

Hello, firstly a big thank you for letting me speak today,

Darren passed away 15th September 2020 aged 41.

Darren was born 11th May 1979 I was already 3.5 years old when he was born, we lived in Kent with our parents who were originally from Essex our mum Dagenham and Dad Mill Beach.

Darren had rosy, red cheeks and a cheeky giggle of a laugh; with very fluffy flyaway hair mum could never get to lay flat.

We spent most weekends going to Nanny & Grandad's in Essex. Saturdays was fish n chip day, and we would regularly go to Romford Market with mum & our Auntie then visit Grandma to see what she was baking.

Darren loved watching 80's shows like the A-team, Dukes of Hazzard, Nightrider and Karate Kid, and many others this was in-between us going through the Index catalogue marking out what we wanted for our birthdays and Christmas, He loved He-Man he had all latest action toys we were both very lucky. Driving home from Essex to Kent we always played duck the bridge in the car and seeing who could spot Leeds Castle first through the trees then we knew we would be home in about 20 minutes.

During holidays we would visit our dad's sister and family in Tolleshunt D'Arcy we loved going there as it was quite remote and peaceful compared to our Kentish town, we would also spend time down at Maldon promenade, Holidaying in Yarmouth, Isle of Wight and Euro Camp in France with family and friends.

Christmas time Essex family would come to Kent, Darren and I would bunk in together and my Auntie oversaw getting us to sleep. One year mum left a load of pressies in her wardrobe and she had to sneak in to retrieve them, Darren and I were hiding under the duvet watching (must have been the year we realised no Santa). Waking at 3am we would both try and open our stockings not too sure why we bothered we could not see a thing! and Auntie telling us to go back to sleep. One year we both got racing bikes, we cleared a path and were taking it in turns to ride around in and out of the living room to dining room and turning around in the kitchen at 6am.

In 1989 we went to Grand Canaria this would have been our last family holiday as a 4, but Darren and I would never have known any different, we had such a fantastic time 2 weeks of fun, laughs, site seeing, camel rides, and cowboy shows. Darren revisited the same place in later years and sent me photos of the hotel and sites.

Mum sadly passed away on 3rd April 1990 from Cancer Darren was 10 me 14.

We slowly adapted as a family of 3, we still went to Essex and dad's sister came to stay making sure we were ok, then we would stay at hers with our cousins whilst dad could work in the school holidays.

Darren started secondary school and fitted in well, made loads of friends and they all had a love for BMX bikes they would fix them up in our garage then head to Hastings to the ramps. He was quite often found in the kitchen knocking up pancakes, my good friend always comments at this as being one of her fondest memories of him, singing his heart out and waking us up! Dr Hook was the beginning of his love for the singer Peter Cetera who sang 'glory of love' and the band he was lead singer in 'Chicago' and this kickstarted his lifelong passion for what we all called his cheesy music! Which included Chicago, and the Bee Gees

I came home one day and Darren was crying, no idea what had possessed him but he had his hair shaved right down the middle, dad actually saw the funny side and we all started laughing and still did even in more so recent years, only thing was he had to have a grade 0 to rectify it, he made me write a letter to school to say he had to wear a cap as he had a hair condition.

When Darren was eleven, he was diagnosed with Glandular Fever, he spent weeks in bed asleep I do not think he ever got over this as even in adult life he loved a drop of sleep.

Mid 1990's dad remarried, and the family moved to Sussex, I did not go I was eighteen and had a job, so I managed to secure a room with a family friend then later got my own flat.

Darren one Saturday in the pouring rain decided to come to Kent on his moped he had to come the coastal route it took him hours and when he arrived, he was soaked through and so tired he slept for 12 hours solid and didn't even see his friends as he had to go back the next day.

Dad's marriage did not work out, and he moved to Essex to be near his sister and set up home. For a brief time, we all lived together again in Essex which was great to be under the same roof again as a family of 3.

Dad met Ann of whom he married, and they have been together for over 20 years now, our family grew from 3 to 8 and over 20 once all the Grandchildren and Great children came along.

Darren moved back to Sussex after meeting a girl when he went back to visit a school friend for the weekend and the rest was history, they set up home and in time had 2 children.

