

'My siblings died in the Sri Lanka attacks – I have the life's work of three people to do now'



The Linsey family on a tour of India in 2014 in one of the last pictures of the six of them together CREDIT: TELEGRAPH

By [Cara McGoogan](#)

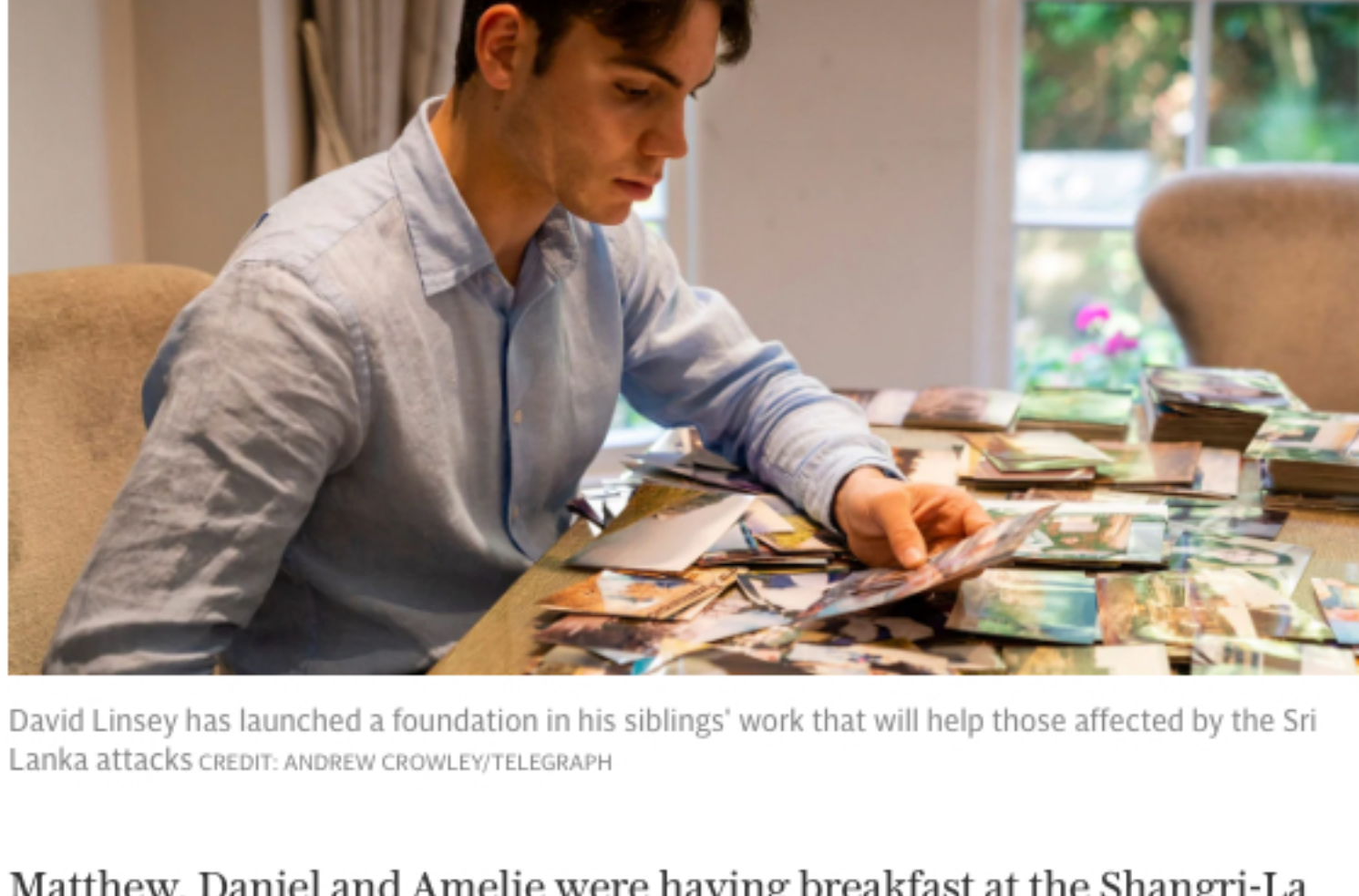
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The breakfast table in the Linsey family home is strewn with hundreds of pictures from the last three decades. Matthew Linsey and his son, David, are quietly flicking through photographs of the family from when the children were young – posing with chocolate ice cream all over their faces, driving speedboats on holiday, and holding a catch-of-the-day.

A quiet pain hangs over the west London house. Father and son speak in barely audible voices, regularly trailing off mid-sentence to sigh deeply. “I waited too long to go through all the photos... it’s very, very upsetting,” says Matthew.

