

Suicide Grief

Personal Stories of Suicide Loss



Relationships Australia
TASMANIA

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20 Clare Street New Town TAS 7008

Free call: 1300 364 277

Phone: 03 6211 4050

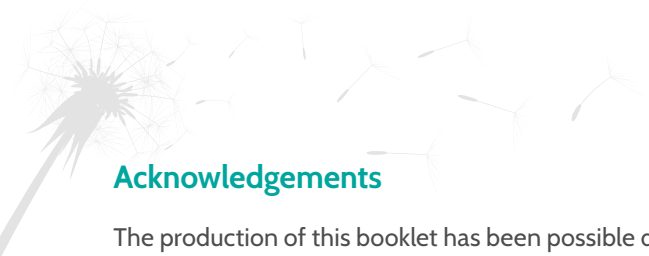
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Edited by Helen Scarr M.Cons., M.A. Creative Arts Therapy

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Suicide Grief



Acknowledgements

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Special thanks to:

Relationships Australia Tasmania for believing in this project and supporting my work to produce it.

The Tasmanian Community Fund for the funds to support this work.

The members of the Suicide Support Group and others known to the Editor who have generously shared their experiences.

Your understanding and acknowledgement of the importance of Suicide Grief is valued highly.



The people who contributed to this booklet...

The contributors to this booklet have all experienced the loss of a close relative to suicide. Some have lost an adult child, some a partner, some a brother or sister. The amount of time that has passed since the deaths ranges from less than one year to twenty years. All contributors have agreed to having their names and those of their loved ones printed, with some names being changed for confidentiality reasons.

Introducing the contributors:

Adele. *It's twelve years since Ben died by suicide, and seventeen years since Adam died in a car crash.*

Ann. *My beautiful son Rowan died at age forty six fifteen months ago.*

Anon. *Now it's two and a half years since my daughter died. Sometimes it seems like yesterday, and I think I will never really get over it. But I have learned to live with it.*

Belinda. *My beautiful son suicided two years ago on 21st June 2010.*

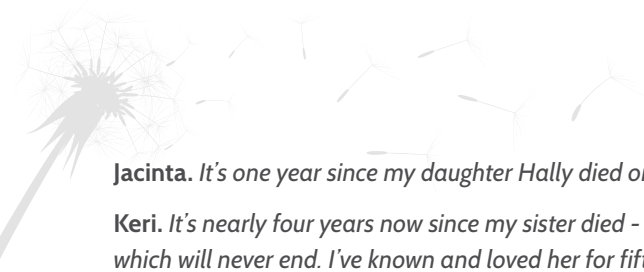
Bill. Partner of Susie (below.)

David. *My sister, forty years old, in the early hours of Tuesday 14th of December 2010 walked out into the backyard of her home and took her own life.*

Dilys. *My daughter, Penny, twenty-two, took her life in November 2001. Nine years later my life was getting back to some sort of normality. Then my world was shattered again when my son Daniel, thirty-three, took his life in August 2011.*

Greg. *My youngest son Ian committed suicide on 23/08/09.*

Hayley. *Now it has been ten years since my brother died. I love it when I dream about him because he is always alive and talking. I love the days following these dreams: I feel he is with me.*



Jacinta. *It's one year since my daughter Hally died on 2nd March 2011.*

Keri. *It's nearly four years now since my sister died - a VERY VERY long journey which will never end. I've known and loved her for fifty-one years, through thick and thin. We were only fifteen months apart in age.*

Michele. *My only child Antony took his own life at the age of thirty five on the 31st May 2011. Antony and I grew up together and we were best friends as well as mother and son. My life will never be the same again as he was my life.*

Pam. *My first child Systka died at five and a half months from cot death; my son Craig died at eighteen during the night after an epileptic seizure. Luke was twenty six when he died by suicide in 2005.*

Pete. *On the death of my brother, five years on... Luckily the pain of losing a close family member and a best mate cannot be imagined.*



Ruth. *It is now two-and-a-half years since our younger son, Matthew, took his own life in Los Angeles. He died on October 11th 2008; October 12th Sydney time, and his twenty-ninth birthday.*

Robert, father of Matthew. *Yes, I am in a better place now than two and a half years ago, but I am a different person, changed forever and valuing so much our two remaining children, three grandchildren and friends.*

Rosanna. *Twenty years is a good chunk of any life - but the twenty years, which started on 3rd August 1990 with the discovery of the death of my husband Stewart by suicide, has exposed me to so many emotional extremes. Now, I have finally reached a plateau where I feel the twenty-year journey can be reviewed.*

Susie. *My daughter died ten months ago.*

Tracey. *It's two years since Bianca died. Her daughter Halle helps me keep her alive when we remember things mummy did.*



We remember the people whose death by suicide has contributed to the production of this booklet

Antony

Ben

Bianca

Hally

Ian

Louis

Luke

Matthew

Mitchell

Penny and Daniel

Rowan

Anon's daughter

David's sister

Keri's sister

Pete's brother

Stewart, Rosanna's husband

Susie's daughter



Foreword

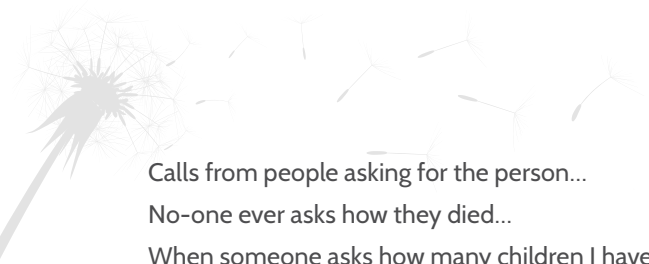
The wisdom shared in this book has been grown in deep, anguished, and painful soil. It takes courage, determination, and a special kind of resilience to speak out about the traumatic and tragic loss of a loved one to suicide. The contributors' unabridged honesty may shock some, yet each unique offering is provided in the desire to help others reluctantly walking this path. With determination and heartbreaking honesty, the diverse voices of the contributors have created a map of guiding lights to support grievors through the aftermath of suicide. It is their hope that this book will help those bereaved to feel less confused, lost, and alone, and that the glimmers of hope that shine through these offerings will support them in finding meaning, purpose, and healing in their life. It is an important gift to know that others have gone before and found a way to go on. In these pages you will find gritty and sage words, such as Keri firmly telling you to 'support yourself' and 'not let go of your own life', Jacinta's decisive self-talk, 'that's enough', and Hayley's resolute thought-training efforts. All wrapped in Helen's soothing and thoughtful mindfulness techniques. Both those bereaved by suicide and those who want to better understand in order to help and support this kind of grief will gain knowledge and valuable new perspectives within these pages. Helen's commitment in making this book available to the community has been a true labor of love; it is a shining testament to the memory of her son and to Helen's dedication to reaching out and helping others struggling with this heart-rending loss.

Diana Sands, PhD,
Director, Bereaved by Suicide Centre for Intense Grief Therapy
Professional Advisor, Wings of Hope Inc,
International writer and speaker on suicide bereavement,
Author *Red Chocolate Elephants for Children Bereaved by Suicide*
Sydney, November 2012



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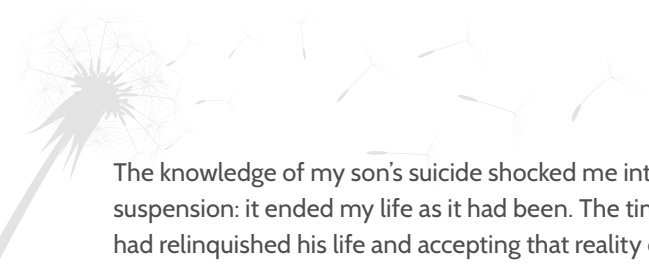


Introduction

When you are reeling from a suicide death and pick up a piece of information about suicide and read: 'Suicide is completely preventable', it's like being whacked in the gut by a punching bag. While you're doubled gasping, it keeps whacking you to the ground, with voices shouting at you: 'You should have prevented your son's death', 'Suicide is completely preventable!' 'Why didn't you stop him?' 'A parent's job is to keep their children safe!' 'Where is your responsibility?' 'Suicide is completely preventable!' These questions and statements needed me mercilessly as my thoughts reeled at that statement. The voice of 'Suicide is completely preventable!' rained torrents on my thoughts, threatening to drench all reason.

My youngest son Louis suicided at nineteen, ten years ago. A week before he died we discovered he was smoking marijuana. After he died we scoured our memories for reasons for his death in the murky anguish of the hours and days following this terrible event. While anyone we spoke to about marijuana use discounted the idea that it (marijuana use) can be harmful to the mental health of the user, my family felt his use was a factor that contributed to his death. I began searching for understanding about the effects on users of marijuana and its possible connection to mental illness and suicide: anything I could lay my hands on.

The statement that 'Suicide is completely preventable!' amongst other information on suicide prevention, may be designed to assist people to prevent someone killing themselves, or to attract funds for suicide prevention, or to simply shock and confront our community into preventative action. While communities do need funding to work in suicide prevention programs, I wish it were that simple. Whatever the reason behind the statement that 'Suicide is completely preventable!' whenever I stumbled upon it, I found it to be shocking, untrue and deeply distressing.



The knowledge of my son's suicide shocked me into a state of frozen suspension: it ended my life as it had been. The time between knowing he had relinquished his life and accepting that reality dragged with profound desolation.

After his death I was desperately looking for some comfort, something that acknowledged that suicide does happen and that you don't always see it coming, as we didn't. There was nothing of comfort around, certainly nothing local. Lots of research talked about suicide statistics, how people who suicide often visit their doctor up to two weeks before they die; the various mental health issues that often accompany suicide; how some people talk about suicidal thoughts and intention, while some people who are contemplating suicide go to great lengths to hide their plans; how most people who use marijuana are largely unaffected, yet a very small percentage of people who use marijuana are adversely affected.

My fruitless search for information to sooth my own sadness suggested that it would be good to collect information that would help others who are grieving after a suicide. I wanted to find information to help people in this position to feel more 'normal' at a time when their lives seem to have been turned inside out and upside down: to allow some sense of reality. For a year or so after Louis died I kept having flashbacks: to the moment my husband told me that Louis had died; to having to call my mother and our other adult children to give them the terrible news; and to the last time we saw him alive...I would have felt comforted at the time had there been something like this booklet for me to read. For several years I have co-facilitated a group at Relationships Australia Tasmania in partnership with Lifeline Tasmania, for people who are bereaved by suicide. Relationships Australia Tasmania received a grant from the Tasmanian Community Fund to produce this booklet and I invited the Suicide Bereavement group¹ members to participate in the production.

1. *Suicide Bereavement group: contact Lifeline Tasmania or Relationships Australia Tasmania*

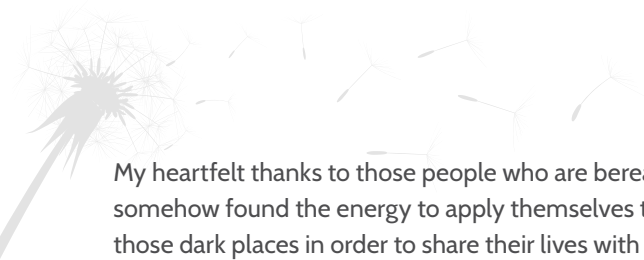


Writing about issues helped me to recover from the terrible grief after Louis' suicide. For this reason I invited group participants and others I knew in this situation to write about issues that had occurred during the first one to two years after the death of their relative, to write from their own lived experience in the hope that they might now be able to see those moments from a distance. I invited them to write of their experiencing to comfort others in a similar circumstance because research and lived experience tells me that doing something for others can foster a sense of purpose.

Because I remembered my own flashbacks, I decided to present this booklet in the format of separate 'topics' rather than as individual stories. Hence there are thirty-five 'topics' that will lead us through the time frame of the 'firsts' and many of the events that families have to deal with after a suicide death. Also, when grief is rampaging through your being, concentration disappears. To open this booklet and see long stories might be off-putting; yet individual 'topics' may invite you to read others' experiences around a topic that resonates.

