



Boyfriend's death prompts Croydon's Rachel Oliver into action

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Rachel Oliver, with a photo of her boyfriend Michael, who died suddenly. Ms Oliver suspects SADS was the cause of his death.

A CROYDON resident is coming to terms with the sudden death of her "soul mate" by setting up a foundation to save others.

Rachel Oliver's life was sent into a spin when her 26-year-old boyfriend, Michael, didn't wake up on August 22 last year.

"I lived the first six months in shock. I still find myself waiting for him to walk through the door," Ms Oliver said.

"It is the unreality of it. The constant agonising over how someone can just drop dead." The nursing student set about finding an answer and came across research into Sudden Arrhythmia Death Syndrome (SADS), a term used to describe genetic heart conditions that can cause the death of young, apparently healthy, people.

Ms Oliver said Michael had seizures for many years but neurological testing had been unable to confirm the cause.

Her research into SADS showed seizures were a symptom; others include fainting and a family history of unexplained death of adults under 40. "The thing with SADS is that there are warning signs," the 25-year-old said.

Ms Oliver said exact statistics were unavailable but research by the Centenary Institute in Sydney suggested as many as 10 people died each week from SADS in Australia and New Zealand.

Ms Oliver is part of a group that wants to set up an Australian branch of the SADS Foundation, based in America, to raise awareness.

Ms Oliver's story, in her own words:

AUGUST 22, 2009 is a day I'll never forget a day that's pierced in my mind.

For it marked the day that I lost my best friend, the love of my life and my soul mate, Michael.

He didn't wake up that morning, for reasons I may never fully understand.

Michael was a happy individual, full of life, with the constant desire to learn and know more, and a never ending interest in cars. He was 26 when he died. But the question is raised, how did he die? How can a happy, 26-year-old just not wake up in the morning?

As a third year nursing student, soon to graduate, Michael's unexpected death led me to put in many hours of research, desperate to find an answer as to what could possibly have taken him that night.

This led me to discover a condition known as Sudden Arrhythmia Death Syndrome (SADS), an umbrella term for many conditions related to arrhythmias of the heart.

For many years Michael had been having seizures, generally in his sleep.

Many tests were done to try to discover what it was that was causing these awful fits, however, my understanding is there were never any clear findings.

Knowing what I do as a nursing student about seizures, in that they are generally not life-threatening, I certainly never believed they would contribute to his early death.

In my research into SADS, I discovered that one of the symptoms for a condition under this umbrella was seizures, commonly seizures where all other neurological tests could not confirm any firm findings as to their cause. I began to wonder whether this condition could have contributed to his death.

Firm answers will likely never be found as to exactly how he died that night, however after talking to many different people, and the hours of research, I believe his death may well have been due to a SADS condition.

My research led me to correspond with many people both in Australia and internationally who have lost loved ones in similar ways, and I have contact with centres for research with particular interest in deaths that occur in ways similar to Michael.

It is my hope that by spreading this information we can create a foundation in Australia to raise awareness and support toward research into these conditions.

To speak to me or be in contact with others in your state affected by SADS, or for SADS information and contacts in your state, please

email sadsvictoria@yahoo.com. More information is available via the Centenary Institute's centre for molecular cardiology at centenary.org.au and at stopsads.org

<http://www.whereilive.com.au>



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