

The loss of a child

“A parent’s perspective”

..... This is a mother’s account of her journey through the first year and beyond after suffering the loss of her two teenage sons.



“While we try to teach our children all about life, we don’t realise that our children teach us what life is all about.”

Author unknown

My Grief is Like a River

My grief is like a river--
I have to let it flow,
But I myself determine
Just where the banks will go.

Some days the current takes me
In waves of guilt and pain,
But there are always quiet pools
Where I can rest again.

I crash on rocks of anger--
My faith seems faint indeed,
But there are other swimmers
Who know that what I need

Are loving hands to hold me
When the waters are too swift,
And someone kind to listen
When I just seem to drift.

Grief's river is a process
of relinquishing the past.
By swimming in Hope's channels
I'll reach the shore at last.

Author Unknown

In memory of my sons who were taken from us suddenly in a car accident,

Brendon 21/3/86 – 14/7/05

&

Mathew 2/6/89 – 14/7/05

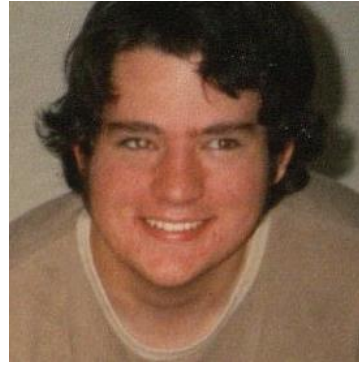
Dedicated to my daughter Georgia and my husband Todd, who without choice began this journey of grief with me. Change was thrust upon us, acceptance will grow on us, and together we will survive this journey.

*My children.
I gave you life,
You gave me purpose.*



Mathew aged 16 years

Brendon 19years



Michelle 2005



Georgia aged 10



Todd 2006

I place these pictures so that those who read this book can see how '*ordinary*' we were. Just regular people going about life as usual. As the reader you may relate to us 'The Family', all be it an extended one, we were a family. We are a family. I have not placed pictures of the boy's father or their other close family members that I have mentioned throughout my journal so as to respect their privacy.

Contents

Introduction

Chapter 1 – Our Story

Chapter 2 - My Boys My Angels

Chapter 3 - Information for those who helps us grieve the loss of a child

Chapter 4 – Help!! What do I say when they say...?

Chapter 5 - Other issues I have faced

Chapter 6 - My personal Journal entries

Chapter 7 - The journey continues

“No one is ever born into Life alone. Everyone has shared the bond of family, at least at birth, and for many people it is a bond that will follow them throughout life. For many people it is the most important bond of all”

Introduction

I decided to write a journal documenting my thoughts after the deaths of both of my sons to help me and also, so that my friends, other parents and in particular my daughter, would be able to understand what I was going through from the night of my sons deaths to the end of the first year and beyond.

It is an account of thoughts, feelings and actions that I and other family members went through. More importantly it is the perspective of a mother, what I have gone through physically, emotionally and spiritually. I was not only trying to come to terms with the tragic loss of my boys but also trying to assist others to accept the loss and help my daughter and myself.

I have experienced the visitor frenzy and then no visitors at all; I have seen friendships strained because of my confusion about the feelings displayed and their lack of understanding of mine. I have seen my daughter who was 10 at the time of their deaths age about 5 years; and have also experienced rapid ageing myself.

My hope is that this book will give other parents an understanding of what to expect, and that is to *expect nothing*, placing expectations on yourself and others at this time only leads to disappointment, strained friendships and even worse strained relationships.

This book is not a guide on what to do or what not to do; rather it's a real life account, covering things that the expert writings in text books don't mention. It is a very personal account of what I as '*the mum*' went through in the ensuing days, weeks and months after losing my sons . Although the book covers the first year, I would say it is a work in progress as the journey of grief will continue until I too leave this earth and join my sons, only when I see their faces and am able to hold them will I truly be happy again.

My deepest thanks will go to my closest friends and the friends of my boys, as without their continued support we might not be able to get through this tragedy.

Many thanks especially to the closest mates of my two sons':

Tom

Evan

Tim

Kristian and

Bec

Who without there on going support, stories and visits we might not have survived the early days and beyond.

Chapter 1:

Our Story

It was on July the 14th 2005, we were all returning home from holidays, the boys had opted to stay at home and at their dads, their sister Georgia went to her dads and my partner and I had been in Fiji for 10 days, our favourite place to holiday. It was only one year prior that I had taken Georgia and Mat to Fiji, Brendon had opted to stay at home, not cool to have holidays with mum and besides he wouldn't be able to take his computer the 2nd love of his life (the first being his car).

I had rang my son Brendon when we arrived at Sydney airport at about 1:30 to tell him we should be home around 4:30 after we collect his sister. "Brendon" I said "Its mum, just letting you know mate that we are in Sydney and will be on our way home soon, should be home by 4:30" "no worries" he said "Mats at the movies, Ill bring him home when he is finished" "ok I said, Love you" Love you to said Brendon. Little did I know that that would be the last time I would hear his voice.

We started our journey home to Maitland NSW, I was so excited to be going home, 10 days away was a little to long, too long to be away from the kids, I looked forward to everyone getting together to discuss what we had all done during the holidays. On the way home we collected my daughter, she was so pleased to be coming home as well, she said "mum I called in home while you were away, Brendon and Tim (Brendons best mate) were there playing computer games" we had a chuckle because that's what those two always did if they weren't out for a drive. Anyway we were about 15 minutes from home when I stated to get a pain in my left leg, a headache and my forehead was really sore, I couldn't explain it, we just put it down to the travelling for the day and the fact that I was probably tired, its was approximately 4:15 pm, we were home by 4:30.

While my partner took my daughter to soccer training I stayed home to answer telephone messages and emails, un pack and just get organised so that when everyone arrived home we could just sit and discuss what we had done.

I couldn't stop my leg from aching, at around 5:30 I decided to get up and put the washing, get my leg moving I thought. At 5:50 pm I heard a loud bang on the door, when I approached the door I was confronted by two police women, I opened the door, they asked if I was Michelle Amess, to which I replied yes, thinking it was some kind of joke. They asked if they could come in, I said yes, as we were walking to the lounge, they were insisting I sit down, finally I realised something was wrong and said "which one Brendon or Mathew" to which they responded "we are sorry to inform you but there was a fatal car accident this afternoon and both of your boys have been killed. Straight away I said NO, you have made a mistake, I just spoke to Brendon this afternoon, he's on his way home, NO NO, you are wrong, they asked if there was anyone else they could call as I was home on my own, I started to dial my husband's (partner at the time) number but they took over.

The police asked him to bring my daughter straight away to Morpeth, to the boy's grandmother's house.

The drive to Morpeth was all a blur of lights to me, I remember saying I know you are wrong, I just spoke to Brendon this afternoon, there has been a mistake, you'll see. We arrived at Morpeth to be greeted by the boy's uncle, I yelled quick get Brendon, he said, "Its true Michelle they are gone".

We all went in side to wait for the boys dad who was being bought home from work, we just sat in the kitchen surrounded by family and friends, I don't remember much else except for thinking, "how could this be, this doesn't happen to us" not my boys.

One minute we were all returning home from holidays, everything was normal, within an instant our 'normal' had been turned up side down and our lives would never be the same again.

My partner and daughter arrived, by the time they entered the kitchen there was a police officer there as well, Georgia knew something was wrong and said where are my brothers "they are dead" the policeman said, I heard my partner start to cry and the policeman say "you have to be strong now, she will need you"

I "cried out my life is over" and so our journey began. No more family holidays, days filled with regrets, things I hadn't said, things I didn't tell them often enough, simple things like "I love you, I'm proud of you"

We were told to go home and get some sleep, sleep I thought, how could I sleep, I wanted to see my son's. I was told I would have to wait until the next day, they were in Newcastle and it wouldn't be possible to see them now. We had to wait for a phone call in the morning to tell us what time we could come down and see them... I don't know if I slept, I just know that wait for the phone call in the morning was the longest wait I have ever endured, knowing my boys were dead, died without me by their side, knowing they were cold and I couldn't comfort them.

