

a positive outcome

AT THE LAUNCH OF TWO NEW AIR AMBULANCES FOR CORNWALL, VICTORIA MILLIGAN SPEAKS OF OVERCOMING PERSONAL LOSS

Words by **Kirstie Newton**



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: THE MILLIGAN FAMILY BEFORE THE ACCIDENT, WITH EMILY AND NICK FROM LEFT; VICTORIA MILLIGAN WITH AMBER, OLIVIA AND KIT AT THE LAUNCH OF THE NEW AIR AMBULANCES; THE NIGHT VISION IMAGING SYSTEM WHICH WILL ALLOW THE AIR AMBULANCE TO INCREASE FLYING HOURS; G-CNWL, DEDICATED TO NICK AND EMILY MILLIGAN

Two new helicopters to serve the people of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly have been unveiled before special guests, trustees, staff and volunteers of Cornwall Air Ambulance Trust. Among the VIP guests to see the helicopters blessed by the Bishop of Truro at the trust headquarters in St Mawgan were Victoria Milligan and her three children, who raised over £270,000 for the Cornish charity in memory of her late husband Nick and daughter Emily. The sum was enough to wholly fund the new Night Vision Imaging System (NVIS) equipment which will allow the lifesaving service to fly after dark for the first time, increasing flying time from eight to 12 hours each day – estimated at 50 extra missions each year.

The event was the culmination of almost two years of fundraising, following the terrible accident in which the Milligans' speedboat lost control in the Camel Estuary in May 2013. The family was plunged into the water; Sky TV executive Nick and eight-year-old Emily were struck and killed by the speedboat, while Victoria and her four-year-old son Kit were seriously injured. Her two daughters Amber, then 12, and Olivia, 10, sustained minor injuries.

To commemorate their unprecedented fundraising efforts, the new air ambulance helicopter G-CNWL features an epitaph: "Nicko and Emily Milligan. Flying over Cornwall. Saving lives together." The two aircraft – MD902 Explorers – were chosen for their ability to carry more medical equipment, expert crew and fuel. For the first time, two air ambulance helicopters will be based in Cornwall, with one operational each day and the other a dedicated backup aircraft.

"It was a very emotional day, but also a very positive one," said Victoria after the launch. "It seems almost unreal that it ever happened, and also to see Nicko and Emily's names on the helicopter. For both myself and the children, it means their lives were not lost in vain. They are doing good for Cornwall."

Unfortunately, the Cornish weather prevented the family from flying in the helicopter as planned. "That didn't stop Kit clambering around the inside, pretending to be the pilot, then the patient. He was given a model helicopter to take home which he was thrilled with, and is now determined to be a helicopter pilot," Victoria laughs.

The family considered very carefully which organisations to raise money and awareness for, and while the air ambulance was not involved in the Milligans' rescue, Victoria felt it was a valuable contribution to the rescue services. "You don't realise how amazing the emergency services are until you are in a trauma situation," she explained. "We spoke to chief executive Paula Martin, who told us they needed to raise money for new technology, and that if we could raise £250,000 we could have a dedication. That really drove us."

A fundraising evening in London amassed £250,000; a bike ride from Trevoze golf course to the children's school in London raised a further half a million, which was split between the RNLI and Child Bereavement UK, from whom Victoria had sought help and is now a patron. "It's a great testament to the amazing man Nick was that we were able to raise that amount of money in his name," says Victoria.

The children attended the launch event for the new air ambulances, and posed for pictures with their mother. "It was important to them to be there yesterday, and to understand

that what they've done is valuable to the people of Cornwall," says Victoria. "The children have been incredible. People say, 'You must be proud of what they have done', but the main thing I'm proud of is managing their grief, proving that the event won't mess up their lives, and that they still have amazing futures. They all know now that awful things can happen; it's not fair to know that from such a young age. The blanket of naivety and childhood has been ripped away from them. I need to be there to protect them. We're all lucky I survived, and I feel I'm here to look after them. It's a huge responsibility, but I'm here to do it."

Shortly after the launch, she received a text from her daughter. "It said: 'Mummy, I'm so proud of you, your speech was amazing, when I grow up I want to be just like you, Daddy was so lucky to have married you.' She is 13, and can have amazing strops, but has had to grow up very quickly. I see a level of maturity that isn't mirrored in her peers."

Victoria is currently working on a book based on her experience of overcoming grief, and is about to launch a website, www.victoriamilligan.co.uk, offering similar resources. "I've spent 22 months looking after myself and my family, and that has meant exercising and eating healthily, not falling ill. I've felt so much better for it, like I could cope with anything."

The Milligans' house overlooking the Camel estuary was sold after the accident. "The new owner kindly allowed us to go back and stay, but it was too hard. We felt like Nick and Emily should be with us," she recalls. "But not having it felt like another loss, so we bought a place near Polzeath. It means we have somewhere to escape to, and Cornwall can still be a part of our lives. The children grew up there on the beach during the holidays. It's in our blood, and not being there doesn't feel right. When in London, our lives are quite disparate, and Cornwall is where we reconnect. We love the outdoor lifestyle; the children love surfing, and I'm a personal trainer; even with my prosthetic, I've been running with my blade on the sand at Daymer Bay."

Nick and Emily are buried in one of Cornwall's most famous and beautiful resting places: St Enodoc churchyard, in a spot overlooking the golf course and Daymer Bay. "It was Nicko's favourite place," says Victoria. "The day before the accident, he and I enjoyed a round of golf there together. We feel very close to them to them when we come to Cornwall." The family visit the churchyard regularly, including on Christmas Eve when they attended a church service. "We take a picnic there – it's important for us to do that and be with them. Friends visit, and we often find interesting things, like a yellow golf ball or a letter from one of Emily's friends, left in a plastic bag for her. It's a very special place."

INFORMATION

- ▶ Cornwall Air Ambulance flies around 700 missions each year, and relies entirely on the support of Cornish people, businesses and visitors for funding, to the tune of around £2.5 million each year. A public open day will be held at the Cornwall Air Ambulance airbase near Newquay on February 21, between 11am and 4pm, to see the new helicopters and meet the aircrew. www.cornwallairambulance.org