, they provided all his meals. I think it was here that he found his fondness for bacon, having it for breakfast every day. His love of it was legendary!

He came back home, and picked up where he'd left off.

Whenever he was coming to visit, he'd ring and say,

'Get a pig in bid, I'm coming home!'

When asked what he'd like with his bacon, he'd say - more bacon! The boys always called me Bid or biddy, mum was kept for more serious stuff.

When we had mobile phones, we used to send each other silly photos from the internet, a lot of them about bacon.

No matter how funny the ones I found were, he'd always come back with a better one. He'd laugh and tell me there was no way I would be able to 'out bacon' him.

One picture he sent that sticks in my mind shows a fridge full of bacon, with a tiny jar of apple sauce on the top shelf. The caption read - seriously, who needs this much apple sauce!

Another read - roses are red, violets are blue, bacon!

Once when Iain and I were going on holiday, we thought we'd leave him something to make him smile. We labelled the kitchen appliances with post it notes, washing machine, oven, microwave, fridge etc.

When we arrived back home, we were in stitches when we saw his response to our notes.

Inside every cupboard, there was a post it note saying.

You shouldn't be reading this; you should be cookin'

You're too far away from the cooker!

Where's mi bacon?

You haven't time to read this, there's a pig to cook!

Get cracking bid!

Happy memories...

He met some new friends when we moved to the village, they all went to a club in Leicester called Die Hard. Soon, he started going with them. Apparently, it was a sort of rave venue, but he loved it!! We were concerned that he'd be drinking, but we found out that alcohol wasn't served, however, the odd 'spliff' was smoked! And Chris being Chris, wasn't going to miss an opportunity to try it!

He met lots of characters there, some more colourful than others.

He was very good at dancing, and even better as a DJ. Not that we ever saw him dance or DJ, but we were told many times how good his patter was, and he had quite a following! Diehard became his regular Friday night haunt, he never missed.

Off he'd go, in his white jeans and tee shirt, long hair flowing in a ponytail. He spent many happy hours at Die Hard.

He became a bit of a Diehard legend.

The time came when he wanted to spread his wings, and move out. Like any other mum, I knew it was time to loosen the apron strings, hide my tears and let him go. It wasn't easy...

He moved to Coventry to begin with. He promised to give me a phone number as soon as he had one, and off he went.

I remember calling this number one day to talk to him. A young lady answered the phone, and I asked for Chris,

"Chris?" she repeated

'Yes', I replied.

"I'm sorry, I think perhaps you've dialled the wrong number, we don't have a Chris living here"

Just as I was beginning to wonder if I had written down the wrong number, the girl spoke again.

"Oh, hang on a minute, one of the lads has just come in. I'll see if he knows him. Hey Grizwald. Do you know anyone called Chris?"

Needless to say, we broke into fits of laughter!

He met some very good friends whilst living in Coventry, but one in particular had four legs, and answered to the name of Prince.

He said he'd won Prince in a card game. Whether that's true or not, I was never quite sure, but it made a good story.

Prince was an 18 month old Staffordshire Bull Terrier, a shark on a leash, as we mistakenly thought, and was as crazy as Chris!

He took him everywhere with him - even to raves! They were inseparable. He changed his name from Prince to Spike after a Labrador we'd had and lost 5 years previously. He also referred to him as the dog formerly known as Prince.

It was something Chris always did - whenever he met someone, he would have to find a suitable nickname for them.

He had a lovely friend who he called Geezer, he came to our house many times. When I asked him why he called him Geezer, he said it was because he couldn't remember his name!

Geezer was instrumental in getting Chris's hair cut.

They had all returned home, after an evening in the pub somewhat worse for wear. Chris went and and flaked out on Geezer's bed.

Geezer threatened him, that if he didn't shift, he's cut off his ponytail. Christopher carried on snoring, so the ponytail was cut.

They sent it to us in the post, saying that if we wanted the rest of him, we had to pay them a ransom.