We arranged to meet police and their Dad in Newcastle, and started the drive, all the while I know I was thinking this can't be happening, we were all on holidays yesterday, how can this be. We arrived at the morgue, were met by a lady and then led into the room to see our boys; their dad went in first, one son at a time... All I remember is thinking that Brendon was a sleep and that he could wake up but that was not going to happen, Mat looked so small, well I don't need to say much more needless to say it was the hardest day of my life.

We headed home, started to make funeral arrangements and well the rest is, as you would expect.

I write this story not for sympathy but to show how easily and quickly this can happen, how it can happen to everyday ordinary people, good people, also to highlight to our teens that they are not invincible. Speed was the factor in my son's deaths.

Grief – the process begins

When you lose a child your life change's in an instant. How do you cope with those powerful emotions along with the chaos and confusion that follow such a loss? What do you do to ease the pain and grief that you feel? How do you go on? How is it possible to find a ' new normal '?

These are the questions I was faced with after the tragic loss of my two beautiful sons, aged 16 and 19 years on that Thursday afternoon, July 14th 2005.

I started a journal and an on-line Blogg as part of my own grieving process, but more importantly to find some purpose out of such a tragedy. I thought If I can help or touch the lives of at least one parent and in particular a mum, who will sadly feel this loss , from my point of view, far greater than that of anyone else, then perhaps we will be able to share information and have a means of working through this grief together.

It is also hoped that you, the reader will gain some strength in knowing there is HOPE. There is a way through this journey and it need not be alone. For me I sought the support of another mum in my situation, someone I knew would truly understand what I was feeling, someone who would be able to hep me on this journey. Little did I know that that someone would come in the form of Vera, my friend, mentor and later on co-founder of the H.O.P.E Support Group Incorporated.

Vera had been travelling this journey of loss for five years when I met her, I thought if anyone could give me some insight it would be her, after all she had been on the journey longer than me.

It had been eight weeks since the loss of my boys when I met Vera, I remember going to a local meeting for parents who had lost babies, there was no where else to go, oh sure there were on line groups but I needed to speak to an actual person, it was suggested I go to this meeting and although it took a lot of courage on my part t reach out I have never looked back.

I recall Vera coming up to me and saying “hey girlfriend, what’s your story” and so our friendship began. Vera called me several times after that meeting trying to coax me to meet with her, have a coffee and a chat finally I gave in. For me it was the going out, the socialising the meeting others I just didn’t want to be part of, but thankfully Vera knew only too well what I was feeling and persisted. I don’t have the words to describe how much I have appreciated her honesty, her candidness and sometimes tough love approach, it has got me to where I am today, and for that I am truly grateful and very blessed to have her in my life.

It was during our many discussions that we wondered where other parents in our situation would go for support after the loss of a child especially if that child was not a baby. We had both reached out to other mum’s in our situation on many occasions and knew through our own experience that this was the best form of help , knowing that someone else was wearing the same shoes and travelling the same path.

Vera planted the seed, her vision if you like, it was to have a meeting place where parents, friends and siblings could come together and share their journey, somewhere where information could be shared, a place where ideas and thoughts about what’s worked for others on this journey could give hope to others new to this journey.

It took approximately one year, but eventually I said to Vera I feel strong enough to do this, let's get the group started and the rest as they say is history.

You will see I talk later in my journal entries about the beginning of H.O.P.E but as a snap shot, we currently have approximately 60 members, we meet once a month at a local club and we have all shared many experiences and made many close friends.

Our visions for H.O.P.E is that it spreads, one day someone will come along who will want to reach out to others, just as Vera did with me, they will set up a branch of H.O.P.E and then no parent will have to travel this path on their own.

Vera's Story

Bobby Max Bajric 29.4.1986 - 29.4.2000
From the Cradle to the Grave



As told by Vera Bajric, who I met on this journey at my 8 week mark of loss. At a time when I felt so alone and quite confused. Vera had been 5 years without her precious Bobby. Vera became, and remains my mentor on this journey and also co-founded H.O.P.E, the support group we started as a result of this loss. I gained much strength from her and guidance in what to expect and how to cope.

Vera's Story.....

We planned this precious child, after having many years of complications conceiving, my Gynecologist, announces to me "Congratulations, you're approximately 2 weeks pregnant.

I could hardly believe my ears, I couldn't wait to tell his dad, I'd waited all day & I didn't want to tell anybody else until I had told his dad & when Bobby's dad finally got home late that afternoon, I'd built myself up with so much anxiety, that soon after I'd told him I started to have a bleed & before I knew it I was put into Western Suburbs Hospital at Waratah & Dr was standing next to me saying "I think you may be miscarrying"

My head was reeling, how could this be happening, only hours previously I was floating on a cloud & so excited about being pregnant & now I found myself totally shattered, from one extreme of emotions to another.

I heard myself talking to my unborn child & begging him to hang on to dear life, to hold on to his God's hand & not let go.

I think he must of heard me because seven days later the Dr said that my baby was fine that we could go home & to thank our lucky stars that our baby was safe, but I think that it was much more than luck that was working in our lives that week.

While I was in hospital that week I started writing a diary to fill in my stay, I talked to my baby through that diary of everything I was experiencing while I was pregnant with him so I wouldn't forget those feelings. I'm so glad I did that now, because when he grew old enough, I would read this to him as if it were a story book, I had photo's in this book of the cousins that used to hug my belly while I was carrying him, & of other family events that were happening at the time of our pregnancy.

Even in pregnancy my baby hardly moved in my womb, every monthly visit to the Dr's I'd inform him of this & the Dr would jokingly say "Perhaps the baby is saving all its energy for when it comes out". All the vital signs were always perfect, the scans showed that he was growing perfectly & he always had a good strong heart beat.

On the 29th April -1986 I went into labor vaguely remember a howling ringing in my ears just moments before my Bobby came into the world, almost as if a wolf was howling in a far off distant place.

The umbilical cord was caught around his throat & the Dr had to do an emergency forceps & stirrups delivery because my baby was in high stress & after 12 hours of labor my first born child was put into my arms, a little bruised & a couple of lumps & bumps on his head where the forceps clamped him, but otherwise he was safe & sound.

I already had his name picked out "Bobby Max" there was hardly a cry when he entered the world & even when our eyes were locked into each others, there was no crying sounds, no whimpering from this precious little boy, I placed my index finger into his tiny perfect hand & he locked his little fingers around it, I looked into his dark little eyes that seemed to be studying me & I whispered to him "Well...G'day little mate.....welcome to the big world, I've been waiting for you for such a very long time" I thought I seen a smirk in the corner of his lip which turned into a smile, as if he was saying, "Thanks Ma, glad we made it"

We kept looking at each other for what seemed to be the longest time, he seemed to know me, as if he'd been here in another time or in another life, he had a look in his eyes of what seemed to me of a wise old man, as if he knew something that I didn't, perhaps he knew way back then that he was going to only be here for a short time, as a matter of fact he only stayed on this plane for 14 years to the day that he was born.

These are my memories of my precious lovable little rogue & that's what he was, he wasn't perfect, he was just like any other kid, he got into mischief, the older he got the more mischief he got into, but never anything that would hurt me or his little brother Alex, he loved being a big brother, matter of fact, I never noticed it until after Bobby's passing but when I went through all our photo's he always had a protective arm around his little brother, there was so many photo's of just like that.

My youngest son Alex was the product of a prayer, Bobby was about 2 years old when he asked if "We could go to the shop & buy a little brother" I told Bobby then that he, I & daddy (Alex's dad, Tony) had to pray to our God for this special little brother & so we did, the 3 of us would get on the edge of Bobbies bed on our knee's, just before he would go to bed & the three of us would pray to our God for this little baby.

There is exactly 2 years & 9 months between my two boys, Bobby was around 2-ish when he asked for a little brother, Alex was born on the 11th of January-1989....there is approximately 10 months of pregnancy....you do the maths.