My hope is that as you read the topics and experiences you will feel comforted by coming to understand how others can also feel 'between worlds'. Life as you knew it has been pulped. There are parts of your previous life that you recognize, yet everything seems unsteady: there is a strong sense of unreality. The transitional uncertainty between 'life as it was' before the suicide, and settling into a new way of being that is manageable, needs a lot of soothing. Personal knowing tells me there is comfort to be gained by reading others' experiences. I hope that you also find these accounts to be comforting.

When I invited people to attend a meeting to talk about producing this booklet, some people had already written something and were not keen to write more, while others were eager to use the topics as a structure to write about their experience. Others were happy to contribute yet had no energy to write. I spent time talking with those people and writing for them. That helped most of them to then make additions or to clarify our joint efforts.



My heartfelt thanks to those people who are bereaved by suicide and who somehow found the energy to apply themselves to the task of revisiting those dark places in order to share their lives with you through the gift of retelling their pain.

Helen Scarr



When I heard the news...

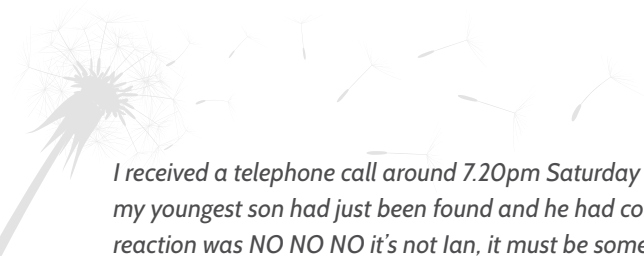
*I was phoned at work by the hospital who told me my son Ben, who I had left at home in bed, had hit his head. I immediately knew that he had jumped off our balcony. I don't remember considering that as a possibility any time before that but without being told I knew what had happened. I felt shocked and full of dread. **Adele.***

*My daughter was in Afghanistan in the Defence Forces. My husband was working in a mine in Western Australia when we heard the news. My husband rang a dear friend of mine who flew with me to Brisbane that night and stayed with me until my husband arrived. My daughter flew home as well. **Belinda.***

*I vaguely heard the phone ring at around 9.30 although I was unable to move quickly enough to catch it and I drifted back to sleep. The phone rang again at approximately 10.15; this woke me. Again, having missed the call, I checked on who was trying to contact me. It was my brother, the call prior had been my father. I listened to my brother's message and sensed immediately a family member had died. I didn't listen to my father's message and couldn't until at least a week later. **David.***

When my second child Penny, twenty two years, took her life in 2001, my world fell apart. It was the beginning of an eight-year gruelling journey of loneliness, depression, near suicide and wandering. I used to think this was the ultimate tragedy - nothing could exceed this - nothing could ever be worse. Nearly ten years later... I had almost come to terms with Penny's death. Then the news came: Daniel, thirty three years, was in a critical condition in the Royal Melbourne Hospital. He had attempted suicide. He was unconscious and the staff didn't expect him to survive the night.

*He survived and over the next two roller coaster weeks of hope and despair, Daniel survived an operation, blood clots, a high temperature and pneumonia. He didn't regain consciousness and after two weeks was taken off life support. He lived another ten days in palliative care. **Dilys.***



*I received a telephone call around 7.20pm Saturday 23/8/09 telling me Ian my youngest son had just been found and he had committed suicide. My first reaction was NO NO NO it's not Ian, it must be someone else. I just fell to the floor and couldn't say anything but NO. Angela rang back later after she had identified the body and told me it was Ian. **Greg.***

*When I heard the news I did not believe it. It seemed so odd. Then I thought it might be some kind of mistake. Then I thought: 'If they get him to the hospital then he will be okay.' We watch enough medical dramas to know pretty much everyone can be saved. **Hayley.***

*I'm the one who drove everyone to her house and called the police and ambulance when she died... **Keri.***

*...it was when the police arrived with the news. I felt so shocked I couldn't think. My husband Tony was at a friend's house and the police rang for him to come home. I suffered such an acute pain in my stomach until I asked if it was possible for organ donation. I don't know where it came from. What was I thinking to ask such a thing? **Pam.***

*The pain of losing a close family member (and a best mate) cannot be imagined. Hypothetical thinking about how awful it may be is irrelevant when the shock phone call arrives and your life is changed forever. **Pete.***

*We were out at friends' for dinner and our world was shattered by the phone call from our daughter Helen with the news. I can only remember hearing my voice screaming, Robert's anguish and the comfort of our friends who drove us home. Our poor daughter Helen had been contacted by Los Angeles police as her name was in the back of Matthew's passport as his contact. **Ruth.***

*On the night we discovered Bianca's death, I lost both my daughters. Becky has never been the same again. A few weeks ago she was diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. **Tracey.***



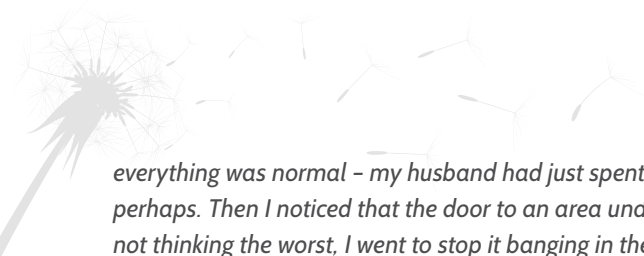
When I discovered their body...

My husband and I had been on suicide watch for three days with our son in a very isolated place, with limited phone contact. We were exhausted and needed to plan how we would proceed over the next few days. We took the dog for a walk in a quiet moment so we could talk about what we needed to do. When we returned he wasn't in the house so we both began searching for him. I found him and screamed to my husband for him to come and help me. We had been present to his incredible suffering and my husband said, 'Thank God he's not suffering any more.'

*When my husband went to call the police I wept, pushing at him, asking him, 'Why? Why? Why?' Then I lay beside him and ran my hands over his chest and body, trying to remember him for the future. I remember looking at his feet and thinking how exquisite they were. **Ann.***

*I sort of knew it was going to happen. Things hadn't been right for a long time. Still there was the feeling of sheer panic. When I discovered her body, I tried to revive her, feeling panic, like it wasn't really happening, feelings of knowing she was really dead but she might start breathing again, perhaps I have it all wrong, asking people to check to see if she really is dead, going to sit in another room. Later, when the police were investigating the scene, my daughter's body was still there. They told me to leave. I walked outside and I saw her cat hunting in the sunshine. I thought, 'I reckon the animal world might have made more sense to her than her own world did.' **Anon.***

I was three months pregnant with our third child, when my husband suicided. For some time things had been black for him. I had dreamed (or was it a nightmare?) of being in a vortex - being sucked down into some ghastly pit - I could not stop the motion - it was a very real image. When I got home with the children that night, he was not there, even though we had spoken on the phone only half an hour before. As the evening progressed I rang Life Line, the hospital and the police, although it seemed too early to record him as a missing person. The next morning I put our eight-year-old daughter and six-year old son in the car to take them to school. For their sakes, I was trying to convince myself



everything was normal – my husband had just spent the night at a friend’s – perhaps. Then I noticed that the door to an area under the house was open. Still not thinking the worst, I went to stop it banging in the wind. As I approached I saw my husband and knew what had happened. I screamed but had to choke it back – the children were getting out of the car, so I hurried back to them. ‘Why did you scream, Mummy?’ ‘There was a huge spider,’ I replied. My son has since told me that he was almost beside me before I hurried him away, but I do not remember him. I just recall the urgency of not letting them see. **Rosanna.**

I felt...

I felt so alone, like a freak. This wasn’t happening to others, no matter how bad their kids had been this hadn’t happened to their families. I feel embarrassed about it. People avoided me and I avoided them to avoid the awkwardness.

Anon.

Over the ensuing weeks the enormity and finality of my sister’s suicide slowly began to creep in. The sense of loss and bewilderment began to engulf me. I found myself drifting aimlessly. These were the darkest days of my life; the brutal trauma, devastation and violence of my sister’s death began to dismantle the very fabric of life. **David.**

When they rang and said ‘Penny’s dead’, it was as if I had been hit with a sledge hammer. My brain exploded. It was so final, so hard to accept. No time to say goodbye – just a huge void. With Daniel, as strange as it sounds I was glad of this time we spent with him...going to the hospital daily for nearly four weeks. It gave me time to say goodbye and accept. The four of us – Daniel, my daughter Sarah, her father and I were together. Although terribly traumatic, it was a special time – emotional, spiritual and cathartic. **Dilys.**

I was numb and couldn’t believe this had happened. NO NO NO NO.

That night a part of me died and an empty feeling consumed me. I fell to the floor screaming NO NO NO. Not my baby. **Greg.**



*My emotions were in chaos and as a 'sufferer' from depression for twenty-six years, well controlled with low dose medication, I was still able to differentiate the horrendous grief I felt from my depression. I know how such grief may lead on to depression, but for me there was this difference right from the beginning. Physically my body seemed to react without my mind. I was acidic, couldn't eat, one night wet the bed and I said to myself, 'Is this what is to come as normal?' I was a physical and mental wreck, yet Ruth and I were expected to respond rationally with all formalities. Through my grief I experienced a whole gamut of emotions with an intensity I can only describe as chaotic. I lost enthusiasm, creativity and desire for life. **Robert.***

The suicide note...

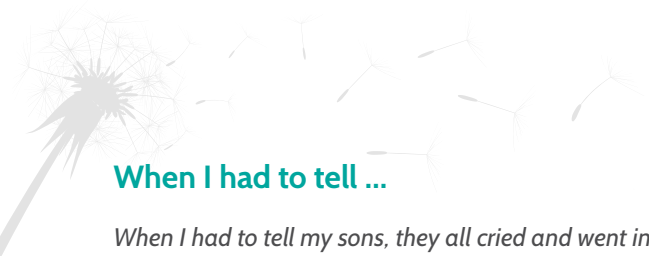
*She left a poem more or less saying that if she could change things and be back again she would. **Anon.***

*A suicide note said he wasn't driving the car. Anyone who suicides normally doesn't have to lie. I believe Mitchell was telling the truth. There was no reason he had to drive home as he would have slept in his car, or at a mate's place. **Belinda.***

*Ian had written pages and pages, songs and music. It took a few hours to go through the lot. In what he wrote I could tell he wasn't happy and had a lot of emotional upset in his life that was consuming him. Voices in his head, thinking no-one loved or cared about him, and what people had done to hurt him. In a couple of his notes he talked about how the voices were tormenting him so much that he had problems coping and on other pages how he would end it all with either a silk tie or a guitar lead. Reading this was so sad and I just wished he had opened up to me a bit more. **Greg.***

*There wasn't a suicide note. I have no idea even to this day (six years later) why he took his own life. **Pam.***

*Bianca left a note for her two children. **Tracey.***



When I had to tell ...

*When I had to tell my sons, they all cried and went into shock; they felt there were unresolved issues between them. **Anon.***

*My wife asked the minister to read out a brief statement to say that her daughter had taken her own life, to please bring hugs and casseroles instead of words. **Bill.***

*I rang my sister and she came over to be with me, not much help and I wished I'd never rang. She and her husband didn't want to be there and didn't know what to say, didn't talk about Ian but just how much they are spending on their house and how long they expect to work for. They took me to their place for the night and arranged flights to Western Australia. Couldn't sleep all night. I just wandered around crying. **Greg.***

*My family told me the news. I avoided telling my friends. When I did have to say something, I just said that my youngest brother had died. If people pushed for details I satisfied them with saying it was a car accident. **Hayley.***

The Police arrived and ...

*The police arrived and wanted to know what had gone on, why was she dead at twenty two years. Was she murdered or was it suicide? What were the circumstances? Other people involved had to be interviewed, her last movements. What was her life about? Who did she ring on the phone? All of this had to be investigated. **Anon.***

*I'm the only one comforting her son while the police kicked the bedroom door in. **Keri.***



The autopsy...

*Just a body with a few signs of old bruises, signs of bites on the lips. She took a fit in the bath? They don't know. Did she overdose? What was in her blood stream? They didn't say. I felt like there was no point in going on about it. It wasn't going to change anything and perhaps it would be better for me to not really know the full extent of what went on in the bath that day and how she came to such an awful end. **Anon.***

*The autopsy showed death was by ligature. **Pam.***

*Before I read Bianca's autopsy report I reviewed 'star's' autopsy reports online. When my doctor asked 'How are you going to manage this?' I replied 'I've read Michael Jackson's autopsy report.' Of course the King of Pop was not my child so it was very different, but it did prepare me for some aspects [of my daughter's report]. **Tracey.***

Arranging to bring my son's body home from elsewhere...

