

Man who died laughing at Goodies had Long QT syndrome

When Alex Mitchell collapsed and died while watching an episode of the Goodies in 1975, the manner of his demise passed into comedy legend.



Lisa Corke, 23, suffered a near fatal cardiac arrest and was clinically dead for 55 minutes Photo: Masons

By Anita Singh, Showbusiness Editor

7:00AM BST 21 Jun 2012



10 Comments (http://www.telegraph.co.uk/health/healthnews/9344957/Man-who-died-laughing-at-Goodies-had-Long-QT-syndrome.html#disqus_thread)

The bricklayer from King's Lynn, Norfolk was said to have guffawed so hard at the BBC sketch show that his heart gave out. Decades on, doctors have established that he really did die laughing.

Cardiologists believe Mr Mitchell suffered from a rare heart rhythm disorder, Long QT syndrome, which can induce cardiac arrest when triggered by exertion or adrenaline. They came to the conclusion after his granddaughter, Lisa Corke, was diagnosed with the syndrome.

Mrs Corke, 23, suffered a cardiac arrest at her home last month and was saved by her husband administering life-saving CPR before the ambulance arrived.

Once admitted to hospital, tests showed that Long QT syndrome was hereditary on her father's side.

Mrs Corke said: My granddad died one of the most famous strange deaths. I think at the time they probably thought he suffered a heart attack caused by the laughter but doctors realised he died from a cardiac arrest caused by LQT syndrome after examining me.

[The Goodies give their first public performance for 25 years \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/culturenews/8116070/The-Goodies-give-their-first-public-performance-for-25-years.html\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/culturenews/8116070/The-Goodies-give-their-first-public-performance-for-25-years.html)

[Oddie and the mystery 'incident' \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/celebritynews/9121086/Springwatch-presenter-Bill-Oddie-BBC-investigated-me-after-mystery-incident.html\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/celebritynews/9121086/Springwatch-presenter-Bill-Oddie-BBC-investigated-me-after-mystery-incident.html)

[Return of wacky gags and the killer kitten \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/drama/3654382/Return-of-wacky-gags-and-the-killer-kitten.html\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/drama/3654382/Return-of-wacky-gags-and-the-killer-kitten.html)

His death has been talked about for years and made all the papers at the time. I never knew him but it's strange to think we both had this life-threatening condition."

The curious case of Mr Mitchell made headlines after he settled down to watch The Goodies on March 24, 1975.

The 'Kung Fu Capers' episode featured Bill Oddie as a blackbelt in 'Ecky Thump' - a little-known Lancastrian martial art which involved pelting opponents with black pudding. Tim Brooke-Taylor played a Scotsman who defended himself with a set of bagpipes.

According to his wife Nessie, Mr Mitchell, 50, was in stitches throughout the episode then gave a tremendous belly laugh, slumped on the sofa and died". She later sent a letter to the Goodies thanking them for making her husband's final moments so happy.

Mrs Corke, a mother-of-two from the Isle of Sheppey in Kent, collapsed on May 4 and was clinically dead for 55 minutes. Her husband, Mick, dialled 999 and was instructed to carry out CPR. She was taken to the Medway Maritime Hospital where doctors fitted her with a defibrillator to 're-set' her heart.

She said: "It's very unusual to survive an out-of-hospital cardiac arrest, so it makes me feel very lucky.

"The doctors said Mick saved my life. It's incredible to think how lucky I have been that he was there and didn't go to pieces. Someone must be looking over us.

"I would like to thank everybody - the paramedics for not giving up. Everyone was fantastic.

"But I have to get my daughters checked for the gene to see if they too have a risk of developing LQT syndrome."

Her father, also called, Alex Mitchell, said the family remained thankful to The Goodies for the manner of the elder Mr Mitchell's demise. He was always really cheerful and laid back, and he would have been happy to go while laughing.

It is amazing that after all these years we have finally found out what caused his death."

Dr Iqbal Malik, consultant cardiologist and director of the Cardiac Catheter Laboratories at London's Hammersmith Hospital, said watching the Goodies was likely to have been the trigger" for Mr Mitchell's death.

Adrenaline, exertion or anything that creates a strong emotional response can be a trigger," Dr Malik said. In some cases the heart re-sets itself after five or six beats, but in this case the patient was not so lucky.

It seems they were right at the time - this man did die laughing."

After hearing Mrs Corke's story, Tim Brooke-Taylor said: "I'm so pleased something positive has come out of this story.

When Alex's wife, Nessie, originally wrote to us generously saying 'thank you for making my husband's last few moments happy ones' we didn't quite know how to react.

"I eventually said 'I am very sorry that Alex died. The only consolation is that if I died suddenly I would prefer it to happen when I was laughing at, say, Morecambe and Wise than any other way.'

"I'm incredibly impressed at Lisa's husband's reactions and treatment. Mick, you're a hero and I hope Lisa and your beautiful looking children have long and happy lives. Please also pass on my best wishes to Nessie."

Mrs Mitchell is now 86. In her 1975 letter to the Goodies, she wrote: "My last memory of my husband is looking at him and hearing his laughter at your programme."