In 2006 Darren started to show signs of Paranoia he was convinced people at work were talking about him, following him, and trying to get him the sack, he became very depressive, negative, even to the point a song which was no 1 in the charts at the time Crazy by Niles Barkley he thought was written about him.

On the 2nd April [personal/sensitive] they held a birthday party at the grandparents in Sussex's home, one of the family friends who attended was a policeman and had noted strange behaviour in Darren that was witnessed by all who attended such as making an unusual speech full of guilt and sadness before doing birthday cake and then becoming suspicious of a Dr Hook song playing in the kitchen thinking it was a message from people telling him he needed to see a Doctor.

On the 3rd of April Darren went into Tesco in Broadwater for baby formula leaving his partner and daughter sat in the car waiting, [personal/sensitive] the anniversary of our mum's passing. Darren never returned to the car, a search was put in place, police were alerted quickly due to his mental health state and was supported by the police officer present at the party the day before. We made posters we searched and searched day and night driving around for 4 days, just as his partner was about to leave to do a TV appeal to try and find him, Darren called his home phone to ask what was going on and ask his partner if the paranoid thoughts were in his head or real, whilst being reassured over the call, The call was traced to a payphone near the site he went missing and the police were able to locate Darren and assure him that he was safe and ask him if they could take him to hospital to seek the help that he so clearly needed, he gratefully went with them, and they took him to be assessed. He had been hiding in an abandoned garage.

At the hospital I remember running in and grabbing him but there was no emotion he was very tense & ridged. It was like he was on a different planet; he didn't say anything there was nothing, but I distinctively remember a smell, which later I realised was stail congealed blood on his wrists where he had tried to slit them [personal/sensitive]

A doctor assessed Darren, and it was immediately requested he be sectioned. A place in Chichester was available, we all drove him there, by this time it was dark and very eery, the place had high security, was horrible leaving him was like leaving a little boy, but we knew as well as Darren that it was for the best for his own safety. He spent about 4 weeks in there till he was transferred to a less security unit near his home, he spent several more weeks getting the help he needed to be able to return to the family home.

For a while life seemed to be fine, Darren got a job, his second child was born.

Around mid-2007, His partner went on a holiday with the children and her mum, Darren was working in a self-employed role and felt he couldn't afford the time off even though he was asked to go along and the holiday had been paid for, Darren didn't go, but literally a day into their holiday Darren overnight went downhill, he took [some medication alongside alcohol]

Darren though despite this seeked help from the Samaritans and it was them that called an ambulance who took him to the local hospital. Whilst this was happening Darren's partner had become concerned because he wasn't returning her calls or texts and hadn't shown up for plans, she had made with friends to keep him busy and upbeat whilst she was away, so she asked her stepdad to go to the house, it was then a neighbour had told him she saw him leave in ambulance. Darren was discharged under his care. With this they both travelled to Spain to be with the family, they spent the remainder of the holiday together which is what Darren needed.

Early 2008, their relationship mutually broke down and Darren decided to move back to Essex with our dad and stepmum, He still had contact with the children and would visit weekends when not working spend time down there and even bring the children back to Essex to visit the family. Darren and his partner where dear friends still and there wasn't no animosity or hate and still this remained till, he died. It was just a case that they knew it was the right thing to do for everyone to recover from the damage that had taken its toll on both Darren's health and the family's wellbeing with such small children to consider. Both still very much loved each other and the decision although the right one, was a devastatingly difficult one to be made.

Darren knew he had to give them space and not drag them down and this was the best way for everyone to be happy including himself.

Mid 2009 he had another relapse this time though he took himself off to The Brambles a mental health clinic in Colchester where he spent about 2 weeks rehabilitating himself and getting advice and help he needed.

From this he returned to dads and work, he even found himself a flat.

Over the years Darren was so up and down, one day you would talk to him and he was extremely low then I would call back the next day and it was like he had won the lottery, no two conversations would be the same with him, you did need a lot a of patience and I did as did Dad & Ann, they lived closer than me I was back in Kent. He had many relapses and times he would turn up at their home in the early hours in tears, they would sit with him for hours, sometimes in silence till he was ready to talk, drinking lots of tea with dad.