*In all my dreadful anguish I knew that I needed to bring Matthew home, not just to Australia, but to our home in Hobart, not his ashes, but him as a whole being. The funeral home we used, and one employee in particular, ensured that this happened and we had Matthew back with his family here. Qantas was caring, practical and extremely supportive. **Ruth.***

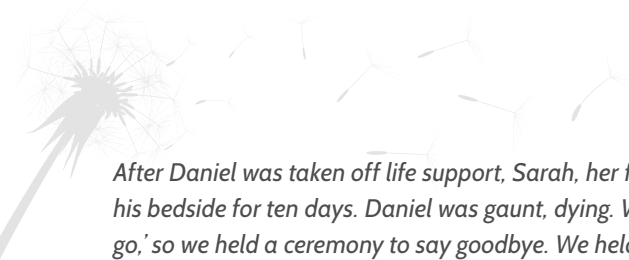
Should I view my relative's body?

*I spent many hours with Ben's body and I am very glad I did so. **Adele.***

Her body didn't look like I expected: the eyes were open; the mouth was open. When I went to see her body at the funeral home there were tears running down her cheeks. That was a shock to me. Apparently this can happen.

Yes, I think it gave me closure and I invited many of her close friends to the viewing at the funeral home, a time I treasure of saying our goodbyes together.

Anon.



*After Daniel was taken off life support, Sarah, her father and I kept vigil over his bedside for ten days. Daniel was gaunt, dying. We said, 'We've got to let him go,' so we held a ceremony to say goodbye. We held hands and said to him: 'We're leaving to get coffee, that's your time to go'. We were just about to re-enter the hospital when someone rang to say he'd died. We missed the transition but none of us were disappointed. We'd been there since it happened and it was like we made the decision and told him. I really value that whole time we were in hospital. **Dilys.***

*I was asked if I would like to view Ian in the morgue but knew it would not be a pretty sight and I would not be allowed to hold him, so declined. **Greg.***

*I viewed Louis' body in the hospital morgue and at the funeral home. I found this difficult but so pleased that I did. To begin with, in the morgue, I couldn't touch him, but my Dad helped me by putting his hand on my brother's arm and then putting my hand on his. He looked dead, painfully dead; and yet his eyes were open and I kept expecting him to sit up. At the funeral he looked peaceful. **Hayley.***

When the life support was to be switched off I asked for the tubes to be removed from Hally's face. The hospital had to check with the coroner's office, and we got permission.

After life support was withdrawn and Hally was dying all I wanted to do was go home and sleep. I thought: 'I just want to go home to bed and sleep for a few hours and then be called in close to the end.' I told the nurse that maybe she could phone me when time was near and I would come.

Now I feel incredibly guilty that I could have possibly thought that. My daughter was dying and all I could think about was going home to sleep. I had been awake for over twenty four hours and was so tired and shocked.

*After several hours Hally's breaths became slower and further apart. Luis was holding her hand throughout. I couldn't stop kissing Hally and telling her I loved her. I stroked her face which made her eyelids twitch and I told myself this was her response to me... that she knew I loved her. After her last breath she shuddered. Luis cried and cried. Body identification was all too clinical and fast. I had to say 'official words' rather than 'mother words' for identification. **Jacinta.***



*The only time we viewed his body was on the day of the funeral. I wanted to make sure it was my son I was burying. The viewing was by invitation only. I didn't want everybody seeing him like that. **Pam.***

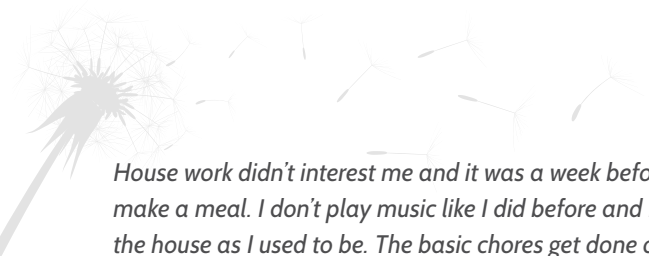
How did I manage everything in those early hours, days, weeks...

*I really didn't manage very well. I left my job; my marriage ended purely because I felt the need to get away and my husband had work which prevented him wanting to get away too. So we split up and I eventually ended up in Tasmania for seven years. For me, this was the right thing to do and I have never regretted it, even though I had much protest from family and friends in Sydney where I had lived all my life. **Adele.***

*We were like zombies; we tried to support each other. We were numb with shock and didn't do much. We sat around and went through the motions of living. I felt so lost without a daughter. I tried to fill the void with books, movies, walks and journeys, anything to take my mind off what had happened. **Anon.***

*In the days following his death we all stayed at our family house and Grandma joined us. We were all trying to keep each other going but also taking quiet time. We had lots and lots of visitors to the house. Some turned up with meals they had cooked and showed their support and only stayed for a short time. This was perfect. Some visitors really annoyed me; they said silly things like: 'If you need anything, even a bag of potatoes, you can call me.' **Hayley.***

*'You don't matter...this is about her son and her mother', my brother said to me two days after my sister committed suicide... 'Hang on! That doesn't make sense. Why don't I matter?' I thought. The next day my brother went camping and hunting with his mate, and left me to deal with it all alone until the funeral five days later. My sister and I shared a room for seventeen years. We travelled overseas together. We bought a house together. I was the only one there encouraging her when she gave birth, I felt as though I mattered in her life. **Keri.***



*House work didn't interest me and it was a week before I put food together to make a meal. I don't play music like I did before and I'm not as eager to clean the house as I used to be. The basic chores get done of a fashion. Maybe I'll get my mojo back some day. I hope so! **Pam.***

*The shock to us all as a family was so terrible. I can think of nothing worse. I was a complete wreck and useless to my husband and children. I could do nothing without crying and the thought of never feeling Matthew's love, warmth and arms around me again was unbearable. **Ruth.***

*The important thing for us was a conscious decision not to take on other peoples' grief. Important because my husband and I are both soft-hearted people and from my previous experience I knew it would all become too much to bear. **Susie.***

For Halle, six, her mother's death is like a double rejection: first not being cared for by her mother, then mummy removing herself permanently from Halle through death.

*This morning while I was making a cup of tea, Halle asked: 'How did mummy die?' Halle knows her mother took her life but not how. She has asked me but I told her I will tell her about it when she's older. **Tracey.***



When people, cards, flowers arrived

*Although it often brought on more pain, it always helped me to feel supported by others. **Adele.***

*When the cards and flowers arrived I enjoyed them. I took photos of them at the funeral; I felt that a lot of people really cared for her. **Anon.***

*Some people would call and sound grief stricken, and we would need to deflect that somehow. Susie's message [below] was difficult for some people as it wasn't what they wanted. But for us, it was a good thing to do. People didn't feel the need to be positive and say it would be alright. **Bill.***

*I only received one card and that was from my sister in Tasmania. It was upsetting but then like Ian I didn't expect much more than that. **Greg.***

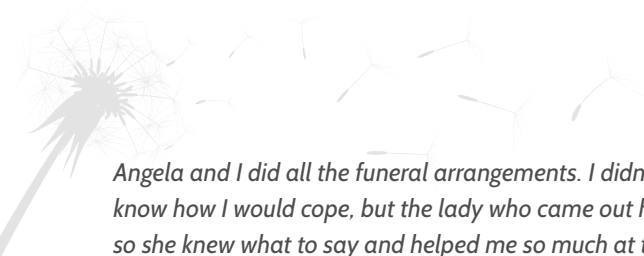
*I was overwhelmed by the amount of cards and flowers that were sent. Many delivery vans came with two and three arrangements at a time. We received handfuls of cards each day for many days. I was surprised at the number of people who showed their support in this way. I found this comforting. **Hayley.***

*The days after Luke's death were hectic with people arriving all day. People who had never been to our house arrived. My brother didn't know my address but he turned up. Cards came in the post. Flowers were at the funeral. Living in a country area like we do people think we live too far away. **Pam.***

*My husband and I let it be known that the condolences that would be helpful after the death of our daughter would be hugs or casseroles. **Susie.***

When I began to arrange the funeral

*When I was arranging the funeral I was panicked about how I was going to pay for it. What am I going to say to people at the funeral? My daughter is having a funeral at twenty two years. I have failed as a parent to stop her taking drugs and killing herself. How can I explain this to people? **Anon.***



*Angela and I did all the funeral arrangements. I didn't want to do this and didn't know how I would cope, but the lady who came out had been through a suicide so she knew what to say and helped me so much at that distressing time. The only thing I knew I wanted were the flowers which were native Australian. Ian loved them and they turned out perfect. **Greg.***

*Arranging the funeral was macabre. You do not have much time and you have to think quickly when you are struggling to think at all. The funeral people are very solemn, respectful and helpful. Choosing the burial plot was confronting. There was not much choice and it is an important decision. Ironically he is lying nine feet under in a place with a beautiful view of the river where he loved the water and the mountain where he died. It is a beautiful place. His body has been put in such a lovely position but he can't enjoy it. But maybe he can, we don't know. I like the cemetery and it seems easier to visit because of its unique beauty. **Hayley.***

When we met with the celebrant she didn't know we were divorced or how fragmented our family was. We were all talking over the top of each other, and not listening to one another's needs, it was awful.

The celebrant offered us a date for the funeral, but I didn't want that particular time slot she had available. The celebrant said "I usually work with this funeral home... go and have a look." I didn't want to because it felt like someone else was making the decisions.

I didn't want that celebrant, I felt there was too much 'fluff' which wasn't right for Hally, so I didn't go and look, instead I left Hally's dad with the task of contacting the funeral home to see what they offered, but they misunderstood and thought he had given the go-ahead. They had started to make plans to move Hally's body. My instincts were telling me to step up and be pro-active which was hard when I was so numb. So I investigated other funeral homes and other celebrants. I found another place I was happy with. They told us that even if Hally's body had been moved and we hadn't authorized it we could arrange for her to be transferred to the funeral home of our choice. We talked with another celebrant but still weren't happy. After a third try we found a celebrant we all agreed on and felt confident we would get what was right for Hally.



Hally's brother Luis (eighteen) and I wanted to look at everything in the funeral home, and how everything worked. We looked at the caskets, prep room - this is where Hally was to be washed and dressed; the crematorium furnace and where the ashes were processed. I asked if they ever got names mixed up, and was told only one person can be cremated at a time and the name tag goes above the furnace so there was no chance of a mix up.

Luis wanted to know how Hally would be looked after because she was very self-conscious about her body. There was no way she would have wanted a man washing her. The funeral home told us that they have a woman who is there exactly for this reason, to look after women only. We wanted to meet her so we could feel comfortable; she gave us a hug and looked through Hally's photos. Luis told me later that he was glad he had a look and didn't find it gruesome. His need to know outweighed any anticipated horror.

*Even though Hally's funeral was nine days after she died there just didn't seem enough time to do things, I was in a different time zone. I couldn't decide on the clothes she would wear; between her old favourite pyjamas or buying new ones. My niece helped me choose the old favourites because they were uniquely and importantly Hally's. But then I only thought of washing them and sewing a missing button on at the last minute. They were still damp when I took them to the funeral home and the prep lady kindly finished drying them. **Jacinta.***

*The funeral arrangements were made by all four of us: Tony, myself and our two daughters. It wasn't a solemn time remembering the antics Luke had done. He was a clown at times and made us all laugh. **Pam.***



Attending the funeral...

