

‘MY BROTHER COULDN’T SPEAK ABOUT HOW HE WAS SUFFERING’

Ten years ago, HARRY WENTWORTH-STANLEY’s family was rocked when his elder brother James took his own life aged 21. Harry talks to *Victoria Woodhall* about why suicide is the biggest killer of young men in the UK and his plan to help others facing emotional crises ►

PHOTOGRAPHS *Chris O’Donovan*

It is no consolation to Harry Wentworth-Stanley that what claimed his elder brother James’s life is the most common cause of death among young men in the UK. Lean, muscular and a towering six foot six, Harry arrives fresh from the gym. The Old Harrovian son of the Marchioness of Milford Haven is a rising star in the land development department at the headquarters of Savills estate agents in London. At 27, he demonstrates far more than just shades of the man James might have been had his life not ended abruptly at the age of 21 in December 2006, when he shot himself during a family gathering. The two shared a love of sport and were as close as brothers can be. ‘He told me pretty much everything,’ says Harry, ‘but I didn’t know that he was harbouring sad thoughts and couldn’t bring himself to speak about how he was suffering.’

The fact that a relatively large proportion of suicides are among young men like James may be no

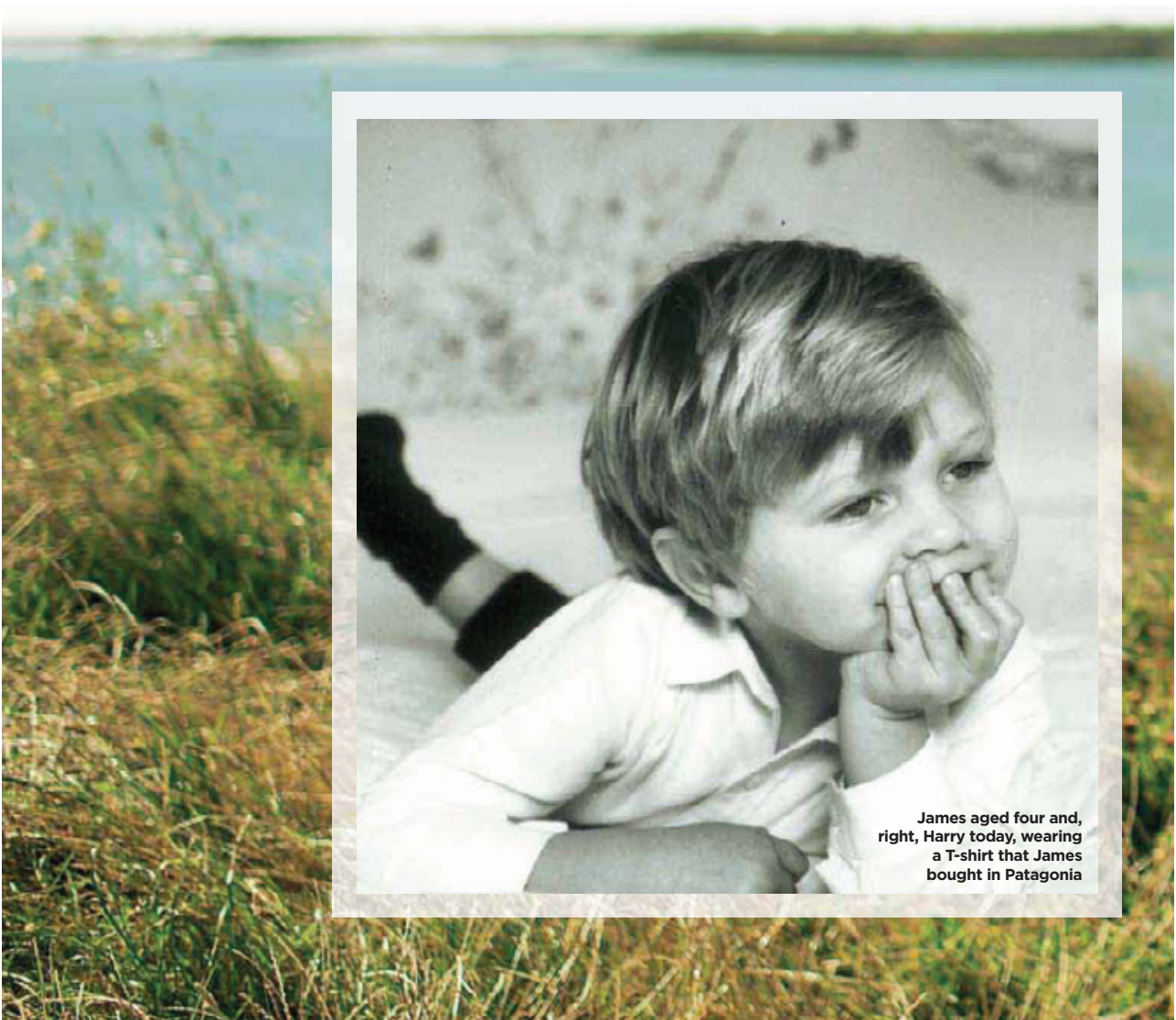
comfort, but it is a call to action.

