

Daniel Pelka – Serious Case Review

The **murder of Daniel Pelka**, aged 4, occurred on 3 March 2012 in [Coventry](#), England.^[1] His mother, Magdalena Łuczak (27), and her partner, Mariusz Krężolek (33), were found guilty of the murder on 31 July 2013.^[2] Daniel's death made headlines for months as it was evident that a number of opportunities had been missed to identify him as suffering severe abuse.^[3] On 2 August 2013, both Łuczak and Krężolek were [jailed for life](#) with a minimum sentence of 30 years each.^[2] However, both died in prison within three years of being sentenced.

Family History

Eryk Pelka, Daniel's biological father, brought his family, and his partner Magdalena Łuczak and her child, to the UK from their native Poland at the end of 2005. Daniel was born in Coventry, England on 15th July 2007. Eryk remained with the family until the end of 2008. Krężolek moved in with Łuczak and her two children in 2010. He became the father to Daniel's youngest sibling and was a resident of the household at the time of Daniel's death.^[4]

Prior Evidence of Abuse

In 2010, a health visitor noticed a bruise to the side of Daniel's head, but was told he had fallen over.

In January 2011, he was taken to A&E with a broken arm, and was also seen to have multiple bruises.^[5] This was assessed by social services, however the doctor who saw Daniel admitted the fracture could have been caused by an accident.^[6] In November of that year, Daniel's school raised concern about him stealing food from other pupils and eating an unusual amount of the free fruit available. Łuczak had previously told medical professionals that Daniel would raid the fridge at night and punch his stepfather when not given food. A social worker had recommended that Daniel be given a snack on the way to school. By the end of 2011, his school attendance was only 63%.^[7]

By the start of 2012, the school was raising concerns that Daniel was obsessed with food and would eat out of bins, and had eaten half of a teacher's birthday cake that was intended for the whole class. He had visibly lost weight after the school holidays. A teacher saw fingerprint bruising around Daniel's neck, and staff had also seen multiple facial bruises.^[8] On February 10th 2012, he was seen by Dr Chakraborty after having lost weight. The doctor issued a prescription for worms and said he

appeared thin but not wasting away. On the 28th of February, he was observed as being 'pasty' with 'sunken eyes' and not interacting with other children. People continued to notice him eating out of bins, including on March 1st, the day he would receive the beating that killed him.^[7]

In addition to direct concerns about Daniel, social services had been visiting the family since 2008 due to serious domestic violence against Łuczak by Krężolek. However, she said she could protect her children, and Daniel was never interviewed directly.^[8]

Death

Daniel Pelka died on 3rd March 2012 after being beaten severely two days prior^[7], as a punishment for wetting himself.^[9] His mother did a Google search for "care - patient in a coma" on the morning of March 2nd. At 3.07am March 3rd, a 999 call was made in which she stated her son was not breathing. Paramedics arrived and took him to hospital, where he was pronounced dead at 3.50am.^[7]

The autopsy revealed 22 different injuries, 10 of which were to the head. A diagram detailing these injuries was released by West Midlands Police and shown widely in the media. The cause of death was ruled to be a brain injury.^[10]

He was also severely underweight, weighing just 10.4kg (1st 9lb). Witnesses describing him as looking like "a concentration camp victim" and "a seriously ill cancer patient".^[11]

After investigation was finished, the body was returned to Eryk Pelka. Initially, Eryk could not afford the cost of flying the body over from the UK. However, a Polish funeral firm in London donated the money for the cause.^[12] On September 3rd, 2013, Daniel's body was finally buried.^[13]

Murder Trial

Both Krężolek and Łuczak denied causing Daniel's death, but admitted the offence of child cruelty.^[14]

During the court trial Łuczak claimed that Krężolek would attempt to strangle her if she tried to protect Daniel, and that he would not let her feed him.^[9]

One of Daniel's siblings gave evidence that Krężolek had tried to drown Daniel in a bath of cold water, and that he was locked in a room and forbidden to use the toilet.^[15] Text message evidence also showed Łuczak admitting to nearly drowning him, and that they removed the handle to his bedroom door so his siblings could not let

him out. ^[16] The jury also heard that he was force-fed salt^[14] and made to perform squats as a punishment. ^[9]

The judge's closing remarks described the cruelty to Daniel as "truly horrific" and his starvation as "unprecedented in this country". She also stated that the culprits "carried out a deliberate and cynical deception of teaching, welfare and medical personnel, which was designed to conceal what was happening, to prevent any help being provided for Daniel". ^[17]

Legacy

Pelka's murder and the missed opportunities to prevent it generated a 'huge sense of public outrage'. Members of the public donated over £10,000 to the [NSPCC](#) in Pelka's memory. ^[18] Coventry has hosted many gatherings to remember Daniel Pelka, with the most recent one held on the 6 year anniversary of his death. ^[19]

The case inspired a petition to make it mandatory to report evidence of child abuse. ^[20] After extensive consultation, the UK government decided not to introduce mandatory reporting, fearing it could create a 'needle in a haystack' situation where reports of extensive evidence of serious abuse would be lost among less credible or serious reports that had been made due to fear of legal repercussion. They also noted that countries with mandatory reporting laws did not have a higher rate of child abuse reports. ^[21]

In 2014 the [indie rock](#) band [Little Comets](#) released a song called "Salt", accompanied by a [YouTube](#) video, dedicated to the memory of Daniel Pelka. ^[22]

Death of perpetrators

On 14 July 2015, Łuczak was found unresponsive in her cell at about 07:15 [BST](#) and was pronounced dead. ^[23] An inquest held three days later revealed that Łuczak had hanged herself one day before what would have been Daniel's eighth birthday. ^[24]

At about 08:30 on 27 January 2016, Krężolek was found dead in his prison cell at [Full Sutton Prison](#). ^[25] The cause of death was found to be a heart attack. He had refused medical attention due to fear that people would recognise him