I am very close with my family and always have a lot of support from them. As I had organized a funeral for my eldest son Adam, five years prior to Ben's death, it was probably easier in some ways. I did not cry at his funeral and was able to speak at the service. I remember feeling quite numb and robotic. **Adele.**

I let the funeral attendant do the talking. I just sat there stunned. Her friends came but they didn't want to talk because they had played a part in her problems by taking drugs together. They just attended, signed the condolence register, sent flowers and left never to be seen again. It was all too hard and yes they were part of her lifestyle and problems. **Anon.**

We were upfront about suicide: Susie spoke at the funeral about it. We even handed out pamphlets from the Standby Response Team at the funeral. **Bill.**

I had to see Ian again and knew he would be in nice clothes and cleaned up. I walked into the funeral home chapel and the coffin was placed at the front facing the seats. I walked up and saw him lying there motionless with tears streaming down my face. I leaned into the coffin and held him, crying and asking him why, why didn't you call me why why why. I laid my head on his and ran my fingers through his hair. I didn't want to leave him and after some time my daughter and sister took my arms and led me out. I will never forget the last time I saw my beautiful son Ian lying there, his mind now at peace. **Greg.**

Attending the funeral was surreal. I know I was there in body, but who knows where my mind was. So many people came. Lots of people were so respectful and so genuinely sad for my lovely brother but others were there for a 'sticky-beak'. **Hayley.**

I'm the only one here with a car, picking them up from the airport, driving everyone around... especially difficult after the service and driving behind the hearse to the cemetery when you are blinded by tears and pain... **Keri.**

Attending the funeral was difficult and I felt numb most of the time. I don't really remember much about the day. **Pam.**



After all the fuss and arrangements were over...

*All I really wanted was to get away geographically and make some kind of fresh start. Part of wanting to get away was to avoid people who knew me. Not close people but some acquaintances. I hated seeing the look of pity and sadness that my presence caused. **Adele.***


*After the funeral was over that was the end of it for most people. Life resumed as normal, but not for me. There were feelings of the empty chair where my daughter was in my life. This is something I will have to learn to live with for the rest of my days. I had a feeling of 'you are on your own now.' There has never been any mention of her since; it is like she never existed. **Anon.***

*My journey into the darkness of loss and grief had only just begun. **David.***

*Once the fuss was over it was nice to be able to breathe some fresh air; to grieve in private without having to perform for the 'potato offering visitors', to assure them that you are okay when you really are not. Having said this, there was an overwhelming silence and finality about it. **Hayley.***

*After the funeral the visitors stopped coming and it was so quiet. All I wanted to do was sleep. **Pam.***

*The mother of my daughter's boyfriend turned up at Bianca's flat when we were cleaning, wanting the furniture. My other daughter asked her to leave and the woman called the Police. I gave them any furniture they wanted, even though Bianca and the bloke weren't living together and nothing belonged to him. I only wanted photographs and papers. **Tracey.***



I began thinking about what had happened before the death...

*He'd reached his capacity - reached a point that was more than he could bear. He'd reached his physical and emotional limits. **Ann.***

*She knew she was going, and she told me what song to play at the funeral. She spent a lovely day beforehand with me, the perfect mother and daughter day. We spoke about her problems and I could see how ill she was from a trauma from a road accident while driving and taking drugs. Her brain was cooked with drugs. Her body was wracked with pain. She no longer felt any pleasure with life; everything was a drag. Plagued with drug-induced epilepsy, shocking mood swings from drugs, no relationship would work, no one could live with her and she couldn't put up with anyone either. Work was hard, to keep the illusion that all was well and to keep up the pretence to everyone that things were alright. She didn't want people to realise the extent of her problems. **Anon.***

*My son Mitchell twenty six, was in the Air Force for seven-and-a-half years, based in Brisbane. He was caught drink driving on 20th June 2010 and suicided on 21st (June 2010). It is a well known fact that he would have been asked to leave the forces. He would have hated that. He adored the forces. **Belinda.***

*I wonder my dear sister how you reached the point in your life you did. I wonder what drove you there. I wonder what were your thoughts, in those final moments. Those final moments, when you were on the cusp of leaving us forever, of choosing death over life. I will forever wonder. **David.***

Daniel was depressed: he'd split up with his girlfriend. He was on anti-depressants early in the year, but the medication made him dozey and as a chef he was cutting his fingers at work, so he gave them up after nearly six months. Sarah and I didn't realize how bad he was. We had some serious conversations and he started to open up a bit, although he was talking suicide around June/ July. Sarah was trying to get him into a psych ward in Brisbane. The doctor was no help. The hospital wouldn't take him so the best we could do was when the psych triage people organized for a counsellor to call. The counsellor said he



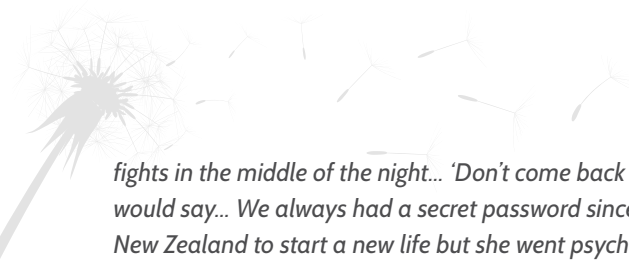
was fine and there was no need for him to be admitted. Two weeks later he was in hospital. After Daniel died Sarah called the psychiatrist to tell him what had happened. He said: 'Tell him to call me.' The psychiatrist was not listening. I stayed with Daniel for a week, ten days before his suicide attempt. It was emotional. We did a lot of talking and crying. We experienced a closeness we hadn't shared in a long time. Daniel had lots of support groups in place plus a psychologist. He took me to a Buddhist group and then we went to a depression and anxiety meeting. He was so articulate and caring for the others. I was feeling he was getting it together. He talked of getting temp work. He was looking forward to going to a group called 'No more Mr. Yes Man'. I left on Tuesday feeling as if Daniel was back on track and making positive changes in his life. I was wrong. The attempt to end his life was the following Saturday. **Dilys.**

I quite often wonder what was going through his mind, the hour, minutes before he hung himself and I think how sad, hurt and lost he must have been. **Greg.**

When I began thinking about what had gone on before Louis' death, it made me realise how many significant changes there had been within the immediate family. These included cancer, one brother moving interstate, a family friend being killed in Afghanistan. It was a significantly difficult time. **Hayley.**

With Hally it got to a point where I thought, 'Something's going to break here' and it did. She took her own life. I never thought it would end like that despite years of suicide attempts. Somehow I thought the 'Something's going to break here' would be something that would give her a jolt and get her life back on track. For eleven years people said 'Confidentiality can be breached when life is at risk.' Her life was at risk so many times but no one ever breached confidentiality to me. I wish someone had. Hally's doctors said they couldn't speak to me because of confidentiality and with this I missed opportunities to help her. She used to say she wished she was an egg and could go back into the uterus and start over again. **Jacinta.**

When we were teens in Sydney, I went with her to the hospital in the police car when she took all mother's pills. I got locked out of the house when they had



*fights in the middle of the night... 'Don't come back till you've found her' mother would say... We always had a secret password since we were small. I took her to New Zealand to start a new life but she went psychotic and disappeared back to Australia. I stayed in New Zealand but rang her every day in hospital when she had a stroke from an overdose. Back in Sydney years later, I took her shopping every week and picked her up in the middle of the night wherever she was stuck, drunk or at some bloke's place.... I sat with her and helped her to bed when she had her first few epileptic fits and mother said she was just fooling around.... When Mother had her put into a mental hospital, Dad signed her out and she came to live with me again and slept with my boyfriend. I knew about her abortions, her overdoses, her suicide attempts, her orgasms with new boyfriends, her psychotic episodes, her depressions, her taking people to court, including me. She supported me and picked me up when I had cancer surgeries, had accidents and ended up in hospital or crashed my car. I ignored her when she wanted to take me to court. **Keri.***

*I had felt that Matthew was secure in his life mentally and emotionally. He had survived a coup in Fiji when much younger when his flatmate was taken captive but fortunately freed unharmed and had returned to Fiji happily to resume his flying studies. He had also survived a severe viral infection five years previously that necessitated hospital treatment and the possible end of his flying. His recovery was complete, but in hindsight, did these events have hidden long term effects? We will never know. **Robert.***

*He considered himself ruined professionally and took his life within two days. His mind was like a heart damaged by heart disease that is asked to run up a mountain. That heart would have a heart attack. He had a mind attack and took his life. Even twenty years on I feel my heart race as I write this crucial paragraph. My own 'downs' were profound as I understood the injustices that had driven my dear husband to the despair he was finally unable to see beyond. The unjust litigation, which had been the final straw for him, culminated ten years after his death. **Rosanna.***



*Matthew was a second officer with Qantas, living what we all believed to be his dream as it was all he had ever wanted to do since early childhood. He was a perfectionist with very high ideals and strongly held views and at the same time was adventurous, a risk-taker away from his professional flying and accident-prone from his early childhood. We learnt that he suffered with anxiety at times, but if he had any problems he hid them exceptionally well. He had broken up with his long term fiancée six months earlier very suddenly, but had since holidayed in the Greek Islands with close friends, skied in the Snowy Mountains and had received glowing reports about his work from Qantas. He was planning an American skiing holiday with his brother Richard and joined the Suburu WRX club. He spoke to us just before leaving on what was to be his last trip and had sounded fine. **Ruth.***

*It seems like despair and blackness were dumped on her. It must have been horrible for her and she couldn't control it, not even with medication. It would come and go regularly. I don't know what made it go away. I know it happened before two of the other suicide attempts. She died at the fifth attempt. **Susie.***

*My grief started many years before Bianca's death. Bianca was abused and bashed. She had mental health issues and was in mental torture with everything that was going on. **Tracey.***

When I needed to leave the house...

*When I needed to leave the house I kept up the illusion that things were okay and people avoided me. It was all too hard. **Anon.***

*People always ask me what I do. The days just pass and I don't really know what I do and I don't really know what they mean when they ask me what I do in the day. Is it 'How are you?' **Susie.***



People said...

*People said that she took drugs and now she is dead. She was a no good waster. What a waste. How selfish she was. I should have been a stricter parent. She mixed with the wrong sort of people. She lived in the moment with no worry of tomorrow. **Anon.***

*While we made undertakings to listen to each other we couldn't bear anyone else's grief. Some people would call and sound grief-stricken, and we would need to deflect that somehow. When Susie's first husband died she felt very hurt by some very unhelpful things some people said. She didn't want to go through all that again. **Bill.***

*I found it difficult to resume any kind of social life. I knew my friends were talking about me and I felt it was gossiping, but in hindsight they were just caring. I found it so hard when people did ask about him and so hard when they did not. I am not really close to these people anymore. I have learnt that life went on for others immediately and they don't want to spend a lot of time talking about really really hard things where there is not much they can say to make you feel better. If you have one person who you can talk with you are very lucky. **Hayley.***

*People used to say, with the best of intentions, that it would become easier with time; comfort that offered little hope in the hours, days and weeks that passed with no relief in sight. In retrospect and to some small degree the initial period after his death itself provided its own comfort as all attention and energy was focused on the dreadful loss. Years after, the dreadful loss is still ever-present, but without all the attention and energy. **Pete.***



When my first husband died [not from suicide], I felt sometimes supported by people and sometimes hurt by some of the unhelpful things they said. As it was an unexpected death I felt I had to help them manage their shock.

*With the second tragic death in the family in a relatively short time, I didn't feel I had the emotional strength to console others about this death. I discussed these concerns with my husband Bill and we decided we would be there for each other, our children and their families and that others would need to deal with their grief through other supports. The initial grief is so overwhelming, you sometimes don't want to live yourself and there is just nothing to give to others. **Susie.***

*Her boyfriend's mother said Bianca killed herself because she had a mother like me. People who don't know the family have attacked me on Facebook about my parenting because I didn't rescue her all the time and I refused to participate in Bianca's lifestyle. **Tracey.***

I would like to have said to them...

*Still can't really answer that question to this day. **Adele.***

*Do not judge my parenting skills, whether or not I was strict enough parent. It hurts me to the core. I have persistent feelings of sadness daily and go through the motions of living but I am haunted daily by what has happened. I will never get over this but I will learn to live with it. The generations to come will hear the legend, the stories and all its sadness, how it has affected me, their parents and the decisions that will be made about their futures. The sheer feeling of panic that this would happen again. **Anon.***

*Bianca couldn't be truthful to people outside the family and say, 'I wasn't able to look after Halle and she was taken away.' While people could see how she lived they didn't know the full story. Bianca lived a violent, drug addicted, raunchy lifestyle.... Bianca knew my reasons for not rescuing her. I had been doing it for fifteen or sixteen years. We weren't surprised when Bianca died; it seemed inevitable. I understand Bianca's reasons. **Tracey.***



Tidying up your relative's life

There was no will left. Bills had to be paid, funeral paid, goods sold and given away. Anon.

