

Workers' Memorial Day

Trevor Burden

Tribute

I want to thank everyone who has joined us here to mark this year's Worker' Memorial Day.

This day is our opportunity to gather together to pay tribute to our family members, friends and colleagues, who have been tragically killed at work.

I am here to tell the story of my son, Jason, who was killed working for Tyne Slipway and Engineering in Wear Dock Sunderland in December 2011, when he was just 19 years old.

But there are many here today, who, like myself, have experienced the agony of losing somebody to the nine to five.

So before I tell Jason's story, I would like to pay my respects to the memories of all those who have died while at work and send my deepest sympathies to their families, friends and colleagues.

Jason

Jason was the perfect son in every way.

He was hardworking, intelligent and dedicated. He had an apprenticeship at Tyne Slipway & Engineering and he was studying hard for his BTEC qualification. We couldn't have been more proud.

He was a talented DJ, a great goalkeeper for FC Simonside- a team I ran for my son and his friends - and he was somebody who lived their life to the absolute full.

Jason really was the most loving, caring and funny lad anybody could ever wish to meet, and he had his whole life ahead of him.

But in December 2011, our perfect son, went to work and never came back.

Jason was working at a bench on a bow thruster from a ship. The bow thruster fell off the bench, and crushed him.

We found out later that the management hadn't carried out a risk assessment- as was their responsibility.

Jason was left to work unsupervised and the thruster was not properly secured to the bench. In short, Jason was unnecessarily put at risk and paid the ultimate price.

He was taken to hospital in an air ambulance, but his injuries were so terrible that he died before they touched the ground.

I stand here today faced with the knowledge that my boy would have been in unimaginable agony and probably all too aware that his life was slipping away.

Knowing how much Jason suffered in his last moments is something that goes through my mind every day, and it is something that will never leave me or any of those who knew and loved him.

As well as his girlfriend of six years, Rachel, Jason left behind his brother Josh and sister, Rachel, who loved and cared for him deeply.

I am immensely proud of them all for the way they have powered through. I know that Jason would be proud too of how they've coped in such awful circumstances.

Jason's death has left an enormous hole in the lives of everybody that knew and loved him. We are all heartbroken and we will never recover from his loss.

He had so much to live for and it was all taken away from him in a moment which could so easily have been avoided.

And this is why Workers' Memorial Day is so important.

It is one day every year when we can come together to pay our tributes to all those who have suffered the tragic loss of a loved one, and to point the spotlight on the hundreds of needless deaths at work that occur each and every year.

As long as the government continues to make it easier for employers, like Tyne Slipway and Engineering, to sidestep, shirk or shortcut health and safety in the workplace, this day will continue to be a day of great importance.

To all employers and politicians, I say that health and safety is not a burden but a necessity to protect our loved ones. I'd rather a millstone around the neck than a one tonne bow thruster crushing Jason, our beautiful son, to death.

Think on Jason who we saw laid out in his coffin. Think on your own children and what you'd want for them in the workplace.

This Workers' Memorial Day, we mourn the dead and fight for the living. The government waters down its commitment to health and safety with our tears.

I would like to leave you with a short video tribute to Jason which I think sums up the life of a son, brother and friend, who will be so sadly missed.

Thank you.