

Mother whose son took own life writes book to help others

Campaign over condition associated with head injury

By Laura Painter

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A MOTHER from Coulsdon whose son took his own life at the age of just 31 has released a book as part of her relentless campaign to make people more aware of the knock-on effects that can be caused by a head injury.

Joanna Lane believes that her son Christopher's depression which led to his suicide in August 2008 was possibly caused by hypopituitarism, a condition often associated with head injuries. The condition is caused when the pituitary gland in the brain is damaged through a head injury and can often stop certain hormones being released into the body such as testosterone.

The 68-year-old believes her son's pituitary gland was damaged when he fell from a tree aged seven and spent a week in a coma.

Following his accident

Christopher, who attended Whitgift School, in South Croydon, appeared to make a full recovery and Mrs Lane says he was a "charming" young man.

However, he struggled with depression throughout his adult life and Mrs Lane found out after his death that Christopher was impotent which she believes may have caused issues with his relationships and fuelled his depression. Christopher, who was living in Skipton, in North Yorkshire, at the time of his death, and was a brother to Jenny, now 38, and Ruth, now 34, was found by police after committing suicide with a helium mask. Mrs Lane, who lives in Southwood Avenue with her husband John, affectionately remembers Christopher, who worked as a software writer for Skipton Building Society, in her book.

She wrote: "He was capable and clear-sighted, he understood people. I remember his soft snort-

ing laugh.

"I miss him so much. But I expect I'll get over that eventually. What I can't ever, ever get over, is the understanding I have now of his suffering and isolation and my realisation of what great strength he showed, when I was so wrongly believing him weak.

"I can't ever erase the image of him putting on that nasty helium mask ... and the thought of his heart beating more and more slowly and uncertainly, and then stopping, as he sat in his boxer shorts alone in the dark."

Since Christopher's death Mrs Lane has made it her business to raise awareness of hypopituitarism and her campaign has brought about a number of changes in the NHS and the Armed Forces.

She said: "I was quite successful really, I wrote to a lot of hospitals and quite a few of them changed their protocol about head injuries and a group of

neurosurgeons said that they would write a guideline for head injury screening.

"We had articles written in The Times and the Mail on Sunday and I also managed to get a Holby City scriptwriter from the BBC to work it into one of their stories.

"Lots of people have written to me saying they have been diagnosed correctly thanks to the articles so I'm really pleased about that and the Army also screen for it now."

Mrs Lane hopes that her new book, *Mother Of A Suicide*, which was published in October, will help raise awareness of a condition which - had it been diagnosed properly - might have saved her son's life, as he could have received hormone treatment which may have stopped him from suffering from depression.

The former English teacher would also like people to tell their stories, which they can share with her by emailing

FOND MEMORIES: Joanna Lane with son Christopher

blueyonder.co.uk.

She added: "[The book] is my story as a mother.

"The first part is very sad and about his death and the second part is about me writing to one charity and organisation after another and the successes and the

failures. After something like this happens you have to do something, so I sort of made it my business to raise awareness."

The Samaritans runs a free helpline for those suffering with suicidal thoughts. You can speak to someone by phoning 116 123.