We told them it was fine, he's all yours!

I thought he would have been livid that his golden locks were gone, but he wasn't. He saw the funny side. He always did.

Back to Spike...

Spike was his side kick and had his own fan club. Everybody loved him and he loved everybody. He was so funny.

Spike had this weird thing about water. If he heard running water, he was off to find it. He brought down many a shower curtain through jumping in the bath. Every home he went in, he managed to find sniff out the bathroom.

One Boxing Day, he discovered our outside tap dripping, and set about ripping it off the wall. All attempts at bribery failed, he wouldn't let go. Chris lifted his back legs, but he was having none of it. He was shivering with cold, but he wouldn't leave that tap until he killed it.

An emergency plumber cost us a small fortune, but we had no option but to see the funny side of it. Chris handed over his wallet and laughed! He took him in for a warm bath as he was so cold, but the minute he was in, he was chancing his paw with the bath taps!!

Crazy canine!

Even the mention of the word 'bath' was all it took for him to run and jump in, where he'd sit, in a world of his own, gazing at the taps. He truly would sit there as long as you'd let him!

Chris used to say Spike wasn't 'wired up' right.

They made a perfect team! Only he could get a dog as daft as himself!

One of many, many stories' springs to mind is about a trip they took. Chris and 3 of his mates, decided to go to Blackpool. They'd got as far as Birmingham, then went to find their next train.

Unfortunately, they boarded the wrong one!

Although they were on the right platform, it was one of those times, when passengers were asked to board the front or back train - depending on where they were going!

They just saw a train and jumped on. Sometime after the train had departed, they realised that they were going south instead of north. As they set about trying to figure out where to get off, they spotted a guard through in the other carriage.

They panicked then because they hadn't a ticket between them.

One of them had the bright idea of hiding in the loo until the guard had passed. So, four lads and one Spike hid in the loo, and tried very hard not to breathe too loudly.

They heard the swish of the carriage door open and shut again, then the same again as the guard disappeared down the train.

They thought it best to stay put until the guard had gone back down the train. When he came back, they held their breath again, but then, just as they thought they'd gotten away with it - the guard knocked on the door - and Spike barked - game over!

The guard couldn't believe his eyes when he saw them all come out of the tiny space. Fortunately for them, the guard had a sense of humour! He told them that Spike was the only one travelling legally, so wouldn't get fined, but they would. Another blow came when he told them the train would not be stopping until they got to London.

After they'd chatted a while, the guard thought that going to London was punishment enough, and waived the fine. Chris swears it was because Spike was making a big fuss of him.

Once off the train, they found the guard and thanked him. He asked what they were going to do, and they said they were going to find the next train to Blackpool!

From Coventry, he moved to Milton Keynes, but sadly, he was unable to take Spike with him, so he came to live with us.

Chris thrived in Milton Keynes, and after a while, he met the young lady who was to become the love of his life - Sarah. I truly believe this was the happiest part of his life.

He was working as a floor/carpet fitter now, and he was extremely good at it. He worked all over the place. One of the most prestigious jobs he did was at a perfume shop in Covent Garden.

On a visit to London with him, he took us to this shop, to look at it. Whilst were in there the manager came over to us, recognised Chris, and greeted him like a long-lost friend! He said what a wonderful young man Chris was, and what a pleasure it had been to meet him. I thought my heart would burst out of my chest with pride. It truly was a work of art! It depicted a compass rose in black and white tiles. It was stunning!

He wouldn't believe how good he was!

Sadly, his beloved Spike passed away; Chris was devastated, as were we, he was such a little character. Before Spike left us, we'd got

another Staffy cross, who was in need of a good home. His name was Nacho, but we quickly changed it to Louie.

Chris was eager to come and meet the little guy, but changed his name the minute he met him. He said he didn't look like a Louie, and thought that Grendel suited him much better. This confused the dog - who just happened to be crazy too. Chris had 'rewired' him within minutes of meeting him!

