

## **Commemorative Evidence regarding Marion Michel by Karen Michel (sister)**

Marion was born in August 1965 and grew up in Jersey in a small family which consisted of her parents and younger sister (me). Whilst growing up, Marion enjoyed days out at the beach, playing board games and cycling with friends. She didn't really enjoy school but passed her exams and started work in a Bank after leaving school. Finance, maths and organisation came naturally to her. She then worked in various office administration roles and also during some of the summer seasons worked at a Hire- Car Company. Marion enjoyed office work and continued to work in these roles on and off throughout her life. Due to her mental health and difficulties dealing with stress, eventually working became a struggle. She subsequently enjoyed working part time as part of an organised work scheme. Her last role being in environmental health, where she enjoyed having insider knowledge about local restaurant ratings.

Marion learned to drive at 17. She liked cars and driving - starting out with a bit of a banger then progressing quickly to a black Mini which was customised with the help of her Dad – wide wheels, bucket seats etc. Her next car was an upgrade to a turquoise VW Scirocco, which was a classic 80s car. She cruised round in this listening to the soundtracks of the time, Tina Turner and Dire Straits. She was a keen driver and missed the freedom of owning a car when she lost her liberty in Essex which is explained later.

As an adult, Marion liked good food, sweet treats, beauty treatments, swimming, Pilates, sunbathing, flicking through magazines and holidays. I often joked that she was 'built for luxury'. She enjoyed family occasions and was probably happiest at these times, which she looked forward to with great excitement. Birthdays were always celebrated with champagne, cake and a meal out.

Marion's relationship with her partner spanned some 33 years and was very important to her. They went through some stressful, less happy periods along with the happy times, but even when their relationship changed and then ended, they were able to remain firm friends and shared a sense of humour and similar interests.

Marion was quite adventurous and travelled widely with her partner, visiting America, Canada, Dubai and most countries in Europe. These trips were some of her happiest times. They also enjoyed Skiing holidays. In the early 1990s they lived with her partner's father for a while in upstate New York. On holidays they hired or took their car wherever they were. Marion would plan and research the best places to eat and stay and find places off the beaten track to explore. They of course went to Las Vegas, which Marion loved. Marion's last holiday was in 2017 to France. Marion still had many places that she wanted to visit.

Marion loved Jersey and it was an important place to her. She enjoyed swimming at the beach, driving to her favourite spots and cooking. Daily routines were important to Marion and she anchored her life around these. Marion missed her home when she eventually got transferred to Essex for her mental health. When in Essex she even put herself through watching the TV show 'The Real Housewives of Jersey' just to be reminded of the scenery and places she loved.

Marion's early adult years were blighted by Glandular Fever and then ME, which was poorly understood then.

Schizophrenia is in our family and Marion was unlucky enough to develop it, with her first diagnosis in the late 1990s. She was noted to be in remission during her 40s. Marion had a history of intense periods of mental illness when she would hurt herself with sharps or jumping from heights, and on two occasions hurt her partner. Despite these incidents being very serious, often resulting in periods of time in Intensive Care and hospital, she always survived these episodes of mental illness which occurred whilst in the community. However, she also enjoyed long periods of

stability when she lived life to the full. Her relapses always came as a sad shock to everyone.

Over time, Marion understood that she found it hard to deal with stress and adjusted her life accordingly. Marion was also found to have Emotionally Unstable Personality traits when she was assessed in Essex. She accepted this and I think this helped her to make some sense of her past episodes when her mental health deteriorated, and the effect this had on her level of functioning.

Marion liked to follow a routine and was a natural organiser with a flair for maths and budgeting. She was forthright about what she wanted and could sometimes be impatient and impulsive. Marion would set her heart on certain things and would look forward to them intensely. She wasn't one to dither or change her mind. However, she could also be flexible when plans changed, if given enough notice. At some point Marion had an assessment for Autistic Spectrum Disorder due to scoring above average in this area in other autism indicative tests she had in Essex. She was found not to have it, but a certain amount of rigidity was part of her personality. She was also assessed as having difficulties with problem-solving.