Why did I just focus on the life of Bobby?.....well, you see.....my son wasn't in an accident, he didn't commit suicide, he wasn't murdered, there was no-one to blame, there wasn't anything that I could do know one to use as a whipping pole, Bobby had "MIOCARDITIS" an undetectable virus, that shuts down the heart.

After the autopsy came back they said that this type of virus can not be detected, no matter how many tests that Specialist's would of done, that it was highly unlikely that it would be detected if the person was alive at the time of the testing.

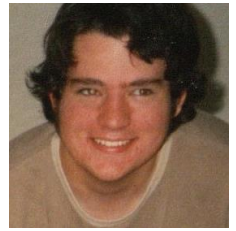
As time passed I felt the need to reach out to other families, I don't know why I kept doing this, I suppose I felt the need to do something for another human being because somebody else reached out to me & I remember how powerful that first one on one meeting was with that same lady that put her hand out to me to guide me through the darkness & we both stumbled through that darkness together.

These memories a mother never forgets, they're imprinted not just in your mind but also in your heart.

Chapter 2

My Boys, My Angels

Brendon Mathew Gilson - 21/3/86 – 14/7/05



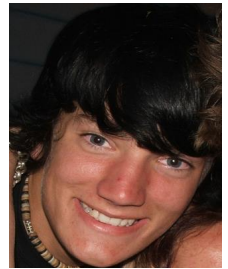
Brendon was a quiet natured, very bright and stubborn young man; you might say a typical teenager, knew it all and wanted to do it all. His passions were his car and his computer. He loved his red ford laser and was always tinkering on it. I remember the day he drove down the road near our house, my daughter and I were watching T.V, we could hear a very loud noise, it sounded like thumping music, and it was heading our way, into our driveway to be exact, I remember saying to my daughter "what the heck is that" and as we looked out the window she shouted with glee, " it's Brendon" we went out side and there he was proud as punch to show us his new sound system for the car. You know the type, the big sub woofer, huge speakers, lights flashing like a Christmas tree, I didn't have a clue about what I was looking at, but like most parents, I smiled and said " hmmm that's nice". He took my daughter for a drive, she was very impressed. Then there was his computer, that damn computer, it seemed to monopolise his time, as a matter of fact I believe it became an extension of him. He was very at home with computers and was very keen to begin a career in IT. He made computers for some of our family and friends and was going to make one for his sister, sadly that never happened.

As a baby Brendon was perfect, all he seemed to do was eat and sleep, he was so content and very chubby. I remember his dad once asking "should we put him on a diet" to which I replied "of course not". He grew to be a very inquisitive young boy, always asking questions, loved the T.V and most of all loved working on cars with his dad. Eventually when he was about 13 he started to race a car in the local Motorkhana car club, I guess that and the driving on his pops farm gave him confidence, perhaps a sense of overconfidence. He was very good at school until about year 8, they say boy's can go down hill from there and down he certainly went, don't get me wrong his grades were great, he was the kind of kid that didn't need to study for a test, he would just rock on up and do it and pass, but his enthusiasm for school dropped, I think it was purely for the social aspect that he completed through to year 12.

During high school Brendon gained casual work at Hungry Jacks, then casual work at Woolworths where he was on night fill duty, it wasn't much but it gave him money and time to spend through the day on his precious computer, playing online games, something that drove me, as with many parents, insane. I always grumbled that he was lazy and should be looking for more work or doing something productive, I even banned him from the computer once for 6 weeks to make him became a functioning member of the family, he didn't speak to me for the whole time, only to say ' you took away my property" anyway it didn't achieve anything, only made him more determined to stick to his guns. I gave it back and he continued on the same.

I remember grumbling at Brendon each Christmas and birthday to buy me a present, he would protest but I would insist and eventually I would get something, with little thought and no wrapping paper. I ask myself now, why did I not see, like many parents, that I already had a gift, I had Brendon, and even though it was for only a short 19 years I am very blessed to be able to say I raised him to be a great young man, head strong, opinionated, arrogant at times, but most of all himself, Brendon, we wouldn't have had him any other way, he wouldn't allow it.

Mathew Richard Gilson – 1/6/89 – 14/7/05



In contrast to Brendon, Mathew was quite the extrovert, very out there and very comfortable being the centre of attention. Always entertaining, making us laugh, laughing at himself. He was a very caring young man and thoughtful of others. He hated confrontation and would always prefer to walk away till things cooled down, and then return to discuss issues. Unlike Brendon, Mathew was quite a handful as a baby, he was a very fussy sleeper, fussy eater, didn't like strangers, as a matter of fact I remember once taking them on the train to Newcastle, as was often the case for an outing, we were sitting in a normal carriage but every time someone looked at him he would cry. I eventually had to move to the front of the train where you would stand with a push bike, a gentleman got on and looked at him, he started to cry, to which I quickly replied "its ok he doesn't like strangers". Mat didn't sleep well as he always suffered from bad wind; we spent many nights sleeping on the lounge room floor because he needed to be on his tummy on a hard surface. He also suffered from skin irritations, in particular, exema, many times he had to endure the wonderful smell of pintarcel in a bath, a soap substitute, a horrible dark green tar smelling product. We also had the pleasure of many hospital visits with Mat, up until he was about 5 as he had a condition that caused his joints to become dislocated for no particular reason, on the odd occasion we had broken bones and green stick fractures.

I would come to work and the girls would say "how's Mat today"? To which I would reply "he's been sent from hell to destroy me" boy oh boy he kept us on our toes.

He was quite the character, he was in trouble on the school bus once because he pulled his pants down at the back of the bus and Mooned whoever was looking at him, just like Bart Simpson he said. On several occasions he went to pre-school in dress ups, even with his undies on the outside like superman, never a dull moment.

Mathew never had difficulty in making friends, he was quite the leader, never a follower, even through to high school, trying to start trends... one day he came home and asked me to buy Bob the Builder socks, I said " why would you want to wear them" to start a trend he said. Then we had to go through the change from a young boy with short light brown hair who wore any colour but black to a young man who only wore black, grew his hair almost shoulder length and dyed it black, the black finger nails, the big ear spacing trend (earrings) I just couldn't keep up. I asked him if the aliens had come over night and swapped him with my Mat?

I thought he was the perfect son, actually truth be known he was not so perfect, after the accident many of his friends shared stories of late night drinking sessions, big parties and girlfriend activities, he had me wrapped around his little finger, quite the actor he was. I would say if he had a party to go to "now Mat you know that there might be girls and drinking and smoking there" he said "mum I'm not silly I don't do any of that stuff" so trusting I was, rather, Naive I know now, he was quite the party animal, but I am glad he was able to experience more than some boys his age. If I had known about all of his antics he surely would have been grounded until his 30's. Yes quite the little actor was my Mat, he loved drama and carried it off at home so well, quite a character, a real joy to be around, a great and loyal friend to his mates, sometimes cheeky, but like Brendon we wouldn't have him any other way, that was our Mat.

Chapter 3

Information for those who help us grieve the loss of a child

Friends
Family members
Siblings
Co-workers

I quickly learnt this is was not only a learning curve for me but also those around me. I searched all possible resources to find ways to help others help me. Vera told me very early on that we on this journey have to teach others how to react and how to help us after all they are also treading a new path, many dealing not only with the loss of our child but the loss of us as the person they once knew.

The following information is a guide only. It is what I and other parents have encountered and how we coped at the time

Friends.

When I lost my two teenage sons in 2005 I had no idea of the road ahead. I was not prepared for the learning journey I would be on nor did I have a clue on how to help others help me.

As the months went on and the visitors stopped visiting and the phone calls stopped coming I soon realized that not only was this road hard for me, it was also hard for those closest to me. In particular I found it difficult to accept that at a time when I needed them the most some friends seemed to stay away, worse yet some friendships ceased to exist.

