

Commemorative and Impact Statements

Michael Paul Goldwater

Lisa Goldwater

My name is Lisa Goldwater, and I am here to speak about my brother, Michael Paul Goldwater, who died on 5th April 2000, when he was just 35 years old.

Michael was adopted by our family when he was 10 days old and was the third child after my older brother, David, and myself. My parents were so relieved to have him, and he was welcomed into our family by all our relatives. As Michael was only a couple years younger than me, we were close growing up. He was a happy child, and used to tease my brother and I by saying we were just born, but he was chosen. When the inquest into his death took place, his adoption was stressed and emphasised as if it meant he wasn't my parent's actual child, or that he meant less to us, but this was not the case. Michael was my little brother, and I always wanted to protect him growing up. Mike was very funny and chatty, and he made me laugh a lot. He was kind, and befriended children who were left out in his class, alongside loving animals and going to the zoo.

Michael had shown signs of mental health struggles as a teenager and would act out at times. I remember the first time being frightened of him when he was about 15, but then things went back to normal for quite a few years. It wasn't until Michael was about 18 that he really started to show signs of mental health problems. He had started to smoke cannabis, and once told me he felt like he was stuck in a trip, other times he believed he had telepathy. I was concerned and was training to be a mental health nurse at the time, and so my mum and I got hold of a psychiatrist to come to our house to see him, but they told us Michael was fine.

When Michael was about 19, my parents were going on a big trip on the Trans-Siberian railway, and I was worried about Michael being at home alone, so went down to stay with him with my boyfriend at the time. It was during this time Michael first went into hospital. He had barricaded himself into his room, and when I tried to open the door, he became violent, throwing table legs at me, and I later saw he had carved 'Lisa die' into one of them alongside many other messages written about me. I was scared, and my boyfriend, managed to shout him down and stayed with him while I went to a nearby phone booth. I called the emergency doctor, and they took him to hospital. I didn't want to put him into hospital, but I was worried, and I wanted to make sure he was ok for my parents. He wouldn't let me go with him and I worry he never forgave me.

After that, Michael was in and out of inpatient care at Runwell Hospital, most of which was informal admission. When he was home there were incidents of violence towards my parents, he was paranoid they were attacking him. When he was in hospital, he always said he wanted to be home, and this made my parents feel hugely guilty, but he needed to be helped and we thought he would be.

Michael's diagnosis did change over the years, but he suffered with schizophrenia or schizoaffective disorder. He would self-medicate with marijuana and other drugs as he said this would stop him feeling anxious and stop him hearing voices, but I think this was only making his mental health worse. He would also be in hospital in intensive care for periods at a time as he wouldn't eat properly or take his medication for his diabetes.

Michael's stays at Runwell started in the early 80s and sadly continued until his death in 2000. He seemed to be in all the time, as each admission was for fairly extended periods. When he was home it

felt like it was just a matter of time before something happened. He was using drugs, and I tried to get him help and let him come to stay with me, but social services had washed their hands with him. I wanted to help him but didn't know how, and his illness took over our lives. His mental health continued to deteriorate, and he would be admitted back into hospital as an inpatient. I always had the feeling his care was substandard, and there was a lethargic air with a lot of people put into the big hospitals. I didn't like him being in hospital, but you think at least he will be safe.

My parents and aunt had visited Michael the day he died and say he seemed much brighter, buying them coffee, and loving the gifts they brought him. Later that day, the police arrived at my parents' door and told them that Michael had had a heart attack. They said he had been taken to Basildon Hospital, but as there were no intensive care beds he was being taken to Harlow. When my mum and dad arrived at the hospital and saw him on life support the doctor then told them it was very bad news, and the police wanted to speak to them because it was a homicide inquiry.

The morning after Mike went into hospital my parents rang me to tell me he had had a heart attack. When I got to the hospital, I realised he had been restrained and he was put on a life support machine. He had already lost his pulse. It is all a bit blurry, but I accidentally walked in when they were doing a brain stem test on him, and I could just see the flat line. I grabbed my breath and that's when I realised there was no brain activity.

