

■ Stupor – Jeffrey comforts his heroin-addicted son Gavin

Picture: MAXINE CLARKE 98/5559/24

'He cried in my arms and asked me for help ...I felt frustrated, there was nothing I could do'

# DON'T LET MY BOY DIE

By LINDA CHRISTIE

GAVIN Smith looks the picture of contentment as he lies asleep on his dad's sofa, but the truth behind this picture is heartrending.

Gavin, 19, who has abused heroin for nearly three years,

## Dad's plea for addict son

is in a drug-induced stupor and his dad Jeffrey fears he may not live beyond Christmas.

The news is all the more tragic as the Smith family lost their son Paul, 20, when he was stabbed to death by a paranoid schizophrenic

four years ago. Now 52-year-old Jeffrey has been moved to make a desperate appeal through the Echo for someone to step forward and help them.

Sounding tired and strained as he spoke from his home in Nelson Road, Basildon, Jeffrey told how Gavin:

- Turned to drugs after his brother's brutal death
- Broke down in his dad's arms crying, begging for help and claiming he wanted to die
- Stole his mother's wedding ring to pawn for heroin
- Failed to give up the killer drug despite three rehabilitation programmes at Basildon Hospital.

Jeffrey said: "He has been asleep 24 hours. As soon as he wakes up

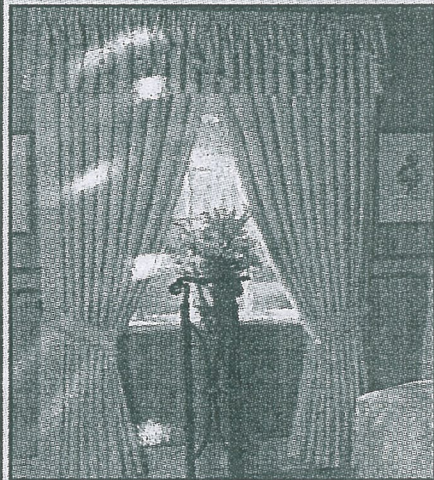
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## Don't let my boy die

● From P1

he will have something to eat, then go out looking for drugs again.

"When he cried in my arms and asked me to help I felt so frustrated because there is nothing I can do.

"No-one's willing to help him because he can't help himself.

"Although he's had the best advice, there's a limit to what the doctors can do. My son is dying and I feel so powerless.

"We hoped when we shopped him to the police he would get locked-up and that might solve the problem, but he was put on probation."

Jeffrey is full of praise for the hospitals and probation service, but said their powers are limited.

Instead he's had to watch his son fade away.

Gavin has lost two stone, his arms have become scarred with needle tracks, and he suffers memory loss and drowsiness. Now he just wants to escape the pain.

Gavin's habit has led him to steal around £1,200 of jewellery and mementoes from his parents and he has appeared in court three times on charges of theft.

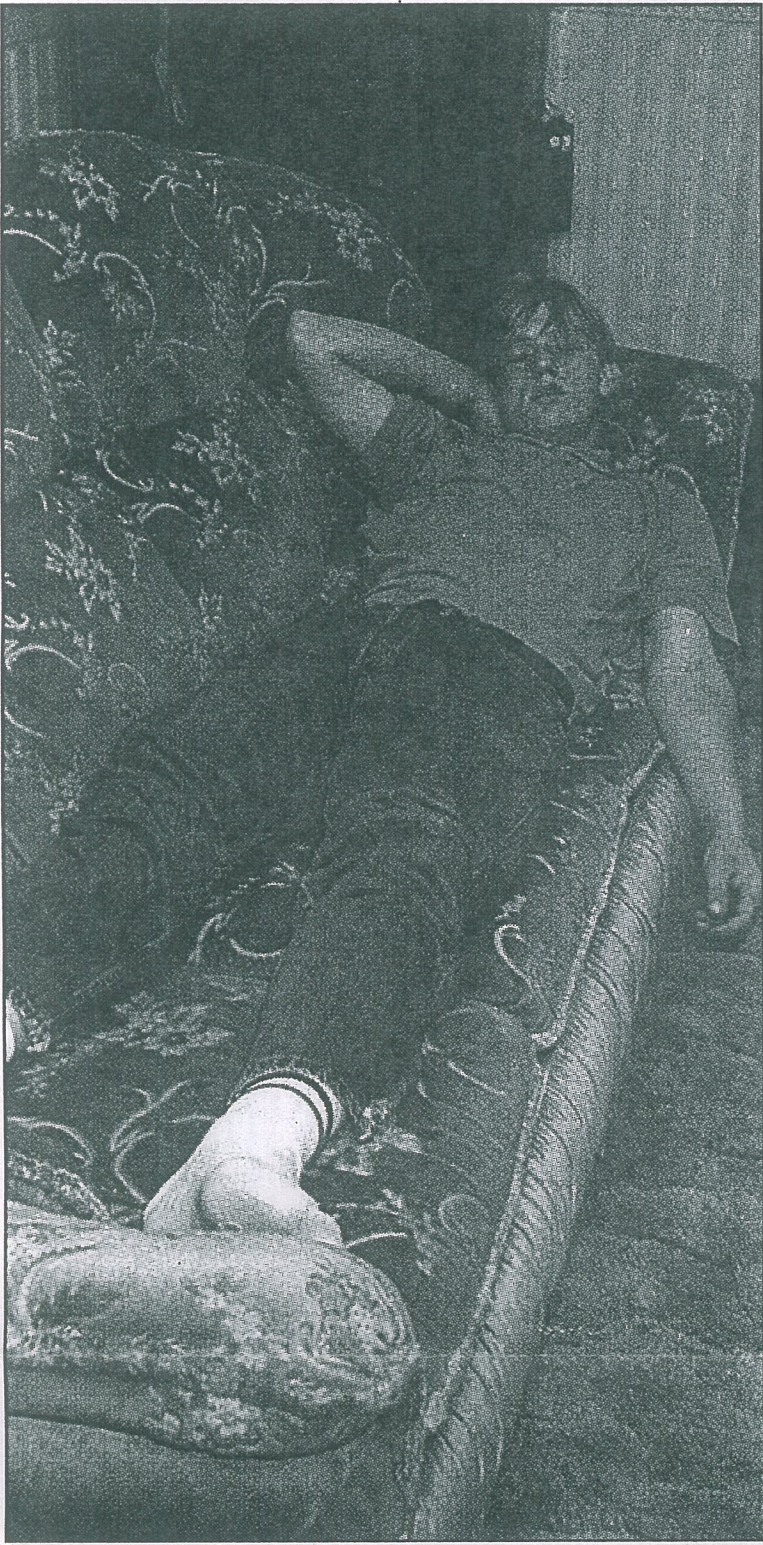
He was arrested again on Monday night for allegedly stealing packets of bacon from a store.