During the first few months of my grief I did the best I could to research and find information and tips for those who I considered to be my closest friends, in need of help themselves, after all, I knew that I would need their ongoing support for many years if not the rest of my days... grieving the loss of a child is something that cannot be done alone.

How friends react can make a difference in how well the bereaved family is able to survive not only during the early days, weeks and months but in the long term.

Those of us who have lost a child are not only dealing with the loss of the child, but in a sense the loss of ourselves, everything we believed in, stood for and held dear has been shattered and as a result we are trying to begin a new 'normal'.

Tell your friend they can be of great help and support by remembering a couple of key things:

1. We may not want to do what we did before in our friendship. Be prepared that if for example we shopped and danced with you before the loss of our child it will be quite some time (if ever) before we have the energy or desire to do those things again. Often what we need most is a quiet chat, a cuppa and a cry, sometimes just having someone sitting in the same room is all we need.

2. Realize that we may not want to chat on the phone or return text messages, for some of us we have nothing left to say, it will be up to you to instigate the communication, often we may want to sit and listen to what's going on in your life but may not feel the need or even have the energy to talk. Be patient we may feel like calling one day and we need to know you are still there.

3. Be mindful that for us particular dates are of even more importance now. We need to know that others are thinking of our child/children on the day they passed, and on their birthday, we need mostly to know that someone is thinking about the pain we as the parents or siblings are going through on those dates. Yes its hard for you but remember it's even harder for us and a simple call, text or email to say "hi, just thinking about you" means so much and not just in the early months but always.

4. It may feel at times that we are pushing you away, as a grieving parent I found it difficult to give any of me to any one person, and a declined invitation or not returning a call may seem to you that we are pushing you away, BUT we are not, it just means at that time we had no strength to chat, be patient and know that we still love and need you. But above all be persistent, we can't give up and nor should you.

5. Don't ask us to call you if WE NEED, that wont happen, we need YOU to check up on us every now and then, we don't know when we need, we hurt so much that we don't think of ourselves, we are only thinking of what we have lost, suffice it to say, WE NEED and we will need often.

Above all just know this, we are suffering the greatest loss of all, and we will endure this pain till we meet our children again, the last thing we need is to lose our closest friends; we have enough sad inside of us without the sadness of losing a treasured friend.

Family Members

For me this was not as difficult as I didn't have any close family members to speak of, I had an Aunt, and Uncle and two cousins at the time of losing my boys; actually this is how it has been since I was about 18. Although we were not that close they were all I had and I felt I needed lots of support from them. Sadly I only got that support in the early months if that, after some time they stopped visiting, as my aunty said to me one day, "Shelly I never visited you all the time before I don't intend to start that just because this has happened" I will never forget those words, "just because this has happened" this I thought was the death of my two sons, I would have thought that if ever you would start to visit now would be the time, but sadly that was not the case.

The visits became less frequent to the point where they were if I was lucky every couple of months so for me I gained no strength in knowing they were around. Others on this journey though have had a totally different scenario play out, they have had family become closer than ever before, they have had extended family reach out to them and provide on going support. For some the family

relationships that had broken down had now renewed and become stronger than ever.

What I found is that it's a hard and scary road for everyone and everyone copes differently. Try not to expect too much, that way you won't be disappointed. Ask small favours of them from day one and show them that you need them from day one.

Tell them how you are feeling especially if you are not happy with the way they are supporting you; tell them what you need other wise how will they know.

I also lost a sister (who I had only just started to re build a relationship with after many years apart) after losing my boys. She came to visit one day and said she would not be back as it was "too hard" for her to see me the way I was, I had to accept her honesty and understand that that was the way she felt and there was nothing I could do about it.

Siblings

At the time of losing my boys my daughter was 10, so young to have to go through something so traumatic. For the longest time I found it difficult to even acknowledge her grief as I was so wrapped up in my own.

I didn't know how to help me so how could I possibly help her. Initially I tried to call a family meeting once every couple of weeks, this was so that we could all express how we were going and what we needed from each other, she found this to be very confronting and upsetting so it didn't last long.

Asking her every morning how she slept and how she felt was also not a good way to handle it as she was not ready to talk about it and certainly didn't want to tell me anything.

We attended the school counsellor together but that was pointless as she felt no connection with the woman and felt it was a waste of her time. We attended a counsellor together but again too confronting for her and it only made me more upset.

What did work was the support of the boy's mates who would come around and take her out every now and then or pop in for a chat. These kids she could relate too, these kids she had a connection with, as hard as it was for me to see them it was great for her and eventually for me as well. They all continue to support us and in particular my daughter to this day.

Another thing that worked was just being mindful, learning how to read her face and body language just as she had with me. I was able to tell when she was having a bad day and perhaps start a conversation off about the boys or something they had done, this in turn would encourage her to talk about them and more importantly let her know it was ok to do so.

I know others in my shoes have helped their other children by seeking counselling support, but the general feeling about what to do is usually listen to them, they will let you know what they need.

Co-workers

I returned to work three weeks after losing my boys. I found this to be very difficult but I had no real choice, work was waiting for me, they told me “take all the time you need” but how would I know what time I needed. I had no idea of the life long journey I was about to embark on so I returned to work in my role as a teacher. One of my jobs required that I work on a daily basis with teenagers; this of course was very hard on my heart.

My first day in class saw me calling out a class role that read amongst the names Brendon and Mathew, my heart sank and I felt immediate panic ensue me. With no where to run I looked at my colleague who promptly said “are you ok” to which I replied “yes, but I need to leave the room, I did this purely to catch my breath, to re focus and remind myself that these kids were not my own, I gathered myself and returned to my work.

On the way back to work I knew I needed or I at least felt I needed to explain how I was feeling and what had just happened, after all this was likely to happen again.

I explained to my colleague that I felt as though I was going to have a panic attack because the sadness welled up in me from the deepest part of my stomach, I told her I found it difficult to breath and focus when all I could hear were the names going over and over in my head. I let her know exactly how this was for me and asked if we could perhaps pre read the role prior to meeting with students that way I could avoid or prepare myself for such a situation.

Another incident happened on my way to class one day when I drove past a car accident in which one of the vehicles had over turned, I knew what was coming on the road as we were all being stopped by police but I felt that feeling of panic rise up again, it didn't matter what I said to myself or where I looked I went into panic mode, it hit me when we drove past the vehicles and I saw one was over turned, the car was yellow but in my mind it was red (my sons car colour) in my mind it was his car. I continued along the road for only a minute or two watching the fire truck and police in the rearview mirror and bang it all hit me, I could not focus, all I could do was pullover. I tried to gather myself but only managed to call work to let them know where I was, by the time someone had come I was in mild shock and had to be driven home, 3 work colleagues came out to ‘rescue’ me that day, they were all witness to the panic attack and were all unsure as to how they could help.

I went to work the next day and quietly sent them an email, thanking them for their help. My boss had said I could go home but I explained to him that I needed to be there; after all I would probably have many of these incidents occur from now on so I best figure out a way to cope.

During my employment since losing the boys many of these things have happened, some bad some not so bad, I have learnt to do the following in order to help my co-workers cope with the new me:

- Speak to them about how I am feeling if I am having a bad day
- Remind them of the special days that will come up, for example your Childs anniversary or their birthday, this will prepare them as well and will help them to know what to expect of you around these times.
- Don't be afraid to be honest about how you're feeling and ask for help if you need it
- Explain to them what can set a panic attack off
- Explain to them what tasks you can and can't do as a result of this loss, after all you are no longer the same worker.
- Encourage them to be persistent with you in terms of work functions etc. By this I mean, for the longest time I never attended even a birthday cake cutting for a work colleague, but they never stopped asking me.
- Have at least one close colleague that you feel you can talk to if needed, you don't have to let everyone know how your doing, often this other person can take care of that for you.
- Take a day off for you when you need it, sometimes you may be of no use to anyone because the sadness and the loss weighs so heavily on your shoulders
- Ask if you can work from home, I found this to be a great benefit in at least the first year.