It is one month since his 19-year-old son, Daniel, and daughter, Amelie, 15, were killed in the Easter Sunday terrorist attacks in Sri Lanka, when bombs exploded in the hotel where they were staying for a holiday with their father. David, 21, had stayed at home in London to revise for his final year Oxford University exams in economics and management; his mother, Angelina, and younger brother Ethan, 12, kept him company. It was rare for the family to split, but Daniel was due to go to university in September and Matthew wanted to spend time with him.

“Normally the house is crazy, there are people yelling, four kids,” says David. “Now it’s just me and my younger brother. The finality of it is so hard to process. There’s no way to deal with it – we’re taking it day by day.”



David Linsey has launched a foundation in his siblings’ work that will help those affected by the Sri Lanka attacks CREDIT: ANDREW CROWLEY/TELEGRAPH

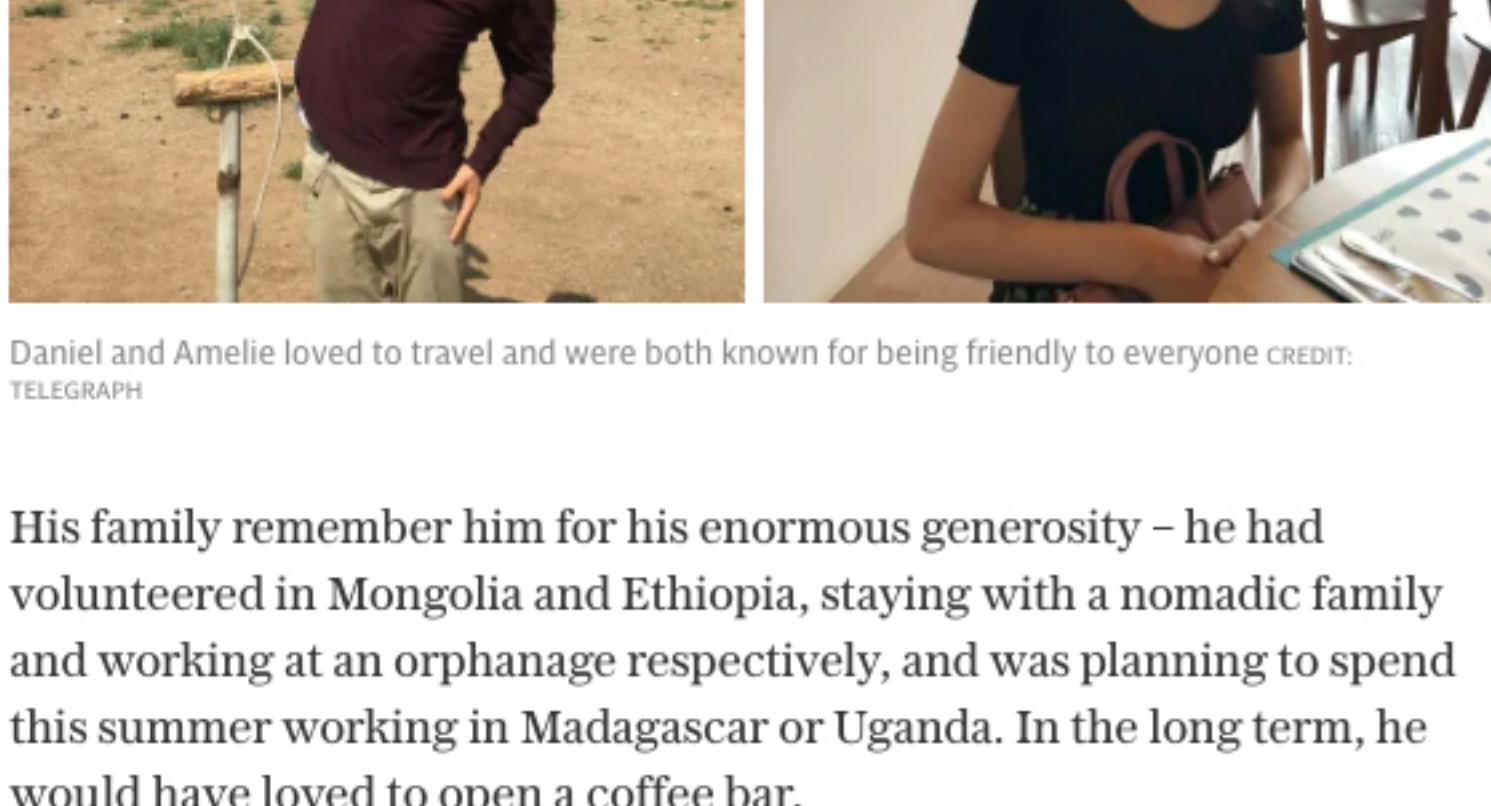
Matthew, Daniel and Amelie were having breakfast at the Shangri-La hotel in Colombo on the last morning of their trip when the first bomb went off. The family find it too painful to talk about that day, but Matthew has previously described how they were hit by a wave of pressure, then ran towards the exit – right into the second blast.