I chose to push for an inquiry into my son's death only because of claims by his friends and colleagues saying he was bullied and harassed. When the military did conduct the inquiry it was fourteen months later. There were no 'surprises' in the report. Belinda.

Susie dealt with loose ends as she had the emotional energy to do so. She took time from work to do these things. Bill.

I'm the only one running around doing all the organising with the banks, Aurora, Telstra, celebrant, funeral home, cemetery, Coroner, Centrelink, TAFE, her son's school, selling her car, getting her debts dissolved, talking to her doctors and counsellor... working like a slave cleaning out her house, taking orders, being blamed for anything and everything, freezing at the markets at 6 am for six months to get money to pay for the funeral. Keri.

Settlement of the Estate was difficult and protracted. At the end of two years it was still incomplete, but we knew downsizing the family home was necessary. Again, providence, Hobart and an understanding agent saw I was alright. I have been in the then-new house ever since, with wonderful neighbours, neighbourhood and facilities. Rosanna.

Meeting at our son Richard's house in Sydney with our daughter Helen, we sat in the lounge surrounded by Matthew's possessions. How I hated that day. I'm sure we all did, but in the midst of my tears I remember saying how awful it was - all I had were things: not the warmth, love and fun that was Matthew! I hated all the business matters and cried whenever we were in offices and had to show Matthew's death certificate. It felt a huge invasion of his privacy that we had to show and look anew each time, at the manner of his death. Ruth.

They think I was a bad mother? Who made all the funeral arrangements, paid the bills? Who was cleaning her flat? Tracey.



Calls from people asking for the person...

*She was a big spender, all the shops loved her, and she was keeping hairdressers, beauticians, clothes shops, restaurants, hotels, bars going at full throttle. Some wanted to order things from her and I couldn't tell them to ring Heaven for their orders. They stopped sending her special offers. Gradually it all died down. When people asked me about her, I had to tell them that she is no longer with us, that she has died. **Anon.***

No-one ever asks how they died...

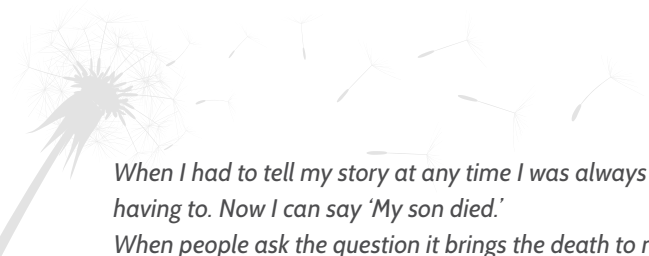
*NO. If I am telling someone my story I always say that Ben suicided, but no-one then says 'Well how did he do it?' Sometimes I would like them to ask. **Adele.***

*In the years following Louis' death I did tell some people that it was suicide and I found that I usually had to then look after the person I was telling; this seemed far too much for me. Now, if the context permits and I trust the person, I say he died of depression. **Hayley.***

*One person who knew how Hally died started quizzing my sister for details and she was really upset because the woman didn't even say she was sorry that Hally had died. **Jacinta.***

When someone asks how many children I have, what do I say?

*I find that I answer that question differently depending on my mood and the situation. If it's someone I am getting to know and I know they will find out the story eventually I usually tell it quite early in the relationship. If it's just a casual question from someone I sometimes just say I have a twenty-nine year old son who lives with me and leave it at that. The question itself upsets me inside because I remember how proudly I used to say 'I have three sons.' **Adele.***



When I had to tell my story at any time I was always waiting for a point for not having to. Now I can say 'My son died.'

When people ask the question it brings the death to mind. There's a process. Soon after my son's death, every time I was asked how many children I have, I was precipitated into a place of pain and confusion. In that space I hadn't developed the skills to answer that question yet. All I was aware of was his absence.

*Now I say I have four and depending on the context I may tell people my son died, or not. If they take the conversation further then I may share more detail. **Ann.***

*When people ask me how many children I have I don't explain, I leave one off; I don't want to go through it all again. **Anon.***

*When Penny died I found this very difficult. Because I was travelling constantly I was meeting new people all the time. Most times I said I had two children (instead of three) and felt dreadful denying Penny's existence. **Dilys.***

*When people ask me about my siblings, sometimes I am honest but sometimes say I have two brothers instead of three. Now the years have passed and I say that we lost him ten years ago people are usually sympathetic rather than inquisitive. **Hayley.***

Sometimes I feel as though...

*I don't want to keep living. **Adele.***

*The memory of Rowan my son can become a little detached but the portal never goes away. The intensity of the grief can still occur so I'm scared to go back to that terrible day. **Ann.***

The voice of my daughter is always around me. What would she say about things that are going on right now; things she will never experience or see that have happened since her death. We still had so much to share together, but her choices had made her life too difficult for her to continue. Sometimes I feel as though she never existed. What was it all for, educating her, raising her, years



*of modelling, hairdressing, driving, veterinary nursing, gaming tuition, music lessons, church camps, guides, tennis lessons, culinary arts tuition, nail art, beauty treatments, hospitality training, coffee making. She had it all and then went on a bender and killed herself. **Anon.***

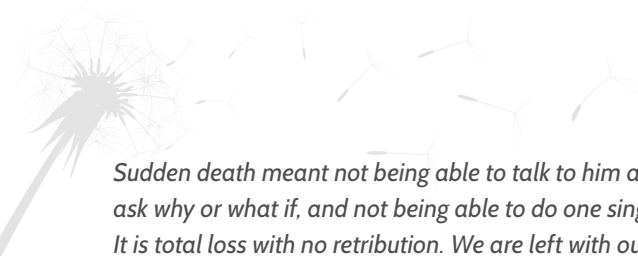
*We need as individuals to have more compassion, more caring. I try and have compassion. At times there is none from the family. There is such complexity. We all take a different pathway. **Belinda.***

*There is no easy way back from here. My sister made a decision to end her life. With the suicide of my sister the beauty and innocence of life was destroyed. Nothing really has any relevance any more. There is no excitement left, just sadness and dismay. **David.***

*After Penny's death I seriously wondered whether I could survive. I did. I also know that this bad patch will pass and I will survive Daniel's death. I may not be able to go back to work again but I hope I can find a way of making something purposeful and positive out of this tragedy. **Dilys.***

*Thinking about his death and imagining his dark times is too much. I feel so helpless with these thoughts. **Hayley.***

*I feel very alone now, like something is missing from my life or I have forgotten something important. There is no one who really knows me anymore so I work hard at being self reliant. My relationship with my brother recently has become closer and he has apologised for his treatment of me and for the first time in my life he said 'I love you' late last year. My focus on importance of family and my fear of losing someone important has shifted to him and he has the same new focus as well. I will live near him when I get older and retire. We will support each other now as mother has also pushed him away and is not interested in his life and activities. **Keri.***



*Sudden death meant not being able to talk to him anymore. Not being able to ask why or what if, and not being able to do one single thing to avoid his death. It is total loss with no retribution. We are left with our thoughts and memories, and the thoughts of others. Some days it's even possible to wonder whether he had actually been alive at all. **Pete.***

*I believe that I am slowly moving on and although time, family and friends have clearly helped, our monthly support group meetings have assisted both Ruth and me incredibly. It has been, and continues to be, a place of sharing with others who sadly understand only too well the feelings of each other. Our group is wonderfully facilitated and the ease of communication brings release. We support one another as our emotions move up and down, meet those newly bereaved who are struggling so hard and have gradually realised we are no longer in that place. **Robert.***

*I really don't know how we all survived that first year, but the support of family and friends and the Suicide Bereavement Support Group was incredible. We were open from the beginning about the way of Matthew's death and I still haven't felt anger, just terrible distress at the thought of how lonely he must have been to end his life. Time has lessened the terrible anguish, but our lives will never be the same. **Ruth.***

*For the first six months it was like driving blindfold on a bitumen road with potholes. I knew the potholes were there but I never knew when I was going to hit one because I was blindfolded. I never knew how deep it would be or whether it would take twelve hours or a week to get out of it. Then I would land in another one. **Susie.***

I feel sorry for Halle. I feel sorry about the way people react to Halle whose parent suicided. If they knew Bianca, they whisper; and we hear her name spoken. People find it challenging. They don't know what to say to Halle. They put their adult feelings onto a child. Children are more pragmatic. Now in public, Halle's more silent about her mother's death. At day care they told her to stop talking about mummy because it was scaring the other children. The carer looked very nervous when she told me. I said to her, 'The little girl Halle was



playing with wasn't scared, she's known her for years. The child's parents know how to handle that. It didn't scare the children, it scared you. If you'd let the conversation go it would soon have finished.' **Tracey.**

When no-one wants to talk or hear about...

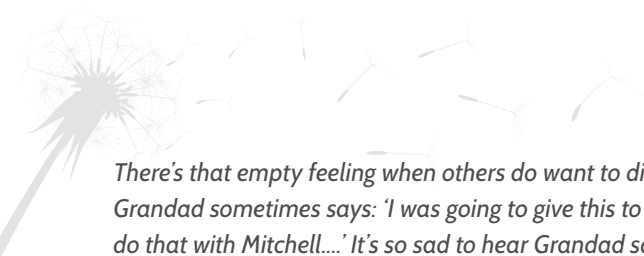
People still offer their opinion of what her problems were and what exactly happened on that day. When no one wants to hear about it I go to group therapy once a month. I find it very healing to see to others going through the same thing. I light a candle, say a prayer, write in a journal and try to remember the better times. **Anon.**

I don't have that problem. Having my granddaughter Halle living with me has given me the opportunity to share my daughter with her daughter on a daily basis. People move on and often they don't have the chance to recall a lot of memories and to share them. I don't have photos of Bianca around. Mummy's a rainbow, with bright colours. Halle draws them. We went to Cradle Mountain and the first thing we saw was a rainbow. Halle said, 'Mummy's here too.' We talk about Mummy's job, wonder what mummy would wear, talk about how they made cup cakes and burnt them. Halle takes Mummy's handbag about with her and sometimes wears Mummy's tie from MacDonalds to school. **Tracey.**

My family and friends...

My friends and family have always been wonderful and I couldn't really ask for anything more from them. **Adele.**

My friends don't mention it much, although some of them are having similar problems in their own families. My family will never be the same. There will always be a feeling of sadness where there was once great joy. Our lives are much duller, less colourful without you. Even though you gave us such heartache. People don't understand that Christmas will never be the same, a time with a now-fractured family. The ghost of what happened lives on. We try to make the best of things, but it will always be there: the sadness of a life gone wrong, what should have been; the feeling of someone missing; the gap that will always be there. **Anon.**



*There's that empty feeling when others do want to discuss him. Mitchell's Grandad sometimes says: 'I was going to give this to Mitchell'; or 'I was going to do that with Mitchell....' It's so sad to hear Grandad say those things because it means Mitch isn't here to spend time with Grandad or anyone. Also in hindsight no-one could have known that Mitch wasn't going to be here for that to happen. It's a difficult road for us with the family. If I bring Mitchell up, the conversation flows from that moment. People seem to feel uncertain when they mention Mitchell and seem to want to know how to behave and what to say. I get that, yet I just wish it was easier for them to bring him up in conversation because I want him to be remembered by everyone. I know I'm selfish wanting everyone to remember him and talk about him yet that's part of honouring his memory. Within friendships, the people I expected would listen are there for me and have been my strength. **Belinda.***

*Friends of Susie's daughter come to meals. We encourage her daughter's friends to look after each other. **Bill.***

After Penny's death, I quit my teaching job in Korea and went to England to see my mother and sister. My mother was never very good at showing emotions, and didn't even mention Penny's name once. I can understand it now. It seems the closer you are to someone, the harder it is to express emotions and communicate. After all those closest are going through their own emotional stuff.