Communication and trust will be the key, remember they have no idea of exactly how you are feeling unless you tell them.

Chapter 4

Help, what do I say when they say.....

During this journey you will hear many people say some strange things; you will also hear people say nothing when you need them to speak the most. How you cope with what people say and don't say will be a big determinant of your own mental state at the time.

The following is some statements I have encountered along this journey, how I felt about them and how I dealt with them. Remember this is only one person's perspective; things may be different for you.

A friend says “call me if you need” - for myself and many others I have met on this journey, this is a very big ask, firstly, if you have never been the type to call anyone for anything, as I was then you will not know how to do it, secondly, how do we know what ‘need’ to call you for? Do we call if we feel the need to vent, be angry, cry, have a hug, need the washing done, need a meal cooked, what about the need to know we are not alone and thirdly, what if we have the ‘need’ but just don’t have the energy to call?

I found the easiest thing was to say in the beginning that I probably won’t call but if they could call me on every now and then any day or time then that would be appreciated.

Someone says “you look much better today” – I guess the people around us see this grief process as a sickness that we will soon be over, after all how long can anyone person not eat or sleep or continue to cry, surely not forever, little do people know that we will always have these ‘symptoms’ of grief. Something I wished people would realise was that I was not sick, I did not have an illness that could be cured by a pill, I have a broken heart, there is only one remedy for that and it’s time.

I realise what they are really saying is that “you look less stressed or less sad today” or that we look like we have had a good nights sleep, or that we have put the effort into picking out what to wear. They mean well and in a way it’s a compliment, its shows me that people take notice of how I am doing and how I am feeling.

At first my response to “you look much better today” was anger, I would think how can they possible say that? I don’t feel any better, besides how would they expect me to look. After some time I came to realise that people don’t know what to say and that the mere fact that they are acknowledging how I look at all means they are being mindful of me. Its their way of being kind, of making conversation.

Someone says “at least you have other children” – anyone who has lost a child and has others still living will have heard this because people think that we should feel lucky that we are not totally alone. Little do they know that it wouldn’t matter if we had ten children at home, we have lost one, or as in my case two and no amount of other children was going to make that any easier for me. As a parent we can’t accept a consolation prize, parenthood isn’t like a lucky draw.

I learnt over time to just take the statement as a reminder, “yes I do have another child and thank you for reminding me to focus on the living” is what I use to say to myself. I think this is truly what they mean, look at what you have and try to draw strength from that person, focus your energy into that other child who needs you in the present, of course at times this is easier said than done and it takes a little while down the journey to really hear what is really meant by such a statement.

“Time heals everything, you’ll be ok”

This is of course true to an extent. As time went on for me I didn’t seem to cry as much, I was able to sleep a little better, I started to eat better, I could hear people around me, I was able to interact with others (not that I wanted to often) all

symptoms of a person who is being healed by time, want to know what the time from was before I was able to do the things I have mentioned? at least two years, and three years on time is still healing me.

Yes you will be ok, you have no other choice, everyone expects it of you, society expects it of you, your other children, family and friends expect it of you, but I know it to be true, I am doing ok, but I wouldn't say I am healed, I would say that time has helped me accept my loss. Time has shown me that I can be OK. For me my heart will never be healed, it will always be broken and will forever have an empty space, but the weight of sadness does lift ever so slowly, that I know for sure, and you will be able to smile again, I know this because I am starting to smile again my self.

"Its been 12 months" you should be getting over it by now" this was actually said to me, it has been said to many I know on this journey the only difference for others was the time frame mentioned.

I remember having this said to me by a work colleague who invited me out for coffee. I declined the invite, saying that "I don't actually go out, so can't really say I will meet you". My colleague felt that 12 months on I should be allowing myself to go out as "it's what my boys would want". For me, what my boys would want was of little concern to me, the pain of their loss, the grieving process and the effort required to socialise with people far out weighed what they might want to see me do. I was not ready to go out; it was enough for me to be at work.

I guess what I can say about this statement is that there is no specific time frame for healing or accepting. There are no rules that say when you should resume a social life or even the life you once had, its been my experience and that of others on this journey that we will never resume the life we once had, we will never *get over it*, what we will do is learn to accept it.

In time, and in YOUR time you will be able to go out, you will be able to have coffee out with others. It was almost two years before I was able to go out for dinner with my husband and daughter to a restaurant let alone meet others out. At almost three years on I have only just recently gone to a few work functions, I finally feel that I can deal with others in a social setting now. For some on this journey it will be longer or shorter, but I guess what is important to remember is that there is no real time frame, only do what you feel you can and do it when you feel you can. You will know when the time is right, something I can say though, the more you do the "going out thing" the easier it becomes, I know this because it has been the case for me.

"Everything happens for a reason"

I don't know about you, but I find it hard to cope with this statement, I find it difficult to believe that there could be any possible reason for any child to be taken from this earth.

What I do believe though is that we can find some thing to come from the tragedy, its hard to imagine I know, but for me I lost all sense of purpose, most everything I did after the loss of my boys seemed meaningless and purposeless, for me I needed to find something to give me a sense of purpose. I could not let the deaths of my sons be in vein, for me I found a passion if you like.

Some months after the loss of my boys I read a newspaper article in a paper that I never usually read, it simply caught my eye one day, when I read it I knew what I had to do, it was an article about a young driver road safety initiative being implemented by a local man. This I thought is what I needed to do, so I contacted the man and have been supporting road safety initiatives ever since.

Something else I did after the loss of my boys was reach out for help. I did this by attending a support group for parents who had lost small children and babies, lucky for me on that day I met another mum who had lost a teenage sone some five years earlier, she took me under her wing and to this day Vera (mentioned at the outset of this book) has been and continues to be my mentor on this journey.

I mention this because this became my second passion, the need to reach out to other mum's in my situation. Vera and I often discussed the need for a support group for parents in our situation, we had both reached out to others by writing letters to mum's who had lost a child we had heard of through the news. We knew what a comfort it was to know that you are not alone on this journey, we knew the benefits of being able to talk to someone who really knows and understands the pain, and as a result we formed the support group H.O.P.E (Helping Other Parents Exist).

So I guess what I am saying is that if I had to say that something came from the loss of my boys it is the road safety work I do for other young drivers and H.O.P.E, two projects that I would never had started. I know that through my loss I have been able to help support at least sixty other parents in my situation, where would they be if I had not lost my son's and Vera had not lost hers, they too would feel alone on this journey, and it is a long journey to travel alone.

Chapter 5

Other issues I have faced

Survivor Guilt

This is something that I struggled with from day one. It makes sense when you think about it, we have survived our children, this is not the natural order of things. The guilt of this survival is often overwhelming. In the early days I felt that self deprivation was the way to go. I felt I should not eat, bathe, do my hair, think about what to wear and least of all go out anywhere, after all it seemed the right thing to do, my boys were no longer eating or feeling the sun on their faces so why should I.

It took many weeks; months even before I would sit and enjoy a proper meal, up until then I simply ate because everyone said I must. It also took quite sometime before I cared what I looked like; as long as I was tidy I figured that's all that mattered. It was almost exactly one year after the death of my boys before I bought a top to wear with colour in it and that was for the first HOPE meeting. I remember then thinking what a big step it was not only to buy the top but to be in a shop buying it.

I refused for the longest time to 'go out' not even to shop, not just because I didn't want to be around others but also because where we shopped had too many memories. My youngest son loved the local shopping centre and if he couldn't go there then neither would I.

Prior to losing my boys I loved to go to the gym, I remember the first time I tried to go back; I ended up having a panic attack, too many people. The next time I tried I went to a smaller gym, one that did not have memories of a life lost, after the class I sat in the car crying; I just couldn't understand why I was feeling this way, I called Vera from the car park and told her what I had done and asked her why I was feeling the way I was, angry, sad and guilty, she explained to me Survivor guilt and also shared with me her own experiences, this made me feel 'normal' if you like. I realised I was not the only person that had experienced this, that this was part of my 'new normal'

Almost two years later and having worked my way up to attending different work functions and even going out for dinner, I started to feel in control of this guilt. I realised that by depriving myself of things was not going to bring my boys back. I also realised that I had to look after myself; after all I had a daughter and a husband who needed me. It didn't mean that I started going out everywhere what it meant was that I tried to do it more often, the more I did it the easier it became, to the point where almost three years on I had an occasion to attend a small dinner and show event. I was nervous about going because although pre 2005 I loved music and dance I had decided I would never enjoy music and dance again and wondered how I would cope.