“Maybe I should have just stayed and covered them with my body,” he said in the days after the attack. The two children were knocked unconscious and separately rushed to hospital, where they both passed away.

He returned to London alone on Easter Monday, carrying three suitcases. One was Daniel’s, which contained coconuts for his mother, and a collection of teas they had bought for the family on their last day. Matthew had lost his voice from screaming desperately during the attacks; instead of speaking, he embraced his wife and David.

That week, a letter arrived from the University of Manchester, offering Daniel a place to study tourism and business. “It was devastating to open,” says Matthew. “He would have been ecstatic. We were happy for him, but it was bittersweet. It was the culmination of all his hard work, then to not be able to take it up...You can’t put into words how upsetting it is.”

Daniel had been working incredibly hard on his schoolwork, often into the small hours, to overcome the difficulties he faced from dyspraxia.



Daniel and Amelie loved to travel and were both known for being friendly to everyone CREDIT: TELEGRAPH

His family remember him for his enormous generosity – he had volunteered in Mongolia and Ethiopia, staying with a nomadic family and working at an orphanage respectively, and was planning to spend this summer working in Madagascar or Uganda. In the long term, he would have loved to open a coffee bar.

“Dan was a very selfless person,” says David. “He never judged anyone and would befriend everyone. He was friends with every staff member at school.”

Both children had inherited a passion for exploring from their parents – who met in an airport thirty years ago. As a family they went on a two-week adventure every Easter and spent Christmas in California, where American-born Matthew’s mother lives.

“They were great people to travel with, it was their favourite thing to do,” says Matthew. “They were very curious. That’s the irony – they were so open to different cultures, peoples and cuisines.”

Amelie was eager to follow in Daniel’s footsteps and volunteer abroad once she turned 16 – but she will never get the chance. A vegetarian who loved food, she always planned where the family ate on holiday and pushed them to try new things. She would let Ethan sleep in her bed if he was scared, and gave hugs, David says, that would “alleviate any kind of pain and stress”.

“She was very well read, kind of an old soul,” says Matthew.



Daniel was friends with every staff member at his school, and Amelie could ‘light up any room’ CREDIT: TELEGRAPH

Her mother, Angelina, who is too upset to speak to anyone outside her close family, later writes to me that Amelie was “beautiful in every way” and “would always stand up for what she believed in – and for the underdog”.

“I called her Little Miss Sunshine because she could light up any room,” her texts read.