Louie absolutely adored him, wouldn't leave his side whenever he visited. The silly thing was, Louie thought that Chris was Grendel, and wasn't quite sure what to do, when Chris kept saying Grendel.

We seem to collect crazy animals!

He and Sarah seemed to be made for each other, but sadly, it didn't last, and they split up. For me, this was the point when Chris' life started on a downward spiral.

Sometime after this (can't remember dates) he was admitted to hospital in Milton Keynes for self-harm.

He was in an awful mess...

We did everything we could to help him, but as any parent knows, there's only so much you can do.

Thankfully, he got himself back to some sort of normality, but I knew that he'd never get over the end of this relationship

Eventually, he returned to live with us and met another girl, but it was a disaster from the very start.

She ended up getting pregnant, and his daughter was born in March 2013

Like everyone else, we hoped they'd be able to make things work, but it wasn't to be.

She is now 11 years old. none of us have seen her since Christmas 2013, and she has been living with the girl's parents since she was a toddler.

Chris had always wanted to be a daddy, so this really cut him deep, and again, his poor heart took a battering, and he started drinking more.

He had morals and principles, and hated to see injustice and unfairness of any kind.

Sometimes he ended up paying for his principles.

He was beaten up very badly whilst in Milton Keynes, for shouting at a chap who was beating up his girlfriend. Chris went to have a word with him, but after he turned to walk away, the man jumped him from behind with a brick, his poor face covered in bruises, and it left him with a damaged eyelid.

When I said he shouldn't have got involved, he said there was no way he could stand by and watch a man beat a woman.

He continued to live with us, until a huge disagreement (about his drinking) forced us to ask him to leave. That's when he moved to Clacton-On-Sea.

It would be several months before we were in touch again.

We visited him in Clacton a few times, but have to say, we weren't too keen on the company he was keeping. He was smoking cannabis, but assured us that that was all. I prayed it was.

We never really saw him the worse for wear through either alcohol, drugs or depression. I had my suspicions, but he was very good at hiding things.

In September '21, he spent some time in the hospital at Colchester, due to an accident he had in Clacton. He rang us to say he was in hospital because he'd injured his leg quite badly.

He was running across the road to meet a couple of his friends when he tripped up the pavement. He was wearing flip-flops at the time. We had to laugh; it could only happen to him! We asked if his friends' names were Jack Daniels and John Smith.

I wished I hadn't teased him when I realised how badly injured, he was.

He landed on his knees and smashed one to bits. So bad was this injury, the doctor he saw thought he'd been in a motorbike accident. He needed specialist surgery to repair it.

Obviously, there was going to be a long period of convalescence. Not the most patient of people, he wasn't looking forward to this.

The physiotherapist was helping him to get back on his feet, but told him that initially, he was going to need a brace for his leg. It would be a long road to recovery.

Bearing that in mind, he was surprised when one of the nurses came and said he could go home. He thought this was strange, and told her about this leg brace, the fact that he could hardly walk, and lived alone in a first floor flat, but she was adamant he was going home.

The hospital provided 'transport' and I use the term very loosely here, as it was a mini bus. The driver had to help him in, and position him, so that his leg was across the aisle, resting on the opposite seats.

The driver and his two mates from the downstairs flat, had to help him up the stairs, all commenting that he should be in hospital.

The following day, the physio rang him to see where he was. He was on the ward with the brace, looking for Chris. No-one seemed to know where he was.

He told him he was at home, and the physio was not happy about this, especially when he discovered how he'd got home!!

He sent an ambulance to collect Chris and take him back to the hospital, because he shouldn't have been discharged!

Yet another example of the 'care' given by the staff at Colchester, and though this doesn't refer directly to the mental health staff, I feel it's important to mention.

He endured months of pain with this leg.