*Sarah has lost her two siblings. She's suddenly an only child. I fear for her. She seems to be doing okay at the moment and ready to start work again but I will keep worrying. **Dilys.***



Family wise I feel quite alone and this saddens me greatly. I have to look elsewhere for support and comfort and in their eyes I shouldn't even do that. What I should do is tough it out and stop feeling sorry for myself because there is always someone worse off than me. GREAT HELP.

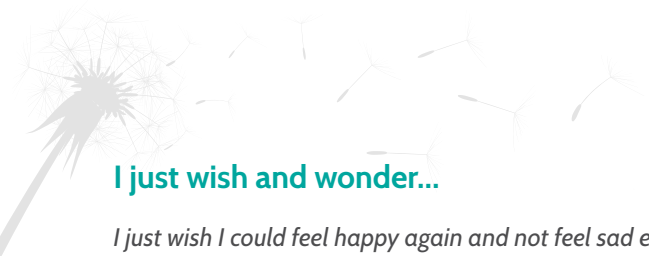
*None of the family ever asked or asks about Ian, it's like he never existed. Makes me sad but there is nothing I can do about it. Besides they don't care about me so why would they care about Ian or my other two kids? **Greg.***

*My extended family do not ever mention my brother to me. I guess they are like most people and do not know what to say. I wish people would mention him; he was real and had such a good heart. I now have an incredibly supportive and sensitive partner who will always listen. I wish my brother had met my partner, I think they would have got along well. My parents talk about him with me and it is really special when we have a good conversation about him. **Hayley.***

I've been wishing, hoping and pining that my family would give me support; with a phone call or a regular visit, not just every six months or so. People rarely call now to see how I'm doing, to ask if I'm alright. I could do with more support but they just don't 'get it'. They say to me 'Why don't you call in sometime?' But I just feel they should be calling in on me as I haven't got the energy. When I confronted my brother he said 'Sometimes when people are grieving they send out the wrong messages'... and he 'fears my hostility'.

*Another brother says 'We've all got our own issues' and 'You're very hard to talk to'... and 'We've never been that sort of family' meaning we've never been a touchy-feely family. I want to be 'touched and felt' to ease my pain. Without it I feel isolated. **Jacinta.***

*What still bothers me is why do others assume we are not affected? The focus is on the mother and child of the deceased, and rightly so but siblings can have a complicated, deep-seated and complex relationship dating from birth and expected to last into old age and death; closer than any lover, child or parent. Our sorrow and pain is not taken seriously by other members of the family, yet we are expected to look after everyone else. Pain becomes more intense and damaging if it is not acknowledged. You've lost your past, your future, your shared secrets and expectations going forward. We are the 'invisible' mourners. **Keri.***



I just wish and wonder...

*I just wish I could feel happy again and not feel sad every time I see a mother and daughter together. I wish I didn't think about this every day and know that you are at peace. I wish I felt zest for life; nothing seems to matter much anymore. Some days I muddle by, the hopes gone. Other members of the family try to overcompensate to make up to me for your failings, but none of them can compensate my loss of you. **Anon.***

*What does my husband need, what do I need? It's said 'we all grieve in different ways' - that's not the point. We say it but we need to do something about it... going that extra mile to make a difference. **Belinda.***

*The fog has lifted, reality has set in and I'm not doing well, trapped in a nightmare I can never wake up from and seriously concerned I will go mad. **Dilys.***

*I found it helpful to make a big frame of pictures of Louis' life. It helped me remember the fun we had together when we were children. It also showed me that he had such a full life, lots of interests, friends and his appreciation of nature. Looking at these photos helped me to remember him when he was alive, rather than his cold, dead body. I love it when I dream about him because he is always alive and talking. I love the days following these dreams. I feel he is with me. **Hayley.***



What happens about the Coroner's findings?

*The coroner's office was very slow and they didn't tell me what was found in her bloodstream. Just that she was a regular drug user and that had killed her. They didn't know if she had drowned or not. It could be this that or the other or all of the above. Perhaps it was better to have a vague sort of answer and blame it all on a bit of this and that. Her bad lifestyle choices. Her party girl ways. **Anon.***

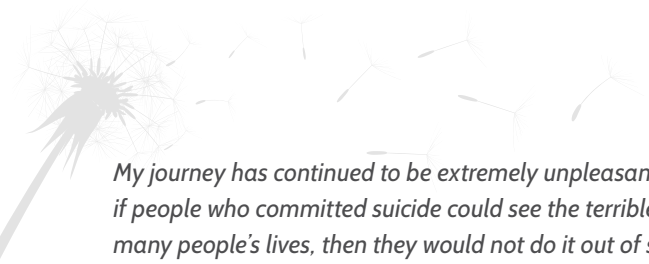
*Tell the Coroner's office you want to pick up the Coroner's finding in person and ask them to ring you when it's imminent. Otherwise it arrives in the letterbox, unannounced, in a standard government envelope and is a huge shock if you are alone and not prepared. Try to organise someone to be with you when you open it. If you're unhappy with anything in the finding don't hesitate to write to the Coroner's office immediately to request changes. They do listen and I had some changes made. **Jacinta.***

Some days...

*Some days I just think about the Christmases with my daughter, the grandchildren I never met, the hopes and dreams we shared together, that will never be fulfilled on her part. The voice of my daughter is always around me: What would she say about things that are going on right now; things she will never experience or see that have happened since her death. We still had so much to share together, but her choices had made her life too difficult for her to continue. **Anon.***

*I've been seeing a psychologist because I've always been a giving person but I felt as though I had nothing left to give. I was all 'gived-out'. The psychologist said that I must give anything I had left to the important people in my life: my husband and my daughter. I needed someone to tell me I was a giving person and what I needed to do. **Belinda.***

*I had to train my thinking to focus on his life, his special qualities and the time we spent together. **Hayley.***



*My journey has continued to be extremely unpleasant and I feel even more that if people who committed suicide could see the terrible damage they did to so many people's lives, then they would not do it out of sheer guilt. That sounds harsh but that's the way it is. What they leave behind is harsher. It's the easy way out and just makes everything worse forever. I'm still in flight or fight mode all the time and dream of escaping overseas or winning a house on the Gold Coast and disappearing up there...ha ha! **Keri.***

*Even so, for me, post traumatic stress and depression still lurked. So I joined things! I bushwalked, played royal tennis, attended concerts with friends, sang in a choir and started a degree. Not all at once! These things enriched my life and brought me in touch with the vast variety of people who live here in Hobart. **Rosanna.***

*Now, I still have things that upset me and debilitate my energy, yet I feel more that I know what's going to do it. **Susie.***

Returning to work

*The workplace has become a hard cold place with not much provision made for grieving mothers having a bad day! I have found it very difficult to work on many occasions. But for financial reasons I have to keep trying. **Adele.***

*I had to look at my life: I thought: 'Life is not as it was before, and I have a right for it not to be.' I haven't been able to go back to work. I was offered another position at work, but then it was business as usual for people and the nightmares began. I decided to change and find a pathway that I can cope with. There are so many who can't do that because of their circumstances. **Belinda.***



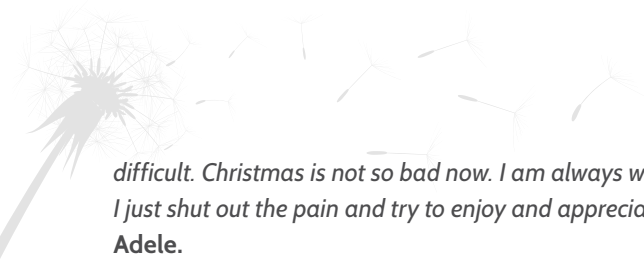
*Returning to work was difficult, it made me strangely nervous but it was so helpful to be busy and have something else to think about and have some routine and normality. I was at work when I got the news and it was strange being back there. I felt like everything was happening around me because my mind was so scattered. I now wonder how effective I was in the work place at that time. Two of my six year- old students arrived in the classroom on my first day back, struggling to carry a potted rose plant between them. They dropped it in front of me, looked at each other, then one said: 'This is for your dead brother.' Their mums didn't know where to look but I loved it. **Hayley.***

*I completed my visual arts degree and went to graduation in August. It was the proudest day of my life and I wouldn't have missed it for anything because of what I went through. This year I have managed to scrape through a masters degree for teaching secondary art full time on top of work. I had a solo exhibition late last year and also managed to get work in other exhibitions despite my workload. One year more to survive and I can hardly wait to get a teaching art job. I refuse to give up my own dreams. **Keri.***

*I returned to work as soon as my youngest was able to enter childcare, which he did at six weeks. In the early years at work my situation was well understood and treated with compassion. After days when I just could not face the world, I would apply for sick leave for a couple of days already taken - I know these requests never reached the leave clerk! I was assured I was supported. At home I had wonderful neighbours who called by and friends and family who stayed. I called them my 'babysitters' - I regarded myself as the one in need of sitting! **Rosanna.***

The first year...

Now it's twelve years since Ben died and seventeen years since Adam died so the first year is really a bit of a blur now. I did anything I could do to make myself feel better including trying some recreational drugs, drinking too much, going out partying, casual sex and spending money I shouldn't have. Birthdays are still difficult days, especially leading up to the date. Milestone birthdays are more



difficult. Christmas is not so bad now. I am always with my family so I think now I just shut out the pain and try to enjoy and appreciate the ones I have with me.

Adele.

For the first anniversary of my son's death I prepared a ritual thinking that the whole family might participate or be a part of it. However my other children had their own plans and did something else.

My ritual included three questions and answers which I planned to read out at the moment we chose. Those questions were:

- 1. What do I want to leave behind?*
- 2. What do I hope for?*
- 3. What is it that I am grateful for?*

I went outside at the time of my son's death one year before and started to read out the responses I had written. My husband joined me a little later. He thought what I'd written was beautiful and as I was preparing to burn the pieces of paper [as part of my ritual] he asked whether I had kept a copy. I had already done so.

*We burnt the pieces of paper and placed the ashes into a Thai garden urn. We played 'Whispering Hope', some music that was important to us. Then we placed a plant in the top of the urn and put it in a special place in the garden. He had a passionate love of fire so we then lit a fire in his memory. **Ann.***

*The first year people brought flowers and visited but after that it was all forgotten. Now it's like you were never here. On birthdays I think about how old you would have been and what you would be doing now. Christmas was a time of great joy; the music, the decorating and the food bring back all the memories. So I walk alone, but your voice and being are always there for me. **Anon.***

On Christmas Day, we were all together in Melbourne. I came into the room and my daughter was crying. She said 'I miss him [Mitchell],' and I said 'I'm so sorry.' Normally she would be off doing things. Mitchell would normally have been there but he's not now. Now my daughter feels so responsible for everything.



*If she gets sad then she feels it makes her mother and father sad and she can't do that because she feels responsible for her parents. **Belinda.***

*With the first anniversary of our daughter's death approaching, we have planned a trip to Europe. We will rewrite the narrative this time. We won't be at home for Susie's birthday, which has always been a family event, or the anniversary of her daughter's death. Next time we'll be here but it won't be so hard. **Bill.***

*Over the ensuing months the pain of loss and dismay only gathered momentum and today, a year later, the pain of losing you continues to escalate to an alarmingly deep and destructive rate. **David.***

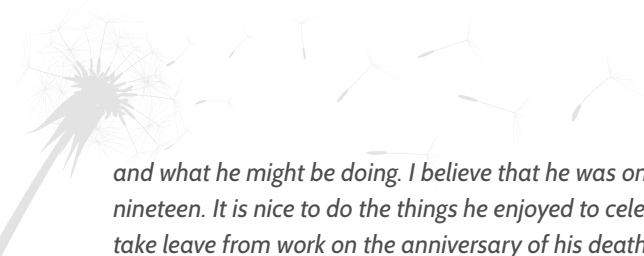
After Penny's death, I went traveling overseas and when I came back to Australia I moved to Tasmania for six months. I was badly depressed, unable to work, broke and suicidal. Then I moved to New South Wales. I found 'Compassionate Friends', a grief group, and for a time I was alright. I travelled around Australia living in four different states, constantly moving residence. I mostly wanted to be alone and found solace in driving the open, empty highways. I was a lost soul aimlessly wandering.

After nine years I was coping well with Penny's death, then my eldest child Daniel, attempted suicide and never regained consciousness.