I coped well, while I didn't get up and dance I did find myself enjoying the music, tapping my foot and actually allowing myself to enjoy, more importantly I had no guilt the next day.

I guess what I am trying to say is that it like most things on this journey gets easier, the guilt slowly dissipates, you can learn to enjoy again. Vera told me this would happen and she was right. I found the best approach was to make myself do little things at a time, small cautious steps and encourage those who ask you to do things to continue to do this regardless of how many times we say no, eventually you will say yes again.

Friendships.

Friendships may be hard to maintain after such a loss, it is true, that sometimes the worst brings out the best in people but the opposite can be said, the worst can bring out the worst in people.

During this journey which has now reached 29 months I have had many friendships fade simply because the 'friend' was not able to cope with my loss, they never knew what to say, when to visit or what to do, it all became too hard, so for these friends regardless of how long they had been in my life, it was time to move on, I was not the same person they once knew, and I think they realised I would never be. Eventually the visits stopped happening then the phone calls stopped, till you get to the point where distance has made an uncomfortable silence grow between us, perhaps they will come, these so called friends, perhaps not, I figure if they can't support me at my most desperate time of need then perhaps they were not true friends at all.

Then you may have the other type of friend, you know the one that you hardly ever saw but have known for many years, you pass in the street and you exchange pleasantries, you always have time to stop to catch up, but life in general has become so busy that the closeness you once shared does not seem as important, what's important is that you know each other are there. Well for me I have had friends like that who as a result of this tragic loss have become very close again, by close I don't mean at my house every day, but giving a phone call, an email or a text message on a regular basis, for them this tragic event has made them evaluate the importance of friendships I guess, they see when a friend is in need and they answer the call.

For me what I have learnt is that you really find out who your true friends are in a time of crisis, you also have to sometimes conduct your own 'personal inventory' and evaluate whether the stress of missing these friends, or worrying about their lack of contact is really important, perhaps its time to give them away, if they care enough they will come back. What's important is that you know who you want to have around you and that you surround yourself with helpful, caring and positive people. Its also very important as the grieving person to communicate with those who are close to you, let them know when you need them, when your struggling and when you are having a good day.

You're other children

This is a very hard subject to talk about. On one hand I felt grateful and blessed to have my daughter and on the other resentful because I had to continue on for her sake. I remember on the night of the accident when she was in the room and was told what happened, I said 'my life was over' her response to that was 'what about me' I probably said something like I love you too, I can't remember, what I do know is that despite what people want you to feel there is no joy in this consolation prize. There is no joy in saying 'oh well I have one child left' as the mum you want all of your children. It was very hard for me to focus on the needs of my daughter in those early days when I was so withdrawn and caught up in the shock of it all. I am very pleased to say that I had a loving and supportive partner

at the time (who later became my husband) who was able to do for her because I just couldn't; I felt I had nothing to give and actually just wished every day for my breath to stop.

It wasn't until around the 14th month mark when I felt that I truly heard things around me again and that includes the voice and needs of my daughter, it wasn't until then that I could look beyond my pain and see hers, I guess only time will tell me what she made of it all, after all how could she have really understood, that yes I loved her but just didn't have it in me at the time to show it.

We have over the past 29 months had many times where she has been very selfish in her thinking but it must be said that during this time she has also been dealing with the start of puberty. I have had the occasion to call in reinforcements in the form of my mentor on this journey, who at the time was 6 or 7 years in front of me, to come in and talk to my daughter, to help her to try to comprehend that mum is not mad, that this is her new normal, that this is how she is feeling and this is how she may feel for many years to come.

I have now learnt to not hold my tears in from of her, I can express how I am feeling and she seems to be a little more in tune with how I might be on any given day, I explain to her when she says 'mum don't cry in front of my friends' that I have to I can't always control when they will come. I guess for her she is not only dealing with the loss of her brothers but too some extent the loss of her mum.

Relationships

This is also a tricky subject, my husband and I had been together for about 7 years at the time of losing my boys, we had broken up for a little over a year prior to the accident and had only recently got back together before July the 14th 2005, in fact the holiday was our way of reconnecting with each other. Little did know the toughest test of our love was yet to come.

For the record I shall just remind the reader that my husband is not the father of my boys but has been in their lives for approximately 7 years, so they are as close to him as any non biological children can be

I must confess for those readers out there who are on this journey and have wondered if they did not want to have sex or be close to their partner was this normal? I too pondered that question, my physiologist said it was and that because men and women deal with emotional issues differently that I was too accept that it might take me some time before I could be intimate again where as my husband might seek it for comfort.

I didn't speak to many people about this because I only knew of people braking up after such a loss, the statistics are quiet high for marriage breakups after the loss of a child, so I really had no idea how we would go.

My husband and I had not been intimate with other for 29 months, as a man I imagine that was hard for him, he was very patient with me and very understanding, I on the other hand really wanted to reconnect but found I just did not have the energy or desire. Its very hard to feel like making love when you

which your own heart would stop, or when you close your eyes all you see are the last days after the accident or the funeral or the viewing, try as I might I just could never stop those thoughts, although sleeping tablets did help, but that's another issue all together.

Anyway it was a little over 29 months by the time we reconnected; coincidentally it was on our 1st year wedding anniversary. I had set many emotional goals for myself throughout the year and one was to re connect with my husband and if not some time soon at least by our first anniversary, finally it happened.

I just decided to try, for me the main issue is 'enjoyment' I still do not want to really enjoy anything I just want to be able to do things, so this was the mind set I had, yes like most things I was able to do it, and while I did feel I reconnected and close to my husband the enjoyment or pleasure was not there, and I am fine with that. We talked about it and I explained that for that was the best I could hope for at the moment, I am able to connect with him on an intimate level and over time I am sure that the rest will just happen.

As for our relationship, I am one of the lucky ones, one of those women who has found a rare man, one who can be kind, caring and patient in a situation that he cannot make sense of himself. A man that allowed me the time I needed before we could again become that close. A man who has tried to understand as best he could what I am going through, what my needs are. A man who realised in the early days that he could not fix this, as men so often want to do when there is a problem, he realised the best he could do was listen to me, be there when I needed and even when I felt I didn't need.

For us this tragedy has brought us closer together but on a more intimate level, far beyond the physical aspect of any relationship. We did not see that as an important part of reconnecting, rather building on the friendship, support and trust we already had for each other, I have come to realise he is a true friend as well as my husband

I guess I might suggest that as hard as it is, for the mum, realise that men handle things differently, encourage him to talk about it even if he doesn't want to, encourage him to seek help so he can help you and above all tell him how you feel.

Coping with work

I went back to all work 3 weeks after the deaths of my boys, not because I wanted to but because my work was waiting for me. 'Take time off they said, take all the time you need' how do you know what time you need in this situation, I didn't have a clue but as a teacher I knew that students were waiting to begin their studies and I was holding them up, so reluctantly I went back to work. I had two jobs to return too, both were teaching, one at TAFE College and the other at a training and recruitment company. I found every day at the recruitment company was very difficult as I was mainly dealing with teenagers, many of whom had attended the same schools my boys went too. I remember on my first

day in a course as we were checking the role I had a young boys name come up, Brendon, my heart sank and I felt like I was about to lose the plot, thankfully my colleague was there and able to take over.