Unfortunately, he was unable to come home to recuperate, but luckily, the boys who lived in the flat below him said they would look after him. And they did a sterling job!

As covid restrictions were in place at the time, we couldn't go and see him. My father-in-law was in our 'bubble' and quite vulnerable because of his health, so we were unable to visit him.

Having such a bad injury also meant that he wouldn't be able to do floor fitting any more. A real blow to him.

We never met his last 'girlfriend' but I'm glad we didn't.

He'd been talking about her quite a lot, and was considering bringing her up to meet us. However, it wasn't to be.

We both tried to tell him to take it steady with this girl, but it fell on deaf ears. After a few weeks, she disappeared.

He was very depressed after this episode. I asked him to move back with us, but he said he had to stand on his own two feet. However, when my brother started his own company, he was going to offer Chris a job.

Sadly, I never got to tell him...

Our little village church had standing room only on the day of his funeral. People travelled from near and far to say goodbye to my wonderful son. He would have been thrilled to bits to see it.

We knew the service would be hard for all of us, so we tried to bring a smile, albeit a little one, by inviting Kermit, who sat on top of his coffin in a huge lily pad. We also asked people to wear a splash of green as a nod towards Kermit.

His cousin and some of his friends had even coloured their hair green!

Chris would have wanted to see some smiles within the tears.

Terry read the eulogy; I was so proud of the way he held himself together.

He began by saying "thank you all for coming today, it's great to see so many of you! But I'm guessing some of you may be wondering if you've come to the right place, and who IS Christopher Nichols? Most of you will know him as Grizwald, but to me, he was my crazy, amazing little brother!"

He told a few anecdotes about the two of them, but one story brought a smile to everyone's face.

Terry had been working in Iraq for a while. When he came home, he treated himself to a new car - a TVR. He'd joined an online club of likeminded people, and decided to join them on a drive to Italy! He asked Chris to go with him as his co-pilot!

All the drivers met up at a hotel in Dover, where everyone was introduced. Chris was soon holding court in the bar, and making everyone laugh!

The laughter continued throughout the journey - but as a co-pilot, Chris was useless. He slept most of the morning, due to his entertaining every night, leaving Terry to find his own way.

Everywhere they went, Chris attracted a crowd! This became the norm -sleep through the day, entertain at night. Some of the drivers who were there alone, asked Chris to travel with them, and one time he did - much to Terry's annoyance! However, when they met up that night, Chris told him he'd only gone with this chap, so he could perfect his Liverpudlian accent!

The evidence was there that night, as he had them rolling in the aisles with his banter.

In a pub in Germany, even the locals came through to where they were sitting, to see who was causing all the laughter! They didn't really speak much English, had no idea what they were laughing at, but Chris had them in stitches.

Terry went on to say, that even though he'd organised the trip, provided the car and spending money, he was known as Griswold's brother!

Christopher left the church, accompanied by Kermit, singing 'The Rainbow Connection'. I think everyone broke down then...

I was overruled with the food for the wake by Iain and Terry. They believed we should have bacon butties - they were sure this is what Chris would have wanted. I was horrified; however, we compromised with an all-day breakfast. Considering it was almost 30degrees outside, it went down a treat, and everyone said it was a very fitting tribute to Chris.

The highlight of the wake - if there could be such a thing, was being presented with a beautiful, commemorative, glossy brochure all about Chris from his friends at Diehard, and others who wanted to pay their respects and share their memories.

They had all clubbed together to produce it, and his friend Antony (aka sock) had produced it, and printed it enough copies for all his family and close friends.

He spent an awful lot of time contacting all these friends, collating their accounts, memories and photographs, before turning into something very special for everyone to treasure.

We were overwhelmed and comforted to see how much love all these people had for him...

How can I put into words the impact Chris' death has had on his family and his friends?

Nothing can prepare you for a goodbye you never dreamed you'd have to say, nor suffer the heartache you never thought you'd have to bear.