*Naturally I can't avoid the grieving process but now, after Daniel's death, it is different. I don't really know why but I seem to be coping a lot better. There is less confusion, less fighting against it. It is easier accepting and going with the pain. I give myself permission to take it easy, to do the things which bring me comfort: gardening, kayaking, going to the suicide meetings and walking the dog. I refrain from, without guilt, social situations, the city and going to work. I try to avoid getting stressed and tired. I take life day by day. **Dilys.***

The first year was so hard. I could have told anyone the exact amount of months, weeks and days he had been dead. I had lots of strange dark thoughts during this period which I had to train myself out of thinking about.

On his birthday I think about the birthday celebrations we used to have for him. I do not think it is helpful to work out how old he would be if he was alive



and what he might be doing. I believe that he was only supposed to live to age nineteen. It is nice to do the things he enjoyed to celebrate his birthday. I always take leave from work on the anniversary of his death. One year I did try to work and ended up being very teary. **Hayley.**

For months after Hally died I kept dreaming she died over and over in different ways. After more than a year of constant dreaming I sort of had a 'mental convulsion' and said to myself 'That's enough... how many times does she have to die?' They're not so constant now but they still come back sometimes. I dream that she has died, and then she pops up alive, and then just as I'm waking up my semi-conscious brain asks 'is she really dead?' The answer is always 'yes' and I am jolted awake, into the trauma of reality that she has really gone. **Jacinta.**

I certainly had extreme ups and downs over the period. Strangely it was pregnancy and a newborn that kept me going in the first couple of years. But this imposed mode of protection for me was not ideal for the other two children who had to struggle with the incomprehensible fact that Dad was dead and not coming back. They have memories of a crowd of hushed and concerned relatives, some from the other side of the world. 'Mum' was lost to them in the well of her own grief, then there was fuss when their baby brother was born.

Rosanna.

I would have said that I knew Matthew well, but clearly that was not the case and I relived his life so many times looking for clues as to what had happened. I went through the pregnancy, birth and his whole life to find where I had gone wrong because the blame and guilt wouldn't leave me. I became hyper anxious about my loved ones and if unable to contact them immediately I had them also dead through suicide. **Ruth.**

What I would say to someone-else in this situation is...

Your loved one/s passed are surrounded with peace and love. I wish for you, the same, until you meet again. **Adele.**



It does get easier as time goes on but it is always there and it never leaves you. The most unexpected things may set off upsetting feelings for you. **Anon.**

One of the most important things is being able to attend meetings. This grief crosses everything. It gives a commonality that I would give my life not to have with these people, but I feel safer with them. I can look at these people and I think 'I feel so sorry for you. I would take your pain away if I could.' **Belinda.**

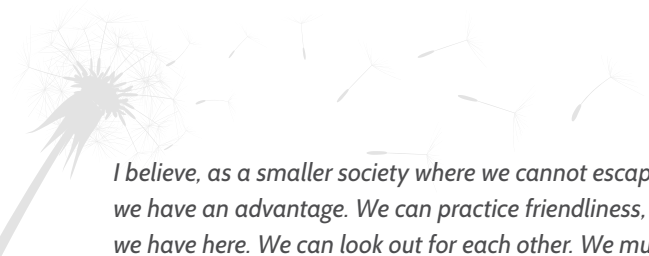
The grieving process is so chaotic, it changes from day to day. One minute I'm fine then I'm not fine. Sometimes without warning everything comes flooding back and I don't know what prompts it. **Dilys.**

Now it has been ten years since my brother died. I would say to someone else in the situation that I am so sorry for the pain your person was suffering and I am so sorry for your loss. Please talk to me when you feel ready. **Hayley.**

You need to be bold and pro-active; you only get one chance. It's important to do what you want to do. It's good to know all the stuff about how the funeral home works. Take someone with you as support when talking to doctors after the death in relation to any injuries, and any discussions about the deceased's mental health history. Someone told me to take the mental health notes with a grain of salt because notes often contain unhelpful conjecture. I needed someone to stand by with a very large bag of salt grains while I read the mental health reports as they were extremely traumatic. **Jacinta.**

After the loss, it is important to support yourself. Don't shut down or let go of your own life. Honour your personal commitments and plans you have made for yourself as they will define you and give you a focus. They are a valuable way of working through non-supported grief. I was doing a degree in Art (when my sister died). My tutors helped me through by accepting artworks about death and encouraging me not to give up. **Keri.**

Thinking of memories (which is good) is not dwelling on the loss (which is not good). Having photos and possessions around, and using those possessions as intended, is a friendly reminder; moving on with life while keeping them part of it. **Pete.**



I believe, as a smaller society where we cannot escape from people we know, we have an advantage. We can practice friendliness, compassion and love what we have here. We can look out for each other. We must treasure and preserve it.

Rosanna.

Bianca was faced with the choice of living with her 'demons' for the rest of her life or finally finding some peace. She chose peace. That's how I see her choice that night. **Tracey.**

I wish I could change...

Everything. **Adele.**

I wish I could change having to think about this every day for the rest of my life, the effect this has on other members of my family and the aftermath for years to come. Having to tell the next generation of this terrible event. **Anon.**

The challenge is with my remaining child. Her life has been thrown into so much turmoil. I lost lots of my daughter with Mitch's death. It's hard being a Mama and doing the right thing by my child who's not here and to let the child who is here know she's loved. **Belinda.**

I wished I could go back to a few days before he took his life and take all his pain and give it to myself. Could I have done more for him? Did I do enough? It goes on and on. **Greg.**

I wish I had known that my brother was in such a dark place and I wish I could have helped to ease his suffering. **Hayley.**

I wish people would mention Hally's name on Christmas cards, but hardly anyone did. The words they wrote all sounded mechanical as if they had just ticked me off their list. They said they were just wishing Happy Christmas to those that were here and Hally wasn't here. They just don't get it. The best card I got was from a friend who said 'Thinking of Hally this Christmas with love.' How hard is it to put that? **Jacinta.**



When I feel really down I wonder how I will keep living...

*Yes, but I always figure that my family has been through enough already, that stops me from feeling too sorry for myself. **Adele.***

*'I feel such tension over my body. I feel so sad for you and what you went through and wonder if I will feel any better tomorrow.' There are days of sadness that this has happened but I try to sustain myself with humour and of days gone by, tempered with the happiness she brought me. I try to not dwell on the reasons and people that drove her to the brink. She is forever present in my mind, just absent at the moment. **Anon.***

*You read things – Take care of yourself, but how to do it? I need to be thinking, paying bills, but often I'm not thinking. It's a wonder that people survive themselves. **Belinda.***

*The trouble with grieving is...there is no map. You are thrust into a world of chaos and confusion, not knowing how to act or how to be. Anger, guilt, remorse, sadness emerge like tempests. It's a rollercoaster ride never knowing what to expect or how to handle the intense feelings. It is all so devastating, so all-consuming. How long will it last? What is the future? How do I survive in a normal world with normal people when I feel anything but normal? **Dilys.***

*Thinking about his death and imagining his dark times is too much. I feel so helpless with these thoughts. **Hayley.***

*I lost all creativity. Cooking and gardening were of no interest and I was unable to write or listen to music. In fact music is still a difficult one for me. I find this strange as it wasn't as though Matthew loved classical music, but going to a concert was unbearable for me as it unleashed so much of my emotions. **Ruth.***

*If you've been suicidal you know that peace: 'There is a way I can stop this pain.' Some days when I get out of bed in the morning I think 'I could cope with it in this way; or there are other ways.' Once you've been there you never really step away. But I can't do that. My 'ex' and my daughter have taken away that option. I can't do it now. My ex committed suicide on the night Bianca brought her son home from hospital. She never recovered from his suicide. **Tracey.***



What I have learned from my experience is...

Bereavement needs to be integrated and redefined. **Ann.**

Cherish every day with your loved ones, it may end too soon. Never trust teenagers, they will never tell you the truth of what is really going on. You have to be strong to survive this and keep your dignity. I never thought this would happen to me, but it has and I must deal with it as best I can and try to get on with life. It is getting easier but there is never a day that goes by when I don't think about what has happened. **Anon.**

There's been so much change. It's enough to lose someone by suicide, the biggest catastrophic thing that can change everything. Everything changes: the colour of the sky changes. There's an avalanche of change that occurs. I was a private person and still am. But people now know things I didn't want them to know.

Belinda.

My sister's decision to end her life is with me constantly, it never leaves. I think about the devastation, and I think about opportunities lost. I've come to understand that I will never understand why she chose death over life. I've tried to understand this but I never will. I will never comprehend as to why. **David.**

With Daniel's death it felt so absurdly surreal - too horrendous to contemplate. The thought of surviving the next eight years seemed unimaginable. I was angry and determined this time it would be different. I wasn't going to grieve.

I know now I can't avoid grieving. Crying is healing. All I can do is go with it, cruise with each day and be nurturing to myself. There are things I have learnt from the grief I felt for Penny. I don't have the same expectations of people around me and I don't get so angry when they make insensitive remarks or seem not to care. It is hard to stay strong when people proudly talk about their children's achievements. A knife turns inside me every time. Can I feel the same pride? Since Daniel's death three things have helped me survive: building a free-stone wall; being with Molly, Daniel's eleven year old Kelpie Cross; and our suicide group. It is so comforting to be with others who have faced the same tragedy. **Dilys.**



*If I had my time over I'd like to have someone with me in the hospital as an advocate, helping me talk to the doctors and helping me to ask the right questions. **Jacinta.***

Bad things happen to good people (the depression my brother suffered leading to his death).

Suicide is not high on the political agenda and it should be. Suicide is much more common than people realise.

That our culture is not skilled in supporting each other with grief. We are lucky if we have one person to support us.

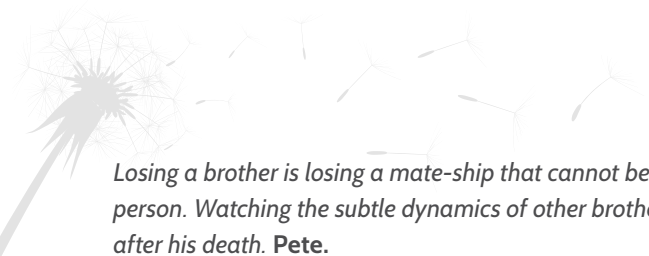
*It concerns me that the media do not talk about suicide to try and protect potential copycats. I think there is a need to talk about it because it is a huge issue that deeply affects so many people. **Hayley.***

I wish people wouldn't say, 'At least you have the memories.' The memories are too painful; they are teasers to make me not forget. It is too sad to remember. If I could forget then I wouldn't be hurt.

*I wish people would acknowledge my loss and grief, and not avoid me and not exclude me from conversations. **Jacinta.***

In hind-sight, the biggest lessons learned for recovery is that it is a journey that must be endured, the importance of seeking support and encouragement from others who understand what you are going through, but then to also know when the time comes to move forward and live your life again.

*I 'count'...I know I do...BECAUSE...we were only fifteen months apart in age, I'm the big sister, the eldest kid, the one that all the responsibility falls back on - that's my job. **Keri.***



*Losing a brother is losing a mate-ship that cannot be fulfilled by any other person. Watching the subtle dynamics of other brothers made this apparent after his death. **Pete.***

*Twenty years is a good chunk of any life – but the twenty years, which started on 3rd August 1990 with the discovery of the death of my husband by suicide, has exposed me to so many emotional extremes. I will never be the same person who lived in Scotland or rural NSW and then moved with optimism to Tasmania in 1986. In a sense, life started again in 1990. I was lucky to have a background of a secure and happy life up till that moment and this helped me through. Now, I have finally reached a plateau where I feel the twenty-year journey can be reviewed. **Rosanna.***

*The important thing is to be conscious not to take on other people's grief. It's important because you need all your resources to look after yourself and your family. **Susie.***

*Community is important. There is a strong community around her [Halle]: neighbours, other who've been there before and after Bianca died; people who would drop anything to come and get her. A family isn't necessarily a mummy and daddy. Sometimes it's a nanny and a big fat black cat. **Tracey.***



Now...

