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'Another punch to the heart': Bereaved relatives furious at photos of PM drinking at No 10 lockdown party

'I hope he can live with himself,' says woman who lost her mother and brother during first lockdown

Andy Gregory • Tuesday 24 May 2022 09:46 BST • 60 Comments



Moment PM denies No 10 party took place on day he was photographed drinking



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People who lost loved ones while **coronavirus** restrictions were in force have spoken of their fury at **Boris Johnson** after new photographs emerged of the prime minister drinking wine at a lockdown party.

One bereaved relative described the “soul-destroying” **images of the boozy events in No 10** as “like yet another punch to the heart”, while another said of the prime minister: “I hope he can live with himself.”

The images published by *ITV News* on Monday were allegedly taken at a **Downing Street** leaving party for former director of communications Lee Cain on 13 November 2020, when England remained in the depths of its second coronavirus lockdown.

Their publication – which follows the conclusion of the Metropolitan Police investigation into the scandal – has intensified questions over why

The photographs came to light as the country awaits the publication of Sue Gray's report into the partygate scandal, after a weekend of fury in the senior civil servant's office **over now-retracted No 10 claims** that Ms Gray had initiated a controversial meeting with Mr Johnson to discuss the report.

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However, the expected wave of public anger at the contents of Ms Gray's report hit earlier than expected with the publication of the leaving party images on Tuesday, as those unable to say goodbye to loved ones or mourn with their families were handed a painful reminder that their own sacrifices appeared not to have been honoured by those who demanded them.

Zoe Elizabeth, a 33-year-old charity worker from Somerset, lost both of her sisters during the first lockdown in April 2020, followed by her grandfather in November that year.

“The pain of losing someone you’ve been close to your entire life is heartbreaking, but to lose three of them is unbearable,” she told *The Independent*.

“We stuck to the rules, despite knowing it would be our last chance to say goodbye. We continued to stick to the rules when we were told we had to grieve alone, which was like a form of emotional torture, but we did it because we were told we had to.”



Families unable to mourn relatives during Covid lockdown restrictions hit out at photographs showing Boris Johnson at a Downing Street party (*ITV News*)

“No one seems to understand just how soul-destroying this is and time after time those bereaved by Covid have had to endure the thoughtless, disgraceful attitude of the government – the very same government we are meant to believe have our best interests at heart.”

Describing it as “despicable” that the government has “been allowed to brush so many of their actions under the carpet” apparently without consequence, she added: “How dare they think this behaviour is acceptable?”

“When will they finally be held accountable? When will my family and all the families who’ve lost loved ones to Covid finally see justice and have some peace without it all being thrust so brashly in our faces? Enough is enough.”

Cassie Garbutt, 45, said she was “furious” with Mr Johnson’s “constant denial” over the scandal, and questioned “how someone can show so little humility”.

Ms Garbutt’s 72-year-old mother Brenda, who had been bed-bound in a care home for 15 months prior to her death, caught coronavirus and died alone in hospital during the first lockdown. Under social distancing rules in place at the time of the funeral, she was unable to hug her grieving brother, Glen, who took his own life just weeks later in June 2020.

“We followed the rules yet I didn’t know this would be the last time I saw my brother I alive. I wish I had hugged him,” Ms Garbutt told *The Independent*.

“Words don’t come close to how angry I am at Boris Johnson and his lies. I, like so many, lost so very much. I will never be the same again.

“How another human being can behave like this in such tragic circumstances is beyond me. I wish things were different but they aren’t, I did what I did to protect others because it was what we should do, yet the leader of our nation doesn’t and persists to lie. I hope he can live with himself.”



Caro Mitchell's father was diagnosed with terminal cancer in November 2020, and died six weeks later on Christmas Eve. In his final weeks, their family formed a very small immediate bubble to care for him around the clock, alongside carers and hospice workers, but were forced to turn away many loved ones who wished to visit him.

"He was a hugely gregarious man who might have had a 'last hurrah' kind of party or gathering had that been a possibility or an option," Ms Mitchell said. "But it wasn't, not for us, although seemingly fine for 'them'.

"There were many friends and family who wanted to visit him but we felt we had to say no to, due to lockdown rules. People who wanted to help and

While she said her father had told her at the time that he believed the prime minister to be “a liar”, Ms Mitchell added: “I dread to think what dad would be saying now seeing Boris toasting most likely himself and all his ‘hardwork’ he needed to ‘let of steam’ from.

Ms Mitchell said she “felt fuming” seeing the pictures published on Tuesday, adding: “Disrespecting the dead will cost him, one way or another, as it should. He disrespected the rules, the dying and dead and their families then and he continues to now.

“Boris has no decency or shame, if he did he would have apologised for lying and resigned by now. He might like to think ‘it’s over’ but it’s not, unfortunately for the country being run into the ground by him.”

The public anger appeared to be reflected by a souring mood within

One Tory MP **told** *The Independent* that the images showed Mr Johnson had lied to parliament, making it likely that more no confidence letters would be penned in the coming days.

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Brace yourself – Sue Gray’s report is about to tell us everything we already know

Responding to the publication of the photographs, a No 10 spokesperson said: “The Cabinet Office and the Met Police have had access to all information relevant to their investigations, including photographs.

“The Met have concluded their investigation and Sue Gray will publish her report in the coming days, at which point the prime minister will address Parliament in full.”

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