The circumstances of his death raised very serious concerns about the quality and timeliness of the care he received. While no criminal proceedings were pursued, an internal investigation was conducted, resulting in temporary suspensions. A year after Michael's death, an inquest recorded a verdict that his death had been accidental, which we were shocked at.

The Trust didn't offer us any support after Michael died, and I saw my parents just getting older and older. I will always be angry about that. It was all a bit secretive, mucky and my experience was there was no support whatsoever from the Trust. We never got a sincere apology from the Trust for their failings in care.

The inquest was an extremely stressful and traumatic time, and it felt everyone there was just trying to cover their own backs. My parents didn't want to sue the NHS, we just wanted to know what had happened. It felt like no one took the proceedings seriously and this took a huge toll on our family. My dad suffered a major stroke and was completely paralysed, with no speech, that he never recovered from. He died in 2004, just a few weeks later. In 2005, my older brother went missing and was found dead after a week. It was like a domino effect, everything happened one after the other. It was harrowing. It's not just what happened to Michael, it's also everything that happened as a result of it, and the devastating impact that has left lasting scars that will never fully heal.

I share what happened to Michael in the hope that no other family will endure the same heartbreak and that urgent changes will be made to protect vulnerable patients in mental health care. The number of families in Essex facing similar preventable tragedies is staggering, and I hope this Inquiry brings about meaningful reforms, ensuring that this pain and trauma ends.

Aidan Spence

This is Aidan Spence's statement from a brother in law, as his relationship to Michael.

Background –

I'm also a mental health nurse and had a positive relationship with Michael for years inside and outside of institutions and at one point invited him in to our family home when he was discharged from hospital. This decision we feel was taken prematurely and I indeed wrote to his consultant requesting we discuss this explaining that I was a senior forensic Community Psychiatric Nurse in a London borough. I did not receive a response.

In a work capacity I had an in depth understanding of how the situation arose and was dealt with. Mental health nursing is a small disparate community and for myself and Lisa it became smaller. There were many events we needed to avoid at this point.

The impact on my family was devastating.

Our children all at different ages each dealt with it in their own way, some with more insight and understanding than others of course but all feeling the traumatic damage it hurled, particularly on their mother.

This impacted on a daily basis to the extent that Lisa withdrew from the business (by this time we owned and managed a mental health care home) finding it difficult to engage and put her usual positivity into her work. This of course meant me working and being away from the family for longer periods and Lisa trying to be present for the children on her own for longer periods which I know she found a struggle. This cycle as cycles do, prevails in the family and is present to this day.

Given the circumstances I believe that together we coped extremely well. I think we were very lucky to have been brought up in strong nuclear families ourselves and if this were not the case it is unlikely that we would have stayed in one unit. We also spent much of our time straddling the business with family responsibilities thus integrating and creating a close healthy relationship with our Carehome residents. Witnessing Michael's deteriorating mental health in the community assisted in our motivation to set up our carehome for men displaying challenging mental health issues (we hold an outstanding CQC rating) The kids have never had Christmas dinner in our own house without a table full of paranoid schizophrenics and although I say that with a sardonic smile I believe that our focus saved us from a much worse outcome.

Strong families can find a way and as parents we always have to find positive outcomes to our often unique challenges. All families experience trauma and after all we are only as happy as our unhappiest child. Maybe that's what drives us.

Thank you for giving us this opportunity to speak. It is at the least a wonderfully cathartic experience and helps us reflect and put some of the past into perspective in our own unique way.

Conor Spence

When asked about the impact that Michael's death had, my oldest child, Conor, said:

Well, it was horrible, of course, and I saw it having a huge impact on everyone else. It was very heavy. Mum and grandma, in particular, became more withdrawn and snappy, with Grandad having a near-paralysing stroke within a year of the death in the following March. The weight of the inquest was palpable in our home, having a significant impact on them and on all of us. I didn't know the circumstances for a few years, but I knew even at 7 that it was strange for a 35-year-old to have a heart attack.

To conclude the biggest impact on all of us was my father having a stroke after the inquest, my father dying, and my brother David going missing ten months after that and being found dead.