I found every day I walked out the door I was holding was my breath for eight hours, when I returned to the safety of home, only then could I let out a sigh of relief close the doors, windows and blinds and block out the world. I continued on in both jobs like this for some weeks until I could no longer keep it together at the TAFE College, I realized by around the 8th week mark I needed help coping and sought the guidance of a support group. As I progressed with work I found it more difficult until I had to admit that my brain was just not up to so much work and I cut back that teaching position, but continued on at the other as normal.

After losing my boys work became purposeless to me, what I once enjoyed about my jobs no longer interested me, I struggled to remain motivated enough to motivate others, eventually I took leave from the TAFE position for about 6 months.

At around the 18 or 20 months I started working as a gym instructor at a gym I had been attending on and off, prior to July 2005 I was very passionate about the gym, fitness and looking after myself, anyway after a few months motivating others seem to take its toll on me and I no longer wanted to be there, at the same time I found it very hard to go to work at the training company; I seemed to be crying and complaining about how much I didn't want to be there all the time, I didn't want to be at TAFE either but struggled along till the 27 month mark at which point I went to my head teacher at TAFE and the Gym to resign, both employers said don't resign just have some time off, come back when you feel ready, again they think they are doing the right thing by saying that. As it was by December 2007 I had cut back at the gym to one shift per week and will start TAFE in 2008 doing only 1 night a week.

Since the loss of my boys I have gone from 4 jobs, 3 casual during the day and one at night to now having one part time through the day and only 2 shifts for my other employers, I don't know if I will ever resume the workload I once had, not only because I just cannot do it physically or mentally but because my priorities have changed, what I once found challenging and rewarding means little to me now. I am looking for new rewarding challenges.

I guess what I would say from my own experience is take time away from work, take all the time you need, society really does dictate how we grieve but sometimes we just have to stop and listen to our hearts not so much our heads, don't wait over 2 years like I did, because by then its even harder for people to understand you, after all in my case I have been plodding along fine in everyone's eyes and now I feel like I am ready to explode.

I would say try not to be so busy, despite what people say and they will say "its best that you keep busy" I would ask who is it best for, you the person who has lost or they the people who want to see you normal so they can be normal and think everything is normal. Listen to your heart if it says you need to be quiet and still then do that.

The new you

A new you will immerge from the dust eventually, although I don't believe I have finished evolving from this loss as yet I do see changes in me that are for the better. I am no longer so work oriented, I do have time to stop and listen to others and I really appreciate the fresh air and blue sky around me more. Where once I would never sit outside and look at the night sky, now I find that's the most peaceful time for me, the time when I feel the most connected to my angels.

I can now go to the shops and not really care too much about how I look, I don't seem to stress over much anymore and time lines and deadlines cause me less worry than they previously did.

In the scheme of life most things we do really are not worth stressing about. I used to think I was stressed now I really know what stress is. Once upon a time I was not an emotional person, rather, I would keep my emotions to my self, now I see how important it is to share your feelings be they good or bad, I realise the value in a good hug either getting one or giving one.

Material things are no longer as important to me, time out, quiet time and time with the people close to you is much more important.

My confidence has gone and that I do miss, I need it in my jobs and have decided to try to bring it back by socializing and networking again with others. If you feel that you have shut yours elf off from others you are not alone, many people who have experienced the loss of a child go through the same thing, people who were once extroverted or at least seen to be that way are often now more, its the quiet we seek now.

I also realize now how many people really do care about me and I value those friendships and acquaintances highly. I have become picky about those I chose to be around, after all I need support and understanding from only positive people who realize for now it is about me.

Something that worked for me.....

I started writing a journal almost days after the loss of my boys. Someone suggested I try it as a way of getting out and coping with the emotions that come with such a loss, not just the sad ones but the other emotions like anger, confusion, guilt, and an overwhelming sense of bewilderment.

Three years on as I read back on those early journal entries I hardly recognize that person. Reading the journal entries now I can see how far I have come in terms of my own recovery, acceptance and creating a "new normal"

It is often said that writing a journal is a way to collect your thoughts, it can provide you with an outlet, for me it was an outlet, I would write and cry, it helped me in the early days to try to comprehend what had happened, something about seeing things in black and white for me. Journaling can provide you with a tool to

reflect on and interpret your feelings, when you read the early entries you can see first hand how far you have traveled on this road to healing, that in itself can be a motivating tool, to see how far you have come when you thought you could go no further.

There is much information to be gathered about grief, the stages, the strategies, what to expect, all of which I spent many hours searching for. I was searching for instructions, or guidelines, something to give me direction, a map, anything that would give me some insight as to what I should expect and how to cope with what I was going through.

In the early days reading about the stages of grief was helpful, I was able to read about each stage and know that I wasn't going insane, what I was experiencing was the normal process of grief for a very abnormal event, the loss of a child. However as the months went on I found it difficult to find the information or insight I needed to help me get through the months of sadness, the complete sense of loss and confusion, there were no step by step guides, no lengthy personal stories, oh sure there is plenty of information out there that tell you to plan, and read, or write but when it comes down to it I found that there was only one thing that would help me, rather one person that could help me, that was me..... no book was going to be able to relate to my pain, no story I read about another parent would come close to mine, of course not, my pain is my pain, they were my children, no one could experience their loss like me.

It is for that reason that I thought I might put my journal entries into a book format, so that people could read first hand the emotions, thoughts, feelings and actions that come with such a journey, although I don't profess to know it all, I do now have some insight as to what new parents who enter this not so exclusive club will be experiencing, perhaps in reading my story you will gain some comfort in knowing you are not alone, nor are you going mad, or imagining or over reacting, you are experiencing a very real thing.

It has come time to finish this book; although the journey is ongoing I feel if I don't stop writing now I will never print this book. Before you get into the journal entries I thought I would share where I am now in terms of my own grief journey.

It is six days away from our 3rd year of loss, the 3rd anniversary of the death of my boys.

My new normal – while it has been hard I have been able to create a “new normal”. I am now able to follow the new routines created by myself and my daughter, we have the dropping off to school routine, and the welcome home at 4pm routine. I have been able to create new routines for dinner and been able to encourage Georgia to help me and have even taught her and encourage her to cook now when I feel tired. We have the walk the dog routine, and have our favorite shows we watch on TV.

Todd has stuck with the shopping routine, buying groceries is something I still rather not do, too many choices for my mushy brain plus I don't think while I am shopping and I spend too much money.

I have my new normal routine of getting up and getting ready for work, no longer do I rush around and panic about being late like I did prior to losing the boys, I move at a slower more calmer pace now after all its just not as important to get to work 30 minutes early, its just important that I get there on time.

Coping with work – work is still work but it's no where near as hard as it was in 2005, I the early days I just hated work and everyone there, now days I find I can get up and get ready, I get there on time and I do my job well. There are still days where I would rather stay home, but its mainly because sometimes dealing with other peoples issues just seem so unimportant, also there are days where I would just like to be still and quiet.

I have over the past three years had several melt downs at work and wanted to resign many times, I find this usually happens around important dates, birthdays and anniversaries in particular, I am aware of this now and prepare for these days in advance by asking for time off or cutting back on my jobs that way I cope much better.

Socialising and getting out – As far as going out, I have in the past few months actually attended work events, I find I am very able to cope with a birthday party now where in the early days I couldn't bare to be in a room with happy people. A for 'going out' well prior to 2005 I used to love to dance and have a glass of wine and socialise, three years on I still don't do that but just recently had the occasion to attend a small gathering with music and good company and found myself actually tapping my foot along with the music, I actually had a nice time and no feelings of guilt afterwards as I have done in the past.

Looking after me – Three years on and finally I am ok with looking after me, I realize I need to look after me so I can be the best I can be to my family, friends and colleagues, but most of all to me. Prior to July 2005 I attended the gym twice a day; I was very obsessed with 'me' and what I looked like. More recently I have realized that being motivated to eat well and exercise to be fit and healthy is something I am still unmotivated to do on my own, for that reason I have reached out and sought the help of two personal trainers who are both helping me to exercise, lose weight and be healthy, which in turn is making me feel good on the inside.