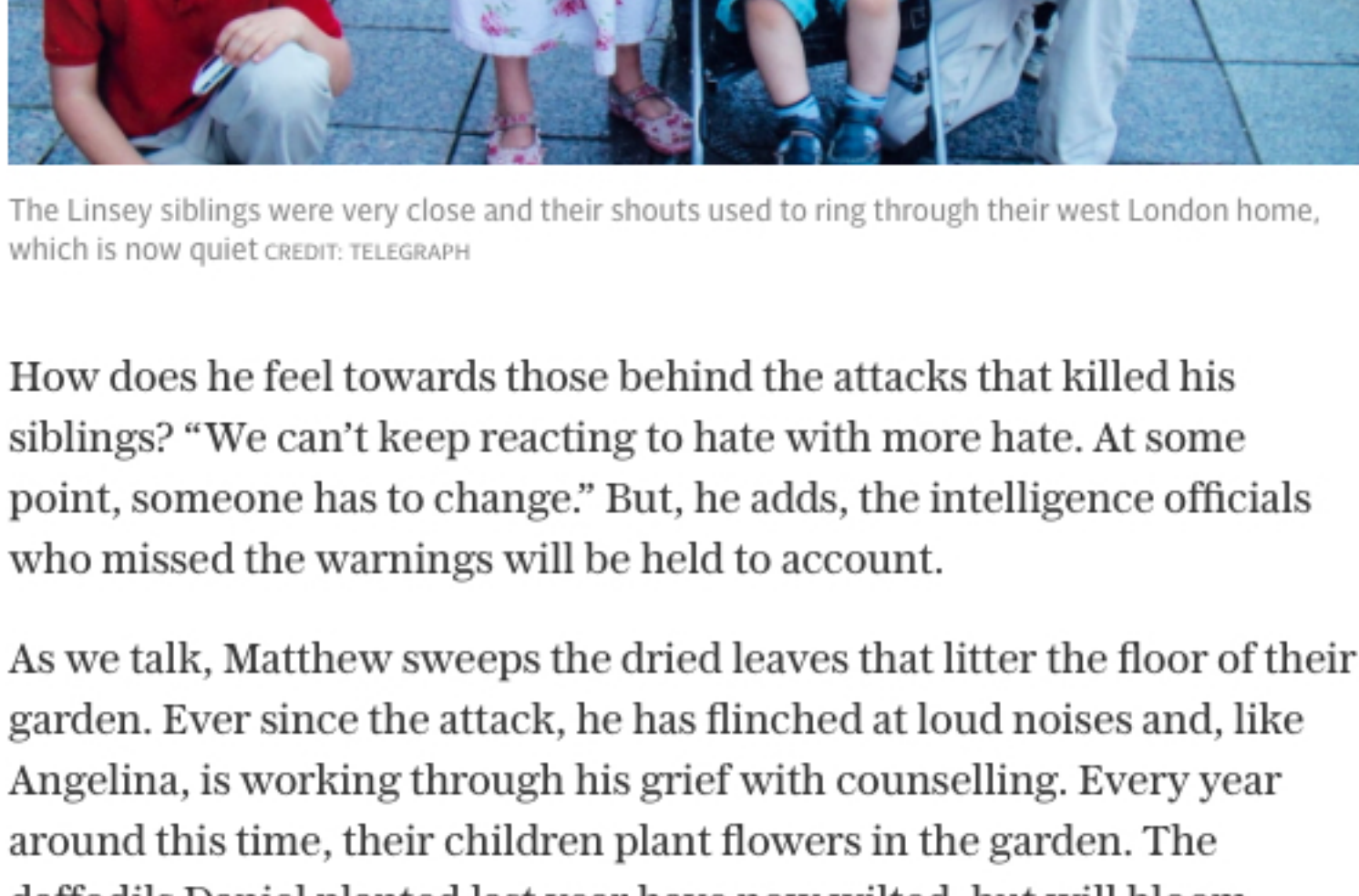
Before he had a chance to process what had happened to his siblings, David started thinking about how he could help ease his parents’ pain, and honour his brother and sister’s memories.

“My dad was coming home to the remains of a family,” he says. “My first thought was, what can I do to make it better for my parents? It would leave too great an imbalance in our lives if we just tried to move on – which we’re not going to do.” Knowing he wouldn’t be able to concentrate on his exams, David asked Oxford for a year’s break and formed the [Amelie and Daniel Linsey Foundation](#). He plans to create a “positive out of something so terrible” by raising £500,000 to support the families of local victims of the bombings, which claimed 300 lives.

Already at £150,000 before the charity has officially launched (he hopes it will do so in the House of Commons next month), David says it will improve local medical facilities in Sri Lanka and set up scholarships for those affected.

It has become a full time job, and soon after our interview he has a phone call scheduled with a school in Kandy. “My number one fear is emptiness,” he says. “I don’t want a vacuum, I need to keep doing things, keep working for my family.”

He is also driven by a desire to make his brother and sister proud: “I feel like I have the life’s work of three people to do now.”



The Linsey siblings were very close and their shouts used to ring through their west London home, which is now quiet CREDIT: TELEGRAPH

How does he feel towards those behind the attacks that killed his siblings? “We can’t keep reacting to hate with more hate. At some point, someone has to change.” But, he adds, the intelligence officials who missed the warnings will be held to account.

As we talk, Matthew sweeps the dried leaves that litter the floor of their garden. Ever since the attack, he has flinched at loud noises and, like Angelina, is working through his grief with counselling. Every year around this time, their children plant flowers in the garden. The daffodils Daniel planted last year have now wilted, but will bloom again.

David asks his father if they will continue the tradition this year. “I doubt it,” he says. “If you want to, David, you’re welcome to.”

The family flew to California for Daniel and Amelie’s funeral earlier this month, which was held near their grandmother’s house, not far from where the family spent Christmas together last year. “It was something I didn’t want to do,” says David. “But it did give me some closure, though, and a sense that Dan and Amelie are in a better place officially.”

He is planning to visit Sri Lanka in August to start the Foundation’s work. His parents, understandably, are worried about the trip and don’t want him to go, but he believes that will change.

“It will never be OK, but hopefully...” Matthew loses his train of thought, before saying, “It will take a long time.” He is in the hallway by the front door. Behind him is a pile of suitcases; Daniel and Amelie’s lie on their sides – yet to be unpacked.

To donate to the [Amelie and Daniel Linsey Foundation](#), visit justgiving.com/crowdfunding/amelieanddaniel