



Dan was just 16

'Prom won't

My son's last words to me were a vow he couldn't keep

Fiona Spargo-Mabbs, 56, Croydon

Padding into the kitchen for breakfast, I yawned sleepily. 'Boo!' my younger son, then 16, yelled, jumping out from behind the door.

'Dan!' I tutted, my heart racing. 'Stop that!'

But he flashed me his cheeky grin and I couldn't stay cross with him for long.

No one could. Not with Dan.

It was January 2014, and me and my husband Tim, then 49, had two sons.

Jacob, 18, had just started at Kent university.

Dan was our family mischief-maker, always teasing and laughing.

Everything was more fun with him around.

He was in sixth form now, having worked hard for good GCSE results.

He's so grown-up, I thought, ruffling his hair.

He'd started going to a couple of gigs, the odd house party with mates.

And that Friday...

'Mum, there's a party tonight. Can I go?' he asked.

I frowned.

It was late notice.

'It's a friend of a friend, he doesn't have many mates. Everyone's going,' he pleaded.

'What time does it finish?' I asked.

'At 3am, but we'll come

home together,' he said. 'Come on, you know I'm sensible.'

He was, and it wasn't like it was every Friday night.

We checked the train times together, and it was only one stop.

'OK,' I said eventually.

Later, he pulled on his coat and kissed the top of my head.

'I love you, Mum. I promise I won't die,' he grinned.

Knowing how much I worried, it'd become a running joke between us.

Something he said every time he left the house.

'Love you too,' I smiled back.

Climbing into bed that night, I glanced at the clock.

Normally, I waited up for Dan, but I'd never make it to 3am.

Only when I got up at 5am, his bed was still empty, and he wasn't picking up his phone.

Icy panic gripped me.

Maybe he's gone back to someone's house, or

the party ran over, I thought.

Then I heard a car pull up outside, a noise at the door.

Dan!

Rushing downstairs, my smile froze on my face.

It wasn't Dan. It was a police officer.

'Are you the parents of Daniel Spargo-Mabbs?' he asked, as Tim came downstairs.

I nodded numbly and he started talking.

An illegal rave... ecstasy pills... It made no sense.

'Dan was found unconscious. He's in Hillingdon Hospital in intensive care,' the officer said.

I was stunned – that was 30 miles away.

We got Jacob, who was home for the holidays and equally shocked, out of bed and set off.

When we arrived, we sat in the waiting room as police came in and out, talking about an arrest.

I didn't care.

'I just want to see Dan,' I told Tim.

Then the

consultant appeared.

'Your son's organs are shutting down,' he explained.

Whatever Dan had taken had done too much damage.

Then it hit me.

Our son could die.

Following him into Dan's room, I swallowed.

A ventilator, wires and beeping machines were keeping him alive.

For two days, I sat with him whenever I was allowed.

'How could you do this?' I asked, taken by anger.

But my fury soon faded. He was already paying the price for his mistake.

I talked non-stop, telling him how much I loved him.

'Dan, you promised you wouldn't die,' I said, tears streaming as I remembered his jokey last words to me.

But that was a promise he couldn't keep.

On Monday morning, the consultant told us there was nothing else they could do.

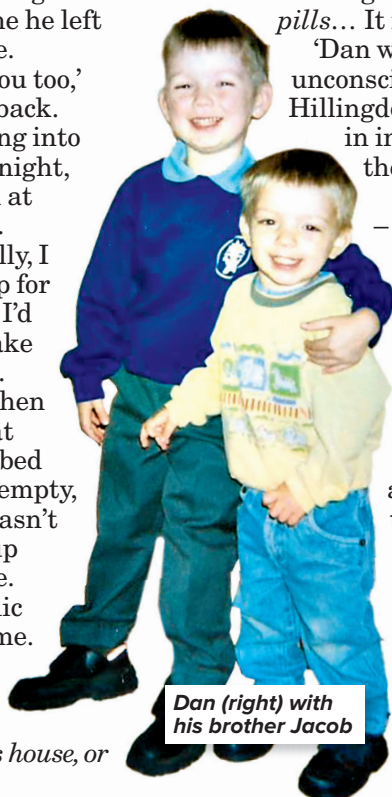
'Are you saying my son will die this morning?' Tim asked in disbelief.

The doctor nodded.

We crowded round his bed, distraught, and I held Dan's hand as he slipped away.

Back at home, I couldn't do anything. I'd open a

Rushing downstairs, my smile froze. It was the police



Dan (right) with his brother Jacob

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TRUE-LIFE



Happy times, with Jacob, me and Dan on holiday



I have great support from Jacob and Tim

kitchen cupboard and stare at the plates, unable to pick one.

I hated walking upstairs, seeing Dan's bedroom door ajar. His posters, his pictures, his clothes, but no Dan.

And when we held his funeral, packed with friends, I sobbed through the whole service.

Slowly, details from that night emerged.

I discovered from Dan's phone he had tried MDMA – ecstasy – twice before. The second time, he'd worried when he developed a fever.

And that night, 17 January, he and his mates had heard about an illegal rave.

There never was a party. How I wished I could go back and refuse to let him go.

He and four friends had clubbed together to buy MDMA from a dealer for £80.

But the little bag Dan got was 12 times stronger than a fatal dose.

Ecstasy can cause you to overheat, dehydrate.

Dan had got separated from his friends, looking for water. But there was none.

When his friends found him, he was outside, unconscious, with paramedics already tending to him.

He never woke up again.

In August 2014, Nicqueel Pitrora, then 18, admitted supplying Class A drugs on 17 January 2014, supplying Class B drugs between 1 January 2013 and 16 January 2014, and possession of Class B drugs on 21 January 2014.

He was sentenced to

five years.

I was glad he'd been stopped.

But grief turned my world hazy and the only thing that made sense to me was to stop other

children dying like this.

Save other parents this indescribable pain.

So Tim and I set up the Daniel Spargo-Mabbs Foundation, a drug education charity, teaching kids the risks, and how to deal with social situations when drugs are present.

Ten years on it's bigger than I ever dreamt.

I work for the foundation full-time and I've written two books for parents, *I Wish I'd Known* and *Talking the Tough Stuff with Teens*.

We deliver drug education at 700 schools, commissioned a play based on Dan's experience in 2017, and deliver workshops to parents and children.

Tim and I also go into prisons as part of a restorative justice scheme.

Dealers need to know supplying drugs isn't a victimless crime. People die.

Now I work from Dan's bedroom. I've gradually

moved more of my files and work notes in, but his posters are still on his walls.

He's part of my work, and in my thoughts every day.

Jacob makes us proud, with a great job and his wonderful fiancée.

Dan never got to have any of that. So I'll keep working every day to make sure every other teen does.



I was awarded an OBE for my work last year

TALKING TO TEENS ABOUT DRUGS

Follow these tips from dsmfoundation.org.uk:

- Take and make opportunities to talk. Use something in the news or on TV as a prompt.
- Side-on conversations can be easier, in the car of example.
- Be honest. Explain why this is important.
- Stay calm and open. You want your child to feel they can come back to you.
- Listen. Make it a dialogue, not a lecture.
- Set boundaries. Clear and fair rules, and consequences, protect children.
- Be flexible. Negotiate expectations as your child gets older.
- Revisit it. Make talking about drugs a comfortable ongoing conversation.
- Don't panic if you're concerned there is drug use. There's information and support out there.