

Britain: Paddington rail crash hero sacked

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A man who rescued a colleague from almost certain death in the 1999 Paddington rail crash has been sacked for work absences, despite the fact he still suffers from nightmares 15 months after the disaster.

The Paddington rail disaster in October 1999 cost 31 lives. Over 400 people were injured, some so seriously they will be scarred for life. The accident occurred when a busy commuter train overran a poorly designed signal and ran headlong into an oncoming express train. In addition to the collision damage, a fire subsequently broke out, which caused terrible burns for many victims.

In the midst of the tragedy, there were many acts of bravery. One such was performed by Wayne Levy, who was hailed a hero for rescuing his colleague, Michael Rafferty, from the burning Thames Turbo Train despite suffering severe cuts to his neck and a fractured hip. The rescue happened just seconds before the two trains were engulfed in flames.

Faint from severe blood loss, Levy pulled Rafferty from the burning wreckage, where flying debris had crushed his foot. The chairman of the official inquiry into the Paddington crash, Lord Cullen, even mentioned Wayne Levy's "superhuman" strength and bravery.

Thames Trains sacked Levy, who worked as a booking office clerk at Paddington station, on the very day he was nominated for a bravery award. After returning from time off Levy was asked to phone the Thames Trains Personnel department who then told him his contract had been terminated. According to Levy, he has had just six days off since returning to work last August, after spending nine months recovering from the injuries he received in the Paddington crash in October 1999.

His sacking came to light on the same day as a British Transport police chief rang Thames Trains personnel office to inform them that Levy had been nominated by Prince Charles for a special bravery award. The police

superintendent said of the phone call: "I expected Thames Trains to be thrilled that one of their staff was being hailed a hero...Instead, there was a pause before they admitted they had sacked him that morning. Whatever has happened, as far as we are concerned Wayne is still a true hero and will be treated accordingly."

Thames Trains dismissed Levy when it became obvious that his experiences in the crash had left him with long-term difficulties that may result in further work absences. For the company this was considered a financial liability they were not prepared to tolerate.

Leading psychologist Leslie Carrick-Smith, who is dealing with victims of the Hillsboro football disaster, told the *Daily Mirror* that Wayne Levy was almost certainly suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, which can last for years. He described the sacking as "brutal" treatment for someone in his condition.

Levy told the press what he confronts each day: "I was all smashed up. The doctors said I was lucky to be alive. Then I started getting flashbacks. Just before the crash I'd fallen asleep. Every time I fall asleep now, the crash happens again in my mind. I also have nightmares about seeing carriages on fire and people burning to death. The first time I tried to go back to work, I broke down completely. I collapsed. I was shivering all over. It was like I was in shock. I couldn't move...I'm a happy go lucky sort of guy. But I'm more morbid now, and things get to me more. I can't make my mind up about things."

In a statement, Thames Trains refused to reverse their decision to sack Levy, reiterating that his absences and missed appointments were "unacceptable". Levy's treatment shows once more the depths to which the Train Operating Companies will sink in brutalizing their staff and maintaining profit levels.



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