Harry’s daily two-hour workouts are conducted with three close friends as they prepare to take on one of the world’s toughest endurance races: the Talisker Whisky Atlantic Challenge, rowing 3,000 miles from the Canary Islands to Antigua. Sleep deprivation, exhaustion and monotony will make this as much a test of mental strength as physical: each team member will row two hours on, two hours off nonstop for around six weeks. The aim is to raise £300,000 for the first in a series of non-clinical crisis centres called James’s Place. Had such a resource existed in 2006, the family believe James’s life could have been saved.

‘People are often surprised that suicide is the biggest killer of young men,’ says Harry. Every year in the UK more than 6,000 people take their own lives; 22 per cent are men aged between 16 and 24. James’s death was out of character for the person his family knew. Ten years on, the only way they can explain it to themselves is that James was too



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James aged four and, right, Harry today, wearing a T-shirt that James bought in Patagonia

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proud and private to tell anyone the extent to which he was suffering, and that he was also very impulsive.

James wasn't a drug user and had no history of depression; he'd been popular at Harrow and then at Newcastle University, and had celebrated his 21st birthday in August with a surf-themed fancy-dress party. (In a bittersweet coincidence, pictures of his party, which was attended by Princess Beatrice, appeared in *Tatler* the month he died.) His default mode was sunny and gregarious. He was a talented polo player, a daredevil with an unstoppable sense of adventure. 'If there was a bungee jump, he'd be the first to go,' says Harry. James had been out of sorts after a routine operation to correct a varicose vein in one of his testicles ten days previously, but hadn't hinted at anything serious. 'We thought, "This doesn't make sense,"' says Harry.

The brothers and their younger sister Louisa grew up as part of a happily blended family. Their parents – venture capitalist Nick and former *Tatler* journalist Clare – divorced amicably in 1996. Clare went on to marry George Mountbatten, Marquess of Milford Haven, a cousin of the Queen, who was divorced with two children. Nick married Dutch-born solicitor Millie Breminkmeyer and they had three more children. Of the eight siblings, James was the eldest.

On 15 December 2006, Harry, James and Louisa had been at the Milford Haven family home near

Petersfield. That afternoon the whole clan travelled to Nick's house in Worcestershire for the weekend.

James drove Harry and their stepbrother Harry Medina. 'I was with James for the last two hours of his life,' says Harry. 'For the first half hour, I was awake; we chatted and he was fine. Then I had a sleep and I woke up when we got to the other end.' By 9pm, shortly after they arrived, James was dead. 'That's the only thing that I kick myself for, if I'd stayed awake... I should have, but...' he breaks off, squeezing his eyes.

Harry went with his stepbrother to fetch a beer from the kitchen. Neither heard the shot but picked up on a sense of panic when a woman helping in the kitchen told them there had been a terrible accident involving one of the guests and not to go to the front door. 'I wanted to know what was going on, so I went up there and it became clear that it was James who'd had the accident. My dad and stepdad were with him in the doorway. I had Mum with me. We made sure we didn't look at him;

I didn't want that memory of him. I remember my dad coming over looking very shocked and saying, "I can't believe it. James is dead."

James had taken a gun from the cabinet (he had his own gun and knew where the key was kept). The family could not yet comprehend that this was no accident. However, in the days that followed it emerged that a few days earlier James had

attended an NHS walk-in centre. He told the consultant that he was feeling suicidal, 'and they referred him to A&E as a [low-priority] category-four case,' says Harry, still incredulous. 'He said that he was in a life-threatening situation and the hospital's approach was the equivalent of [dealing with] a child with a toothache.' James didn't hang around to be treated. 'He probably thought, "Come on, pull yourself together, you're fine, pick yourself up and crack on..." and he walked out.'

