

Oxford student makes first visit to Sri Lanka since siblings died in terrorist attacks

An economics undergraduate who lost a brother and a sister in the Easter bombings is raising money to help local survivors

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David Linsey with younger sister Amelie, 15, who was killed at the Shangri-La hotel, Colombo, on Easter Sunday
DAVID LINSEY

Four months ago, David Linsey more or less had his life mapped out. A third-year economics student at Oxford University, he was engrossed in revision for his final exams and preparing to start a job at a data analytics company.

Then he found out his father and two younger siblings had been caught up in one of the worst terrorist attacks since 9/11. It was Easter Sunday and Daniel, 19, and Amelie, 15, were eating breakfast at the Shangri-La in Colombo, Sri Lanka, when a bomb — one of eight to hit churches and hotels around the country — exploded.

Their father Matthew, who survived, was faced with an impossible situation. Both his children were unconscious. Believing Daniel was more seriously hurt, the investor, 61, tried to carry him to safety while another survivor volunteered to take after Amelie. In the chaos, they became separated. Daniel was rushed to hospital but did not make it. Mr Linsey later found out his daughter had also died. They had been due to fly home that morning.

“My priorities have completely shifted since that day,” said David, 21, who had missed the holiday because he needed to study. He postponed his exams and cancelled his job. “Before, I had an idea of what I wanted to do. Now I’m not sure. Most of my friends have graduated but that feels very detached from me.”

Next month he will fly to Sri Lanka for the first time. In a two-week trip he will meet local survivors of the attacks, which killed more than 250 people. Those he will encounter, on a tour of three cities devastated by the bombings — Negombo, Batticaloa and the capital, Colombo — include a boy who was blinded.

Just two weeks after his siblings died, David launched the Amelie & Daniel Linsey Foundation to support local people. It has become a full-time job. “It has been all-consuming,” he said. “It has been good for me — my biggest fear is not having anything to do. It’s filling the void.” He has raised £220,000 in four months and worked with two charities, Nest and Their Future Today, to provide access to shelter, education and therapy for those affected.

One of the hardest things about life in Britain after the deaths is how quiet it seems. Daniel, who would have started university next month, had a “quirky sense of humour” that made everyone giggle, while the “angel of the family”, Amelie, “was always there for everyone”.

Now, the family home in southwest London, where he lives with his father, his mother, Angelina, and his little brother, Ethan, 12, feels empty. “The worst thing is the moments I forget what happened and then remember again.”

The money David has raised has already funded mental health workers to support those who need it. “I don’t want counselling. I would rather talk to my friends and family who I’m lucky to have. But I know not everyone has that network of support,” he said. “Generally it’s the poorest who suffer in something like this. That’s who we want to help. These people are living pay cheque to pay cheque, and as soon as the money stops coming, they can’t sustain their lives.”

He will sit his final exams next May. After that, he is unsure what he will do. He knows only one thing for sure. “I will carry on Amelie and Daniel’s legacy for the rest of my life.”

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