He will be sentenced on October 23.

Gavin said today: "All my day consists of is sleeping and doing heroin. I have had it up to here and if I don't get help pretty soon I will do myself in."

Jeffrey, a maintenance fitter at Ford, would like to see his son attend a residential rehabilitation course, after several outpatient sessions failed.

None appears to be available.



■ 'Mucking my head up' - Gavin says the drug has ruined his life  
Picture: MAXINE CLARKE 98/5559/3

## MP Angela to probe case

GAVIN'S story is one which has touched Basildon and East Thurrock MP Angela Smith.

She is looking into his case after the family turned to her for help.

Speaking from the Labour party's conference in Blackpool, she said: "This is a classic illustration of how drugs can wreck the lives of not just the users, but their families too.

"It also shows how important it is to provide help and support to get people off drugs and to prevent other people from even starting on that road."

Gavin is on probation for stealing from his parents to feed his habit.

Although John Budd, assistant chief probation officer in Essex, said he was unable to comment on individual cases, he was able

to talk about the service's policy on drugs.

He said: "We don't condone drug taking but we recognise people, particularly with heroin addiction, find it very difficult to lead drug-free lives."

"We work with them and specialist drug agencies in the community on fairly intensive programmes to offer people alternatives."

## Death of Gavin's brother

YOUNG dad Paul Smith was on his way to buy shoes for his son when he was fatally stabbed in the heart by a paranoid schizophrenic.

The 20-year-old, who was attacked at Southernhay in Basildon, was chased to a house in nearby Long Riding where he collapsed and died from his injuries.

A kitchen knife, wielded by Basildon man Karl Edgley, had pierced Paul's heart and lung.

Edgley, 29, formerly of North Crockerford, Vange,

was locked up in Rampton secure hospital indefinitely after a jury took less than 15 minutes to decide he had inflicted the fatal wound.

Paul's family and girlfriend Carrie, the mother of his two-year-old son Jake, were left devastated by the random attack in October 1994.

Ironically, gossips wrongly claimed at the time that Paul's death was drugs-related, but it was his younger brother Gavin who was to turn to heroin to cope with the pain of bereavement.

# 'Heroin: It makes me forget...'

AT 19 most teenagers have everything to live for but all Gavin Smith dreams of is the oblivion of death.

He truly believes his addiction to heroin will kill him if help can't be found soon.

Stumbling over his words and often losing concentration, Gavin tried to explain his feelings of despair.

He had taken a shot of heroin only 45 minutes before so he would be fit enough for a conversation.

He said: "A couple of weeks ago my sister came upstairs to my room and found me with a knife in my hand and I was going to kill myself. At the end of the day I just can't handle it any more." A typical day

By LINDA CHRISTIE

in Gavin's life might see him wake up at 8am.

He said: "I will probably feel really ill, so I have to go out and sort my fix, take it, then I just come back here and fall asleep all day."

The only time it varies is when Gavin chooses to take only some of his heroin in the morning - that means he has something to look forward to when he wakes up later.

He believes he has got his habit down from around £100 a day to only £10 a day, but says the fall in intake has left him feeling very ill.

He started on the slippery road to drug addiction at only 16 when he was offered heroin by a friend.

He said: "It was like pain

relief after my brother died. It made me forget about my problems and all that.

"I didn't realise it was addictive but soon I needed to take it twice a week, then three times a week, then daily.

"I really, really would love to give it up. Not just for myself but for my mum and dad because they have been through so much already after losing my brother and stuff.

"I know it's mucking my head up - I just sit there sometimes crying."

Gavin too believes a residential course is the answer. He hasn't found counselling helpful so far as he claims he is too shy to reveal his feelings.

● Heroin epidemic - P10.

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■ Paul Smith - died of stab wounds

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