The family discovered from emails to his surgeon that James was extremely concerned that his operation had gone wrong and that he might be impotent as a result. He went to his GP, who tried to reassure him, but James seemed unable to free himself from the spiralling negative thoughts. He had never had a general anaesthetic before – Clare doesn't discount the effect the drugs might have had. James wasn't one to bottle up his emotions, but Harry believes his silence at this time was down to pride. 'I think he couldn't wait to be a dad – it's the sort of thing he would have loved. He just convinced himself the operation had gone badly. It is tragic because we could have had those conversations and I'd like to think that we could have brought him round.'

Harry finds it bizarre that were flu the biggest killer of young men, there would be clinics in every town, whereas for mental health there is nothing comparable. James's Place aims to fill that void. The initiative is run by Clare, who, with Nick, heads The James Wentworth-Stanley Memorial Fund, allocating donations to mental health projects. The

charity's first stand-alone venture will be pilot centres in Liverpool and Durham next year. 'Once we prove the model, what's to say we can't have a James's Place in every major city?' says Harry. The target of £300,000 will be enough to set up and run one centre for a year. Harry's employer Savills is a major sponsor, as is the swimwear brand Orlebar Brown. But they are not yet even halfway to their target. Clare is working round the clock to make it happen, says Harry proudly. 'Mum is determined. She will pull it off.'

James's death changed everyone; for Harry came the realisation that he was now head of the sibling clan. 'My sister was at such a vulnerable age – just 13, not old enough to know how to deal with it but still old enough to understand. I felt huge responsibility towards her, and also to my step- and half-siblings.'

That sense of responsibility extended towards Clare, too. 'That night I remember thinking, "How is Mum going to ever get over this?" She felt an awful sense of guilt.'

Somehow they got through the funeral and Christmas. Every day Harry would receive a phone call from one of his friends – among them Toby and Sam, classmates from Harrow who will row with him – to check how he was doing. Clare had bereavement counselling and asked Harry and Louisa to try a session. They did, but concluded that they would rather talk with friends.

Harry's clear memory of that night is a sense of dread that James's death might tear the family apart. He needn't have worried. 'I have been amazed by the ability of my family to cope and to not let this destroy them. Often people feel a

sense of guilt if a family member has taken their own life and it's, like, "We must be partly responsible, we can't talk about this." Our approach has been the opposite; we are not going to bottle it up. If I've learnt anything from James, it's that if you don't communicate your feelings the pressure within will build until it's unbearable. The important thing is never to let it get to that stage.'

The family has never stopped talking about James. At every get-together, it is guaranteed someone will raise a toast and share a story. Many of the siblings and cousins have a 'J' tattoo – Harry's sits discreetly beneath his watch on his wrist. James's belongings, too, are very much part of Harry's present. He is currently training in a T-shirt that James bought travelling in Patagonia. 'When he died, I moved into his room. I didn't even take his clothes out of the drawer; I just started wearing them. For a long time, James's clothes still smelled like him; that was comforting.'

Was there pressure for Harry to live for James? The two had almost identical interests. Harry went to the University of Leeds to study Spanish and business management – the same course that James took at Newcastle. (It was at Leeds that Harry met the third of his crewmates – Rory – and dated Cressida Bonas.) Like James, Harry went to Argentina for a year; 'because I knew he would want me to go there'. And now, Row for James – which, by coincidence, begins on 14 December, almost ten years to the day since

James died – a challenge Harry chose because it had 'James all over

it. He probably would have already done it, that's how confident I am that he would have loved this.'

When Harry was selecting his crewmates, rowing ability wasn't top of the list. (In fact, only Rory has experience as an oarsman.) 'Firstly they had to be good friends, and secondly it's all about what's going on up here,' he says, tapping his head. 'There is something symbolic in that we are young men working in high-pressure environments - we all fit the demographic of men who might find themselves in a rut and be driven to do something dreadful. We are going to be faced with difficult mental challenges and we will need to support each other.'

Despite suffering immense loss, Harry has been fortunate never to have experienced truly dark times. 'That's not to say that I never will - who knows what can knock you off guard? I feel that I understand much better how the mind works as a result of James and this experience.'