The worst day of my life was the last one of his.

The terrible sinking feeling, hearing the knock at the door by the police to tell us the news? It's never going to be good news at that time of night.

Deceased - that's what they said. He's deceased!

Every time I hear that word, my blood runs cold.

How do I describe the pain, when it felt like my heart was being ripped out of my chest and crushed into millions of pieces when I was told my wonderful boy had ended his life?

Truth is, I can't - it's impossible. There are no words- I wanted to go with him!

I was inconsolable when I realised that never again would I hear his voice, see that smile, hold his hand, have a hug and talk rubbish on the phone, while laughing at 'bacon' memes.

He tried many a time to 'get me' on the phone, posing as a salesman using his silly accents. From incontinence pants to tartan coloured paint, second hand windows - I don't know where he got his ideas from.

To be told your child had decided to end his life is agonising enough, yet when you then discover the circumstances surrounding his death; how he was totally failed by Essex Mental Health, that pain turns to disbelief and anger! Only another bereaved mother can truly understand how this feels.

Imagine again how it felt to discover that your child had been at the very same hospital the week before, after taking an overdose. Sadly, we knew nothing about this.

Just a few days later, he was back again to the same hospital, with cuts to his wrists. My boy was desperate for help!

We spoke to him the Sunday evening when he was at the hospital. He told us what had happened, but said we didn't need to worry, because the mental health team were going to take care of him. he was finally getting the help he needed and deserved!

Imagine how we felt, when we rang him on Monday morning to see how he was, only to be told he'd been sent home in the early hours!

None of us could quite believe it!

Despite the fact, that both the paramedics and the triage team had red flagged him, the mental health nurse thought he was a - to quote - 'cheeky Chappy' and sent him home.

Despite the fact he was hearing voices and despite the fact that he'd been there only a few days before for help - they sent him home.

All this was documented in the statements made by the paramedics and the triage team.

No notice was taken of these.

No help

No plan

No idea what to do next.

No hope

He felt totally abandoned.

I can only try to imagine the turmoil his poor soul was in.

He assured us that one of his friends was going to stay with him, and we didn't need to rush down.

I took him at his word, and told him we'd probably pop down to see him at the weekend.

I spoke to this so-called friend of his, who assured me he'd take care of him, and not to worry, but then told me that Chris had no money. I didn't want to give him money, didn't want to put temptation in his way with alcohol, so I arranged for a local supermarket to deliver him some food - with lots of bacon!

The day after, the friend rang again, saying that Chris needed money for petrol, but didn't like to ask...

We duly transferred money to Chris' account.

What we didn't know, was that the money we'd transferred had gone.

On the Wednesday when Chris and I spoke for the last time, he asked me for some money. I asked had he already spent the money I'd sent the day before.

I could tell by his response that he knew nothing about the money I'd sent, nor did he know about the conversations I'd had with the 'friend'

Halfway through our conversation, he abruptly butted in and said 'bid, can I call you back later?' he was gone before I could reply.

We never, ever ended a call, without saying - luv ya.

But this time we did... How sad, considering this would be the last time we would ever speak..

Why he had to rush, I'll never know. It was just like someone had arrived that he needed to speak to.

He never called back.

Over the next two days, I texted, rang, texted again - but nothing.

I told him I was going to get the police to do a welfare check if he didn't reply.

But he didn't.

Finally, when I went to bed Friday night, I rang him, and said I was upset with him.

I didn't know that by the time I'd made that last phone call, my son had already gone...

He'd told me in an earlier conversation on the Monday before he died, that Essex Mental Health were useless - "what do I have to do in order to get some help? Don't I tick enough of their boxes? Why don't they take me seriously - how do they decided who desperately needs help and who doesn't? How much distress do I need to be? I need help Mum!"

Because of the lack of care, we will never know what exactly what was wrong with Chris, but I believe if he'd been given the chance, the symptoms of psychosis he had described, could have been treated, and with the right sort of treatment, he could have gone on to lead a normal life.

