

'MY SON WAS MURDERED - NOW I WANT JUSTICE'

BARNABY WEBBER WAS STABBED TO DEATH IN THE NOTTINGHAM ATTACKS. NOW, HIS MUM EMMA IS FIGHTING FOR CHANGE...



Ian Coates, Barnaby, and Grace O'Malley-Kumar died in the attacks



Emma Webber

My son Barnaby raced down the stairs, a huge grin on his face. 'Mum, I got my grades,' he shouted. It was August 2022, and my husband David and I had been anxiously waiting to see if Barnaby had got the results he needed to get into the University of Nottingham, his top choice, to study history. He had his heart set on going there, so I was thrilled for him. The grades were well deserved, as he had worked so hard. He happily went off to meet his mates and, later that day, we went out to celebrate the good news as a family at a wine bar he used to work at. A few weeks later, we packed up the car and made the journey from our

hometown of Taunton to Nottingham, so we could drop Barnaby off. His younger brother, Charlie, 15, came too and despite problems on the roads and momentarily getting lost, those six-and-a-half hours in the car were lovely, as we spent the entire time chatting. Barnaby was buzzing with excitement. When we arrived among the chaos of other parents, we parked up and started to unload the car. 'I can't believe I'm finally here,' Barnaby smiled as he took in his surroundings. After we put the last of the boxes in his new room, I gave him a hug. 'We'll see you soon,' I said. 'You're going to have the best time. Make the most of these next three years. We'll miss you so much.' 'I'll miss you too,' he said. Over the next few weeks, David and I took it in turns keeping in touch

Tributes left for the victims

with Barnaby via text or phone call. 'I don't want to feel like we're pestering him,' I said. But whenever we spoke to him, he regaled us with tales of how much he was loving life at university. He'd settled in so well, as we imagined he would. Barnaby always got on with everyone, and had no trouble making friends. He met his crowd at uni quite quickly, and didn't suffer any homesickness. One night, he texted to ask how to make fajitas, which made David and I laugh. We made a couple of trips up to visit him, and we were so proud to see the young man he was becoming.

TRAGEDY

His first year at university flew by, and before we knew it, by June 2023, he'd taken his exams and was due home for the summer. 'I've just got off the phone with Barnaby,' David said one night. 'He'll be home next week, he wants to stay up in Nottingham to play cricket.' He was so sporty, and cricket was his favourite, so it didn't surprise me. Later that week, we were away in a holiday lodge in Cornwall when we heard news that a stabbing had taken place in Nottingham in the early hours. We frantically tried to get in touch with Barnaby, but couldn't get through to him. Panicked, we called the police, who then got back in touch with us to deliver the news we'd been dreading. Barnaby had been stabbed to death, alongside two other victims – fellow student Grace O'Malley-Kumar, and Ian Coates. Our boy was just 19.

We drove to Nottingham in shock. When we got there we were met by family liaison officers. Later that week, two separate vigils took place to commemorate Barnaby, Grace and Ian, one at the university



Valdo Calocane



Officers at the scene

'TWO VIGILS TOOK PLACE TO COMMEMORATE BARNABY, IAN AND GRACE'

and one in the city centre. Thousands of people showed up to pay their respects, and we were overwhelmed with the love people showed. In the following weeks, we were told more details about what happened that morning. Barnaby and his friend Grace had been walking home following a night out when a man named Valdo Calocane attacked and fatally stabbed them both. He then stabbed Ian Coates before stealing his van and trying to run people over. It was a senseless, horrific attack and we were broken by grief. A month later, we held Barnaby's funeral. Over 600 people turned up to pay their respects. Tributes were read out and the congregation loudly sang his favourite hymn, *Jerusalem*. In January 2024, Calocane was sentenced to a high-security

hospital order after admitting manslaughter by diminished responsibility. There was no trial, as the prosecutors accepted his plea of not guilty of murder due to serious mental illness. He also admitted three counts of attempted murder relating to the pedestrians he tried to target with Ian Coates' van. Following his sentencing, a report revealed that Calocane, who suffered from schizophrenia, had stopped taking his medication, and was known for showing frequent violent behaviour. He had missed multiple appointments with mental health teams and, just two weeks before, he had been arrested for attacking two of his work colleagues. We felt there had been a massive miscarriage of justice and that he should have been in prison, not in hospital. Evil like that cannot be rehabilitated.

WORDS: DANIELLE LETT; PHOTOS: ALAMY/PA IMAGES; SHUTTERSTOCK

REFORM

Since Barnaby's death, we've fought tirelessly for reform to the justice and healthcare systems. Calocane should have never been on the streets, and was known to authorities prior to killing Barnaby, Grace and Ian. We can't grieve properly until justice is served. What has helped me cope a little bit, though, is the National Grief Advisory Service. Following Barnaby's death, they've provided us with support and I became a patron for them in 2024. There is now a statutory inquiry, which will look at the systemic failures of mental health and police services in Nottingham. We hope to enact changes across the CPS, as well as within the police, ambulance services and hospitals. In the years since Barnaby's death, there have

'WE CAN'T GRIEVE PROPERLY UNTIL JUSTICE IS SERVED'

been similar attacks, from Southport in 2024 to the Huntingdon train attack just last year. Changes need to happen. David and I have also set up The Barnaby Webber Foundation. Our aims are to provide support and inclusion for young people aged 18 and under who are facing life challenges, as well as support grassroots cricket clubs through the provision of essential equipment and items needed to encourage young people to get involved in playing the sport. While our hearts will always be broken, we hope to make a positive change in Barnaby's name, so that his legacy will live on. ■ To find out more, visit barnabywebberfoundation.co.uk. For support following bereavement, go to nationalgriefadvice.com



Emma with Grace's mother Dr Sinead O'Malley outside the Houses Of Parliament



Barnaby was just 19 years old



Families of the victims meet with PM Keir Starmer

INQUIRY BEGINS

A public inquiry into failings that led to the Nottingham attacks began in February. The inquiry is required to provide a final report, with recommendations, by May 2027. On the first day of the hearing, Nottingham and Leicestershire police forces apologised to the bereaved families and survivors for failing to act on an arrest warrant for Calocane, which was issued 10 months before the Nottingham attacks. NHS England and the NHS trust that cared for Calocane also apologised to the families over missed opportunities.