Does he look back on James's death as an accident? He sighs. 'It was an impulsive moment. He is kicking himself looking down, seeing us all enjoying ourselves, going on the row, seeing Crystal Palace - his football team - doing well. Those are the sorts of things where I think, "You're such a stupid idiot." I know he would regret it. It wasn't an accident but it could have been prevented. Suicide is preventable.' ➤

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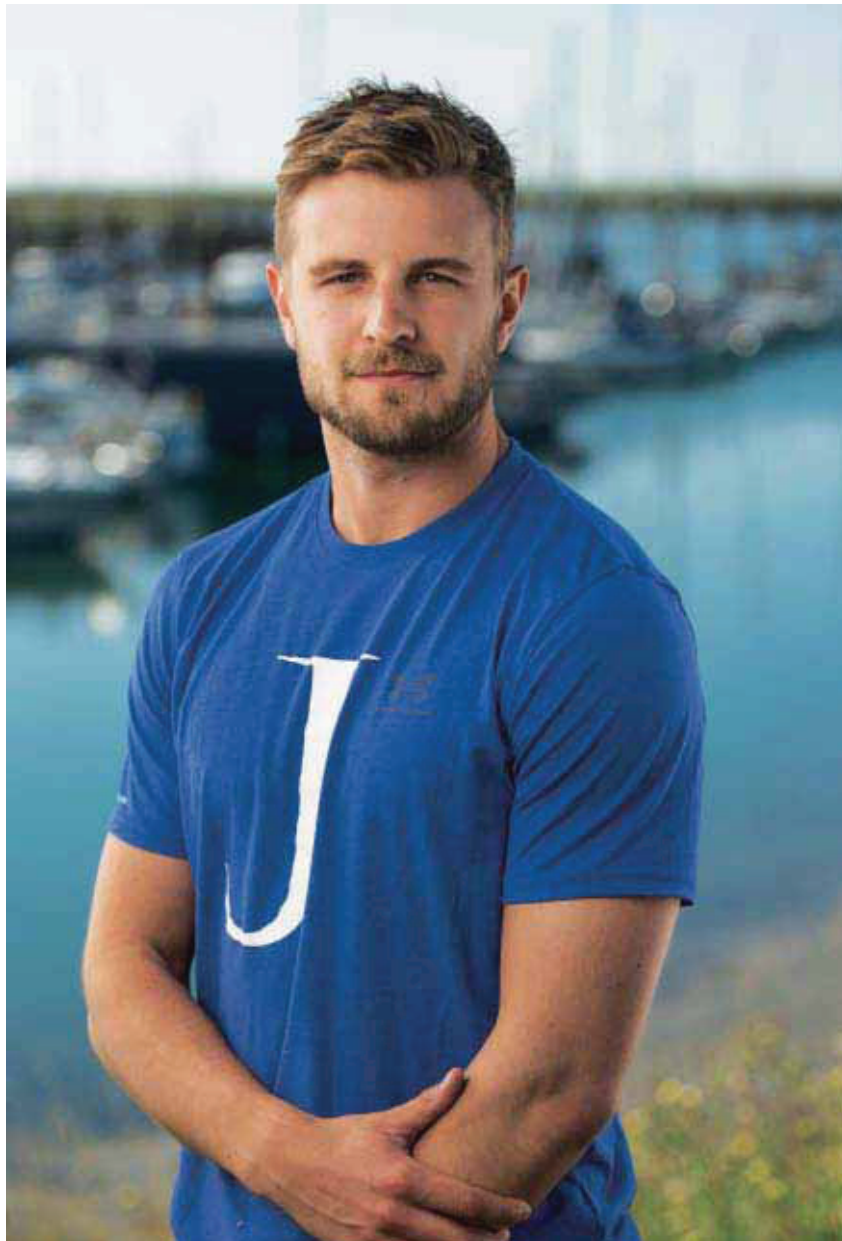


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Harry, left, today, and, above, the **Row for James** team in training.
Opposite: James (left), aged seven, and Harry, three.

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A mother's story

Clare Milford Haven, 56, is mother to Harry and Louisa and an international polo player. She co-founded The James Wentworth-Stanley Memorial Fund in memory of James. Clare sits on the Advisory Group for the government's National Suicide Prevention Strategy.

When James died, the grief was so intense that if you scratched the surface of my skin, you would reach the pain just beneath. Now, the waves of grief that used to threaten to almost drown me are less frequent, but still intense. I recognise that James was seriously unwell and perhaps if we had been more aware about mental illness and suicide, we might have had a better chance of saving him. But then again, maybe not. Suicidal thoughts are complex and not easily visible, even to the most highly trained eye.

As a mother, I feel I should have been able to save my son from himself. I knew James as well as anyone and having had him when I was only 24, we had, in a sense, 'grown up' together. I have learnt to live with the negative emotions following his death because I have no other option. In a bizarre way,

challenging myself physically through playing polo and skiing has helped me to come to terms with the daily emotional challenge of James's death.