#### The move from Jersey to Essex

In 2018, Marion was remanded in custody, in Jersey, following a serious assault on her partner. When she was assessed by several UK experts as part of the proceedings, they took the view that Marion's mental health issues were so complex that they referred Marion for an assessment at Brockfield House, which is a forensic mental health medium and low secure inpatient unit under the care of Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust. No such provision is available in the Channel Islands. Marion was transferred there from prison in December 2018. She was worried about moving there and as a result hurt herself prior to the first attempt

to transfer her. She ended up in Intensive Care again, but she recovered and was eventually transferred to Brockfield House just prior to Christmas. Following assessment, it was decided that Marion should remain at Brockfield House for treatment, under a Hospital Order with Restrictions made in September 2019. In Brockfield House she was initially on Fuji Ward, a medium secure female ward, and then transferred to Aurora Ward, a low secure ward for both males and females in September 2021.

It was hard for Marion to lose her liberty and although she took up opportunities offered to her and got on with her life as best as she could, I have realised since her death how this remained difficult for her. Marion was a fighter, always recovering from difficult periods and adapting well to her situation, however scary. She could always count on her family to support her. Marion's family and friends were proud of how well she settled at Brockfield House. She had a consistently positive approach and took advantage of every opportunity, including therapy and educational courses. She understood that this was her pathway to freedom. Those who loved her felt that at last she was getting the help she needed and that she would be safe. Marion also came off the sleeping tablets that she had been prescribed for about 20 years, which was a significant achievement for her.

Marion had been lonely at times in her life and had struggled to feel that she fitted in. She also had issues with fear of abandonment which manifested in some of her relationships. Marion found it much easier to make friends in Brockfield House in Essex than she had done previously, and she formed some important new friendships there. In Brockfield House Marion was in the daily company of women with shared experiences, such as having a diagnosis of a major mental health issue such as Schizophrenia, personality disorders as well as those having spent time in prison. She had two or three close friends and maintained contact with one friend after they had been discharged. Marion adapted and presented a therapeutic course alongside an OT, for other women who were reluctant to engage with staff-led therapy. One good friend wrote that she would miss 'their chats, eating Magnums on

hot days and making Marion laugh'. Many patients and staff attended a memorial for her held at Brockfield after her death; she was well-liked.

Marion was both steady and excitable, very kind and generous with a lovely smile and a hearty and at-times mischievous laugh. She will be remembered as someone who gave good advice to others, knew details of their lives and wanted them to do well. She saw the best in people and tended not to question things, preferring to go with the flow. This could make her a bit vulnerable at times. She was also loyal, maintaining strong links with friends and family through phone calls and letters.

Marion was very much a big sister to me, often checking on my wellbeing and treating me to meals and gifts. As Brockfield House was closer to my home, we were able to spend more time together, and I will treasure those memories. Marion was also a good auntie to her niece. She cared deeply about her elderly parents and their welfare.

Marion died on 4 March 2022 whilst an inpatient on Aurora Ward, Brockfield House. Staff found her in her bathroom, having inflicted fatal injuries. A narrative ruling was made by the coroner. She died on the 19<sup>th</sup> day of a Covid-19 ward lockdown. She had been through the whole of the pandemic at Brockfield House and was no stranger to ward lockdowns. However, I believe that this one was different for Marion as in addition to the lockdown, she was also subjected to a lot of changes to her routines, planned important meeting dates and to her living arrangements. I believe that cumulatively this was very stressful for Marion.

There were plans for Marion to be discharged, near to me, in August 2022. Marion was so close to beginning an exciting new chapter in her life. She had a lot to look forward to and live for. She would have had continued support from us all and would no doubt have stayed in touch with her Essex friends. This has been one of the

hardest things for her loved ones to accept, as we had been waiting for the day when she was discharged and we could all spend time together again, but it was not to be.

Marion's death has been a shock and has brought much sadness and changed all our lives forever. We miss her deeply.

Below are a few of the ways in which Marion's death has had an impact on me and other friends and family:

- Loss of a continuing relationship and future shared experiences of a daughter, sister, and aunt.
- Dealing with the Jury Inquest process, all that goes with it and the toll it takes on loved ones.
- Losing faith and trust in public bodies and 'the State.' Feeling cynical about the motives of organisations when things go wrong.
- Feeling that you can only 'fight' so much and then having to decide what issues to take up and those that you can't stretch yourself to.
- On a personal note, changes to my life in an immense way, for example, effect on employment and my ability to focus.
- Having the burden of balancing the needs of the living (elderly parents and my own immediate family) as well as seeking justice for the person that has died.
- Having to live with the fact that although positive changes have been made at the Trust because of my sister's death, the magnitude of the failings in her care is so very hard to comprehend.

Karen Michel (sister)