However, Colchester hospital denied him this chance. I know he was frightened because he'd been hearing voices- this was on his notes, which we believe were not read by the attending staff.

Another point worth mentioning, is that we didn't have a Family Liaison Officer until the end of March. We were not aware that we should have had one. No-one (except the coroner's assistant) contacted us about anything. We were totally alone.

We were introduced to our FLO on March 22nd - nine and a half months after Christopher had died.

Whilst talking about things to mention, although it doesn't really relate to EPUT, it was part of the harrowing experience we had.

My husband was talking to a policeman on the phone. He was trying to claim Christopher's belongings. He asked if there was anything else besides his phone. Did they have his wallet?

He was told - 'no, there's nothing else. There's a belt here if you want it!'

Considering the manner of Christopher's death, that remark was cruel!!!

We lodged a formal complaint against EPUT in October '23. We were told this procedure would take a few months - six at the most.

Not to decry the person who looked into this too much, as I appreciate there seemed to be a lot of obstacles in his way, it took 10 months to get the report. During this time, the investigator kept in touch with us, but it got to the point where it seemed we were getting a 'rehashed' version of the same email each month.

We were not happy with his findings, it left a lot of unanswered questions, due to the lack of record keeping by the mental health team.

Because of this, we (Iain, Michael, Beverley and me) prepared a response saying the report was unacceptable. This was sent August 18th

We received a reply on the 21st August saying it was under review and they'd get back to us. We are still waiting.

We were unable to get a straight answer at the inquest, which was held in Chelmsford on November 15th 2024

Chris wasn't referred to the 'care at home' team, the nurse saying he didn't realise he could. Knowing how much Chris loved to chat, he would have welcomed someone to call at his house on a regular basis.

So frustrating!

Either way, the decision to send him home was categorically wrong.

Incidentally, none of the NHS trusts talk to each other. One would assume, that if you entered a name, address, date of birth and the NHS number, that you would be able to gain access to that person's medical information. But alas, no. They keep all this information to themselves, e.g., each trust. So, if, as in Christopher's case, someone had had a similar episode in a different county, like him, this information was unavailable.

If staff were able to access this medical history through a nationwide system, it would give them some insight into the patients' health, even draw attention to any particular recurring condition.

This could really help with a diagnosis/medication. It's easy for a patient to forget/omit things when in a state of anxiety.

I don't believe my son wanted to die; he just couldn't get the help he needed in order to stay.

And for that - we, and the entire family, hold EPUT and Colchester hospital responsible.

Some things cannot be mended. Even if the heart mends, it will always bear the scars and feel the pain.

For the rest of our lives, we will have to try hard to focus on the way Christopher lived - not how he died.

His daughter will never have the chance to meet her dad, I can only hope that in time, I will be able to tell her all about the amazing man who was her father.

We lost our son, Terry lost his brother, the rest of the family lost a valued, much beloved member.

Christopher would not want revenge, but he would want justice, and not just for himself. It is our sincere wish that he, and all the other poor families and friends who have suffered this unimaginable heartache get it.

Depressed people do not feign being depressed- they try hard to convince you they are ok. These 'so. called' mental health professionals should know this.

Staff referred to Chris as a Cheeky Chappy

A Cheeky Chappy is not a diagnosis, nor a good reason to send anyone home!

Its high time mental health was taken more seriously, more help made available - and policies put into place to ensure that all medical notes are read!

I'm sure this inquiry will be paramount in helping each and every one of us to feel some kind of solace.

We bereaved will never get over, through or around losing our loved ones. Somehow, we manage to function day to day, but it's very hard and painful, when part of you is missing.

Thank you to all involved.

Finally, I cannot end without mentioning Melanie Leahy. Without her diligent, relentless, campaigning, I doubt we would be here today.

From the bottom of our hearts - thank you Melanie.