As a boy, James was always more gregarious and Harry was a little more reserved. It's fair to say that Harry was slightly in his brother's shadow until James's death forced him into a role that he had never expected to assume. The day after James died, I asked Harry if he was OK and he replied, "I am OK, Mum, but my biggest fear is that this is going to destroy you and if it does, it will destroy everything."

I realised that I had to keep everything together and that we had to get through this in a positive way. Harry and I have become incredibly close since James's death and I can rely on him for support, although

I would never wish to burden him.

When Harry told me about his plan to row the Atlantic, I wasn't happy at all. It was the first time that our relationship has been a little strained. It scares the living daylights out of me. I don't think I will sleep a wink until I see him arrive safely in Antigua.

Had James had somewhere to go when he was feeling suicidal, the outcome might have been different.

When he was sent to A&E, his fate was already sealed. A&E is brilliant for physical trauma but not emotional trauma. I went to visit Pieta House, a suicide and self-harm crisis centre in Ireland, and saw what they achieve there with free counselling in an environment that is calm and non-clinical, manned by trained volunteers and qualified clinicians. This is what I want to achieve with James's Place. It will be for people experiencing emotional or suicidal crises – not those with a long-standing mental health issue who are already receiving help. Around two thirds of people who take their lives every year are not in touch with mental health services and they are the ones I want to reach. Men are three times as likely to kill themselves as women, so James's Place will be geared towards men.

We need to encourage men to share their problems like women do. A stiff upper lip serves no purpose when you are screaming inside. That old adage 'a problem shared is a problem halved' is so, so true.

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Clockwise from top left: Louisa and Harry with their mother Clare last year; Harry (back left), James (back centre) and Louisa (right) with their half-siblings in 2006; James aged 19, and the siblings at Harry's confirmation at Harrow in 2004

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Meet the crew



Rory Buchanan, 27, is a commercial property investor. His sister Louisa, 31, has suffered from clinical depression for ten years

'I have never put myself through anything like the physical and mental extremes that we will endure during this row. There is a clear link between what we are doing and the struggles we are trying to help with James's Place. When you live with someone with mental health issues, it's tough trying to understand their perspective. Ten years ago, when Louisa was diagnosed, there wasn't as much known about the condition. It can be easy to miss. Her way of dealing with it was to take herself away from everyone. Fortunately, we were able to spot that something wasn't right - she found it difficult to concentrate, she said strange things, she looked terrible - and get her to a place where she could receive help. People often think that a breakdown has to have a catalyst. But in Louisa's case there wasn't one - it can spiral simply when the person starts overthinking things. Keeping conversation open is key. As a crew, we are very aware of talking about our emotions. It's difficult for men - it's not in-built and society sees sharing feelings as feminine. It's the curse of the modern man unfortunately.'



Sam Greenly, 27, a captain in the Scots Guards, has witnessed post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

'I've known Harry since we were at school

and when James passed away I saw the effect it had on him - the person he had looked up to his whole life and one of his closest friends suddenly wasn't there any more, and he didn't have an explanation for it. When he approached me to do the row, I said yes straight away because it's for a great cause and one that is extremely important to me, having encountered young men and women in the army who have suffered from PTSD. PTSD is an anxiety disorder caused by highly stressful, frightening or distressing events. The Army has made great strides in accepting and treating it, especially after the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Prince Harry referred to it as the "invisible injuries" of war when he opened the Invictus Games this year. Like James, these are young men steeped in the ethos of pride and masculinity and feeling unable to talk. An environment that breaks down barriers and lets people know that they are not alone, while providing a light at the end of the tunnel, is what James's Place is about.'



Toby Fenwicke-Clenell, 27, is an investment director and has experienced mild depression

'Harry, Sam and I were at school together. When James died we made sure we were always there to discuss it with Harry. The Row for James campaign is about the importance of talking about issues before they become a major problem. Four years ago I struggled with mild depression. I noticed I became very negative, full of worry; I was lacking in self-confidence and motivation - it was very draining. The hardest thing was not understanding what I was suffering from. Because I didn't understand it, I couldn't discuss it with

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anyone, I just suppressed it all. To stop the negative thoughts, I went out a lot, kept myself busy and started drinking more. Looking back, I can see it was a number of small things which, if I'd tackled them individually, would not have become such an issue. It is the accumulation that can build into a force that's hard to deal with. That's all in the past now. These days, I make an effort to talk more. I have seen through Harry that the willingness to talk goes a long way.' ❏

■ *To donate go to rouforjames.com*