*Now I wish I had been there when you died. No one should die alone. I wish I had been harder on you. Perhaps I could have stopped you destroying your life with drugs. **Anon.***

*The first time I smiled after Mitchell died, I was in the garden doing something and I felt so guilty because I was thinking of something else. Our family home has the most amazing memories but one day I woke up and it was just bricks and mortar. It's all right to think: 'I can't do what I used to do.' So we moved. One day I was walking in the garden of our new place and there he was, playing his guitar. **Belinda.***

*There has been no pressure to 'move on' or 'that's wrong' in relation to how we manage things. By managing to have no outside pressure it's easier for us to deal with things with each other. We keep checking with each other because we understand that things might change. For example we have discussed staying in the house and are content to stay for now yet we continue to check with each other. **Bill.***



Individual perspectives

Where were you God?

*Where were you God
When my sparrow fell*

*Where were You
when my sweet fig shriveled,
on its barren branch*

*Where were You
When it trembled,
swung tenuously,
breaking this withered bough
that bore
yet cannot bear
its twisting weight*

*Where are You
Now all the lilies of my field
Lie wilted*

*Are You
The bitter tears
that wet the furrows
of my keening soul*

*Were You
...perhaps within
The falling sparrow
The trembling fig
The barren branch*

Are You

This empty silence

Into which these

Falling questions

Echo...echo...echo ...

Ann

References from the Holy Bible used in the poem

Luke 12:7

Matthew 10:29-31

Matthew 6:25-34



Dear Antony

*Six months have passed since you left me that night
I walk past your bedroom door morning and night
Hoping you will open it and say "Mum I'm alright"
It doesn't happen; one day maybe you might*

*I lay awake at night with tears in my eyes
Trying to find an answer, asking myself "WHY"
People say I'm brave and strong
But that's not true; it's just so wrong
My heart is breaking as each day goes by*

*With you my son gone; all I do now is cry
I wait for your texts on my phone
I check for messages when I get home
Nothing, emptiness, I feel so alone*

*I never thought I would say I miss your loud music
And yelling at you to "Turn it down before I lose it"
Or ticking you off for drinking and smoking in your room
I just miss having you my son around listening to tunes*



*I watch the videos of you fishing and listen to your voice
I go through the motions each day, there's not much choice
I'm keeping your memory alive while trying to understand why you died
I watch your montage and listen to your music; it's the only way I can survive*

*There's many times I wish I could run away and hide
No matter where I go though, these feelings stay inside
My heart is empty and broken, my only child is gone
It's doesn't seem right; it's so dreadfully wrong*

*You can explain to me one day
Why it had to happen this way
I love you my son and miss you every day
My only child, my Antony, my friend, I'll always love you
so cruelly taken from me that night, I never said goodbye to you*

*Someone told me last week that you are still with me
You told her to pass a message onto me
She told me that you are now at peace and have no more pain
You are happy and need me to move on and be happy again*

*I'm not ready to let you go Antony; I need you here with me
I'm sorry for holding onto you and not letting you go free
Your one wish was to be at the shack so you could be with your grandfather
One day when I am ready I will place you there with him but I am still your
mother*

*So you will have to be patient a bit longer
And when I feel the time is right and I'm a bit stronger
Free you will be, until we meet again my son*

**Your Mum
Michele.**



Two sisters

*...and then there were two
two sisters
the same
but different
one short one tall
one fat one thin
one happy one sad

oh! So very sad
two sisters
the same
but different
and then there was one...*

Keri.



Letting others know...

Tell me

Don't tell me everything will be alright because it won't.

Don't tell me you know how I feel because you wouldn't have a clue

Don't tell me he's in a better place because he's not.

Don't tell me I'll get over it because I won't.

Don't tell me to move on because I can't.

Don't ask me how I am because I'll tell you and scare you off.

Don't leave his name off because I won't acknowledge you.

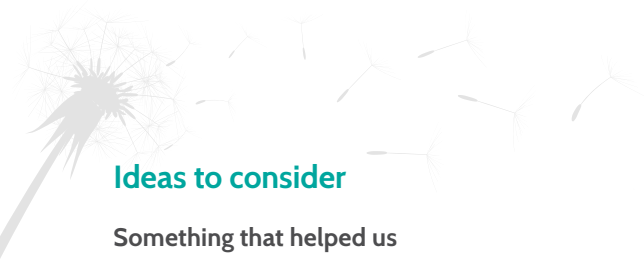
Don't tell me time heals all pain because it doesn't

*Tell me he's looking down on me and is with me all the time
and I'll feel some comfort.*

Greg.

Some ways we speak about a suicide death

*I hate it when people use the expression 'committed suicide'. It hurts me. They don't know the term comes from when it used to be a crime and people were thrown into jail if they didn't die. It perpetuates the taboo and myth around suicide. I just want them to use more updated language for example: 'died by suicide' or 'took their own life'. **Jacinta.***



Ideas to consider

Something that helped us

Susie and I had a talk and agreed on two things:

There is no such thing as a dumb question; life is already hard enough

We made a pact to be gentle with each other.

We didn't try to gloss over the difficulties with our daughter before she died.

As she came into the conversation, we talked about her. Sometimes it was sad, sometimes not so. We were honest with ourselves and each other about the way things were.

*We took the time to listen to each other even if we'd heard it before. **Bill.***

Two 'Awareness' or 'Mindfulness' tools

These two tools were helpful to me in the early years after Louis' death in assisting my mind and heart to rest a little. I still use them regularly.

The first is tuning into one's self, to complete self-awareness or mindfulness; and the second is focusing on your body and journaling. Sometimes they may be used together to great advantage.

Tuning-in to yourself

The tool of *tuning into the self* sounds simple yet from experience I can assure you it takes a great deal of practise to achieve. Here is one of the many ways you might go about it:

1. Look for ways to survive each day and each night: ask yourself what you need to do to be safe. Keep asking until an answer emerges. Carry out the answer if you think it's a good thing.
2. Try to 'allow' yourself to be however you are, if only for a moment. Examples of this may be feelings of anger, fear or tearfulness. Acknowledging to yourself just how you are feeling may have the effect



of calming and soothing your pent-up emotions or thoughts. Then if you need to be doing some other task, make an appointment with yourself to come back to the question or feeling later and sort it through. In such instances I find it useful to ask myself the question: 'What am I upset about?' rather than thinking general thoughts such as that it's about the death of your person or any other matter. The more specific your answer the more helpful it will be to your wellbeing.

Sometimes I wondered 'How can I survive this terrible sorrow for another moment?' Now, after years of practise, when I mentally and physically STOP and ask myself what am I thinking or where in my body I am feeling 'something' unusual, or nothing, my sensations and thoughts begin to settle. I've written below what I do for you to try.

Focusing on your body and journalling

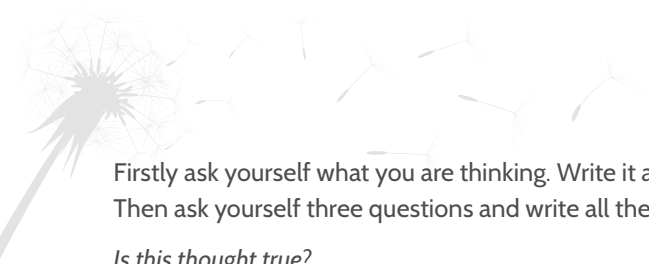
Ask yourself where in your body you are experiencing the terrible feelings and talk yourself thoroughly through how it actually feels. Check out other parts of your body for any other areas of pain or difference, or a sense of 'nothing' perhaps, and try the same process of describing to yourself just how each part in turn is feeling.

Keep checking your bodily sensations and describing them to yourself. Perhaps after a time you may notice that you are feeling a little 'easier'.

With thoughts that won't go away or keep returning try asking yourself, 'Is this true or might I be imagining or exaggerating?' If it's true, ask yourself if it's something you need to be thinking about again.

Ask yourself whether by continuing to agonize over some of these thoughts, you can make a difference to the death of your relative or whether it is helping you in some way?

Sometimes writing things down *or journalling* can help keep track of thoughts. (I find it helps my thinking and writing to use paper that is a 'comfortable' size to write my thoughts down and a pen that flows really well).



Firstly ask yourself what you are thinking. Write it all down.
Then ask yourself three questions and write all the answers:

Is this thought true?

Is it helpful to think about it?

Is this something I need to think through carefully?

If you answer 'yes' to any of these questions then allow time to write it all down to clarify your thoughts. If 'no' then try to replace that thought with something pleasant or different or constructive.

H.S.: I found these 'tools' to be very helpful following Louis' suicide, especially in 'alone' times. I still find them useful for many reasons. I hope you do too.



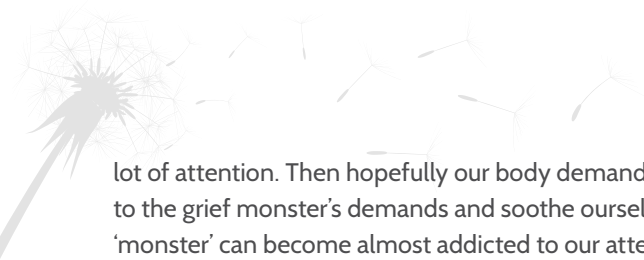
In conclusion

The most important reason for the collection of this personal information is to offer a place of refuge and comfort to people in the aftermath of a suicide death of someone close...a mental resting place for the person feeling whacked by the statement that 'suicide is completely preventable!', for example, when they were unable to prevent the death of their relative for whatever reason.

My task of editing these experiences of the contributors to this publication is so very moving. As I read them I have a sense of tingling in my body and a feeling that I am part of a select universe of sorrow and wretchedness that characterises the experience of many people who are grieving after the suicide of someone close to them. While my body is tingling from reading these tellings I feel a sense of acceptance in the worlds of others that seem similar to my own world since Louis' suicide. I have a sense of being uplifted by the sharing of the 'underside' of others' grief. Uplifted by the knowledge that while I struggle in the depths of my sadness, all of these people and many more are also struggling in their sadness. While my preference is that no one has to endure such grief, reading these stories broadens my self-centred perspective. My sadness feels soothed by the sharing and by the understanding that in my guilt and sense of inadequacy that I was not able to prevent my son's death-I am not alone in those thoughts and feelings.

During the early years after Louis' death when the pain of his suicide felt as though it was searing my soul, I searched for tools to help me live through the emotional and mental torment that 'survivors of suicide' are left with. In the 'Awareness and mindfulness tools' (page 54) are two of the tools I found useful in offering my mind a rest.

In conclusion, I want to say that grief, in my lived experience and from talking with others and reading their stories and experiencings, does not give up on us easily. Once we have 'caught it', it blossoms instantly into a full blown 'grief monster' that seems to only sit quietly after we give it a



lot of attention. Then hopefully our body demands that we stop giving in to the grief monster's demands and soothe ourselves somehow. Our grief 'monster' can become almost addicted to our attention and keep taunting us with memories and emotions. If the 'grief monster's' addiction becomes too entangled within us, it can cause serious harm. If we ignore it or push it away it will sneak up on us and attack at the most unexpected times. If either of these situations occur, it is advisable to seek help from a doctor or other professional such as a grief counsellor, before it goes too far. Your doctor or local hospital staff will be able to steer you towards a grief counsellor or suggest some helpful way to learn to live with your new way of life at the moment. It's worthwhile to carefully consider contacts such as:

A trusted neighbour

A good friend

A family member

Your local GP

Your Hospital or Community Health Centre

Beyond Blue

If you are feeling suicidal and/or need support:

www.beyondblue.org.au

Lifeline Tasmania

24/7: 13 11 14 Office hours: 6282 1500

The Standby Response Team

24/7: 0400 183 490 Office hours: 6282 1511

Relationships Australia Tasmania

1300 364 277

Mental Health Services Statewide Health Service Help line

1800 332 38

A list of these phone numbers kept by the phone, the kettle, or in the car may be useful. **Editor.**

**You are important. Please do not suffer alone.
Tell someone how you feel and what's on your mind.**

For further information about this booklet
or suicide grief please contact the editor
Helen Scarr on helens@reltas.com.au

Relationships Australia Tasmania
20 Clare Street New Town TAS 7008
Free call: 1300 364 277
Phone: 03 6211 4050
www.tas.relationships.org.au



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