Early 2018 Darren went to the doctors as he wanted help, he knew he needed medication and at the time was not on anything permanently, he was a bus driver, and he did not want to jeopardise his job or take something that could make him tired. I am on the understanding he possibly was prescribed something. The doctor then referred him for some cognitive counselling, but the referral time was slow, so Dad, Ann and I paid for him to have private counselling whilst he waited for an appointment, for which he was extremely grateful. He never turned down help, he always found it difficult to open, but it was easier to talk with strangers. He had private sessions which helped him massively.

Darren turned 40 in 2019, and he wanted to do another sky dive, he had done previously back in 1999 and loved the thrill. We all chipped in for his birthday and even paid for it to be filmed to keep as a memory.

2020 started odd for everyone with COVID, and I guess this gave Darren a lot of time to think, I would often call him or vice versa when he was on a brake, we would chat about day-to-day stuff, give each suggestion on what Netflix films to download, he seemed fine nothing out of the ordinary. June 2020 when we were allowed to start mixing outside I met him at the children's mums house, we spent the day in Arundel with the kids, on the rowing boats, walking, chatting and eating ice-creams, I absolutely treasure this day, I have a photo of us all balancing on a huge tree stump and stranger took a photo it's one of my last smiling memories of him. We also had a trip to Chessington world of adventures where we took the children for a fun filled day out.

August came Darren brought himself a classic Mini Cooper, he loved these cars and had several before, but this one was a classic red and his absolute pride and joy, it was not cheap, so he brought it a tent to act as garage, to help preserve it.

Bus driving was not for Darren really, he loved driving, but I think the people were a bit too much for him at times, so late August he started the process to become a lorry driver, he took the relevant on-screen tests and seemed extremely positive and excited.

The week before Darren died, I can't recall anything different in him we spoke as normal, but something must have happened and triggered off his depression, he even signed himself off work, on Sunday 13th September my dad called me to say Darren was in a bad place, he was expressing signs of paranoia, guilt, and that he just didn't know what to do as he was being watched by faces in the window across the road in a nearby building, he was even convinced people were flashing their car lights as part of a conspiracy to capture him, when in reality it was people probably being nice and letting the bus out! he did not trust anyone; he was not eating as he thought he was being poisoned. The crisis team were called, and Darren was visited that afternoon in his home.

Darren confessed to trying to take his life ^[personal/sensitive] none of us were aware of this, the guy asked Darren several questions about his state of mind, one being are you feeling suicidal his response was yes, NO Notes were made on this visit, all the guy could do was reassure Darren that someone would call him and visit the next day (Monday) this did not sit well with Darren, as there were trust issues. The guy left and did not submit his report till 23:59 that evening hours after leaving Darren.

I called Darren the Monday morning and wanted him to know, I loved him and was trying to get him to eat and drink, reassure him all will be ok, the conversation was very much one sided, he could not even string more than 2 words together.

Problem with Darren he carried unnecessary guilt one that has stuck with me since his first relapse in 2006 is that on the day of our mum's funeral, after he went off playing football with friends, I don't remember this neither my dad, but he had seen this an awful thing to do, and it carried heavy on his mind. We both said to him so so many times, mum would not have wanted anything more than you to be happy and playing.

On Mondays visit again Darren asked if suicidal response was the same, he was in-fact worse than the Sunday, due to lack of food and water his mind was very psychotic, he trusted no one, he was blank, the guy asked several questions about his past. He would have been aware of Sundays visit and Darren's history as he was in the system. No medication could be prescribed without a doctor and the first available appointment offered to Darren was on Wednesday 16th via a zoom call. This would never have worked for Darren, he needed face to face help and support, he depression and anxiety and deteriorated, and this call did not even guarantee medication would have been prescribed.

That Wednesday was also my uncle's funeral, Darren had already expressed concerns and felt guilty for not being able to go, we tried to reassure him this was not an issue, Dad said he would be with him during the zoom call. As the day went on, he became more depressed and very vulnerable. He even asked if he went to hospital where would he go, a response was "it wouldn't come to that" this to Darren would have been a massive blow to him as would have seen this a negative, he never ever had an issue with getting help he would have seen this as people playing with his mind. That evening the mother of his children also called him with concern
[personal/sensitive]

She recognised the signs of paranoia she had witnessed before and asked him do you feel safe?" to which he replied "no, and I can't talk" as he felt he was being listened to and unable to talk freely.

On the morning of Tuesday 15th September around 06:30 Darren sent himself to sleep forever, he was found [personal/sensitive] with a ligature around his neck.

I have no words on how I felt when my dad called me, All I remember is screaming NO he did not need to, go check there must be a mistake. My poor dad was beside himself. It breaks my heart knowing he was there sitting with Darren on the floor waiting to be collected by the coroners.

I then had to break the news to the children's mother who had to tell his children the devastating news that we had lost their father so suddenly. Something I never thought I would have to do and breaks my heart to this day having to say those dreaded words, "he's gone I'm so sorry".

When the police arrived after the ambulance crew had finished, my dad was sat in the lounge and as the Inspector left, he heard him say to his PC, mark it down as a suicide! Nothing was said by dad till several weeks later, I figure the shock of absorbing his son had died hadn't sunk in, but it seemed very insensitive and how on earth did he know what had happened just be glancing, he had only spent 5 minutes upstairs if that.

The first couple of days where a blur, then the coroner said he could not give a cause of death due to insignificant findings, no marks on him to show how he had died. From this it led to an autopsy being taken and then would go to an inquest.

This at first was very daunting and we all had mixed feelings and emotions, we had no idea of the process, but looking back now it opened a massive assortment of problems and concerns we had that could be raised by us as a family. So, we took this as a positive.

We requested a full EPUT report and statements and so did the Coroner, in-fact from Darren dying to the actual full 2-day inquest which was 22 months we still had to chase and chase even on a few days before the start.

On reading the report there was so many failings, the report was half complete, a lot of copying and pasting, wrong information, silly things like they referred to Darren having 1 child of whom he has no contact with (this was far from the truth), it said Darren had [personal/sensitive] denied any active intent, this again was not true as he had said so on the Sunday and this was documented in the report. Boxes ticked that indicated he should have been sectioned, if someone who has a history and tells you they are suicidal and has recently tried tells you all this then surely appropriate action is to get them in somewhere of security and help, especially when they are willing to go.

After 2 days of reading police, Ambulance, GODSAMS first report, coroner, and Toxicology on top of EPUT's input the coroner concluded Darrens death as Asphyxiation by Ligation without Intention, it could have been avoided. The coroner also requested a regulation 28 be made by EPUT but we are yet to see this report. In evidence EPUT responded "yes, he should have been sectioned" and apologised for not doing so, this was awful and soul destroying for us to hear.

I can only describe Darren's mental health issues starting the day our mum died, and this slowly ate away at him over the years leading to his death. We didn't know what the future held, he may have spent time in and out of institutes, he may have become a long-distance lorry driver, cruising the towns and cities living his best life, we really don't know, but what I do know is that it was cut short by the neglect and him not being taken seriously, and with this his future ended.

The impact on myself and the family I can only ditto what everyone else has said that has sat or stood here, its affected us all in numerous ways, My Dad & Ann have moved as they couldn't bear seeing the bus Darren would have been driving, it literally stopped outside their home, I don't want this to be about me, I am strong and will fight! we all sit here in the same boat which is filling up but one thing is for sure we won't let it sink!

Darren was a fun-loving guy a super dad who would do anything for his kids, he was kind, extremely hard working, we all miss him terrible especially that giggle.

A few weeks after his death we found in my parents wedding album tucked inside letters written by Darren one to myself and another to Dad & Ann, we treasure these as he expressed his love and gratitude for us always being there for him.

My letter back to Darren would have read:

There is no need for thank yous, you are my brother and a son to Dad & Ann, we would have always been there for you it's what naturally a family would have done. You do not need to thank or apologise to anyone, remember you are only human, no one owns you, I just wish you were listened to. My only peace I have in all this is that our mum has you now under her wings, and you can be clear of the demons. Love you always Fly High little brother xxxxx