I am also very aware of the fact that I need quiet time, I still need those days and moments where I can just be me, be sad if I want, be quiet if I want and I don't have a problem with letting people know I need that. I realize now that communicating with everyone around me is the best way to get the help I need.

Relationships – This is an area I still struggle with. It has taken some time but finally I realize that friendships can and do change from such a tragedy, some remain and some follow a different path. Friendships are hard work and

sometimes require more energy than I have. I understand that my closest friends also struggle with this journey and I know I must be the one to teach them how to help me, more importantly I just accept that some friendships will never be the same, such is life.

In terms of family I have since lost the support from my aunty as she is “not happy with how I choose to live my life” she is not happy with the way I grieve for my boys and cannot understand my need to help others, while I am sad at this loss I realize this is her choice, and no one has the right to tell me how I should best cope with this loss after all I have to live with it for the rest of my life, she has the luxury of being able to walk away from it.

The relationship with my husband, who at the time of my boy’s deaths was my partner, has for the most part grown stronger. As I have indicated we actually got married one year after their deaths, he had been asking me for almost 7 years, I never felt we needed to be married, I always thought we had plenty of time and why bother, well if there is anything I have learnt on this journey it is that you just never know what is around the corner, why wait. In terms of a closer intimate relationship, this I still struggle with, to me it’s the ultimate in allowing myself to enjoy and that is not something I am really ready to do fully yet, but we are stronger because we communicate and we talk about these things, he is also a very understanding man, after all he sees the pain I live with on a daily basis, he hears the tears, he is there to hug me when no one else is around. I know that given time I will be able to fully engage in all life has to offer, just small steps at a time.

In terms of my relationship with my daughter, I feel we are doing fine, Georgia has become very observant and can quickly identify when I am having a bad day and tries her best to help me out as much as possible. I am able to enjoy time with her now; we go out shopping together and have even gone away for short breaks together. She talks of the boys quite often and when she sees me cry she will say “mum they are all good memories, you should smile” so I am glad to have her to remind me of the good times as my thoughts are still very often over shadowed by what I no longer have.

A new sense of purpose – as I mentioned earlier I have found two projects close to my heart, two things that make this nightmare seem bearable, they are the support group that I co-founded, H.O.P.E and my work on road safety initiatives. Both of these things have given me a sense of purpose again, they are something good that has come from something so horrible. Of course I wish I had never been put on this path and occasionally still think why me, why us, but I know the work I am doing has helped me to cope, I know helping others has helped me and it has also helped to show Georgia that out of such a tragedy some good can come.

Not a day goes by where I don’t think of the boys and the loss and wonder how I will go on without them. I will always have an empty space in my heart and a pain that only another mother on this journey can understand. What I try not to do is look too far ahead, one day at a time, if I can continue to get through one day at a time then the journey will be bearable.

I try to plan ahead for all special days, birthdays and anniversaries etc. I communicate with those closest to me about how I am coping. I try not to expect too much from anyone and just accept that everyone's journey is different. I accept that friendships change and can even be lost but I also know that when one door closes another one opens, yes I have lost friends along this journey but have met many other wonderful people that under any other circumstance I would never have met, for this I am truly grateful.

If I had not been thrown onto this path I might never have realized that time was so precious, I might never have realized how peaceful and beautiful the night sky could be (that's when I feel the most connected to my boys) I might not have ever slowed down enough to enjoy the fresh air and sunshine and would certainly never have believed that there is a place to go when you leave this earth. This is one thing that does give me comfort on those really tough days, I know the boys are with me.

I know that if you are reading this and you are in your very very early days you may find this all hard to fathom, how can one who has been through such a loss be so optimistic about anything? How, because I have seen people further on this journey than me smile, and laugh and love, these are the people I draw strength from, these are the people I searched for in the beginning and these are the only people I can look at and see that it really is possible to continue.

Chapter 6

Personal Journal Entries Of Michelle

These are journal entries that I wrote in the early days following the deaths of my sons. It was suggested that I write as it may be a way to help me come to terms with and deal with feelings of sadness, loss and anger. I don't know that it helped much in the beginning, as most of the early days are a blur to me, I am however, glad that I did write everything down because as you travel this journey there will be times you think you haven't moved much past the day your life changed forever, the journal entries will help you to see that you have moved forward, if only in small steps.

Thursday the 14th July, The day our lives changed forever.

I was so pleased to be returning home from 10 days in Fiji, I was looking forward to getting back to my routine, seeing the kids, sorting things out between me and Mat (we had had an argument prior to me leaving for Fiji), little did I know that our lives were to be changed forever that evening.

We collected Georgia from her dad's around 3:45 and arrived home by 4:30pm, I had sent Mat a text message earlier on to let him know we were on our way home and would be home no later than 5pm, and said on the message, : see you then mate" I had tried to ring Mat but couldn't get a reply so sent him the message. I then rang Brendon at 3:30pm to let him know we would be home by 5, said " Hi mate, just letting you know we are on the way home, should be there by 5" he said " no worries, Mats at the movies, but I will bring him home later" I said " I have some goodies for you from duty free shopping" he said " thanks mum" I finished the conversation by saying " no worries mate, see you later" he said " ok by mum" I said " by Mate". If only I had known they were to be the last words we would share, I would have said, should have said, "Love you mate" (1 hour later they would be dead, gone from life in a physical sense for ever)

Todd and Georgia had gone off to soccer training, she had to be there by 5:30, I chose to stay at home and check my messages, emails, un pack and put on the washing. While they were gone I was doing the emails but my left leg was still aching,(it had begun to ache about 410 pm, as did my shoulder and my forehead was sore to touch) so I decided to get up and do the washing and walk around a bit, that was when I heard a loud bang on the back door, when I approached the door I was greeted by 2 police women, I opened the door, they asked if they could come in and then asked me to sit down, I thought it was all a joke, I insisted on standing and said to them " which one, Brendon or Mat" thinking one of the boys had been in some kind of trouble, they told me there had been an accident and that both boys had been killed instantly, I said " no there must be a mistake I just spoke to Brendon" frantically I tried to ring the kids mobiles, all the while the police were trying to calm me down and get information off me as to who they should ring. The police wanted me to come to Morpeth where my son had lived for the past 4 months with his Nan, pop and dad. Frantically I told them who to ring and with that we took off to Morpeth, the whole time in the car I was totally in denial, saying maybe they had made a mistake, did they have his licence are they sure?

Todd and everyone arrived, we had to tell Georgia that her brothers had been killed, I was in some sort of trance, I don't remember a lot from the night, Georgia screamed, Todd cried, everyone cried – I was still thinking no, I wanted to see them, but was told I had to wait until tomorrow (Friday)

We waited for the boys dad to get home from work (what a drive that must have been, a 40 minute trip) We stayed at Nan's house for a while all trying to digest / comprehend what had happened – HOW IS THIS POSSIBLE I thought, My babies DEAD NO!!!!!! We went home, no words, what to say- just shock!!

Friday the 15th July

Neale and I go today to identify the bodies of our boy's. My god waiting until 10:00am to go to the morgue at Newcastle, can you imagine having to do such a thing? That was one of the longest mornings of my life – Aunt Cheryl comes to mind Georgia – poor Georgia, how does a 10 year old comprehend it all if I can't?.

We arrive in Newcastle and the police officer explains the process, I don't think I am really listening – he says that speed seems to be the cause, Oh Brendon, WHY??? We always say “drive safe, be sensible” he say's “ no worries” BUT!!!!

We go to the morgue, me, Todd and Sharee (what support she has been for me), Neale and Michael, the boys uncle. Neale goes in first, I hear him cry out after seeing Brendon (he and Brendon were like peas in a pod, so close).

My turn, I try to prepare, but how can you, I don't think I was fully aware of what I was about to do, now that I think back to that day I don't know how I managed to walk; I walked in to see Brendon sleeping, covered in a white sheet, a few small scratches on his face, I touch his forehead, its so cold, wake up Brendon I think to my self, he just looks like he's sleeping, its all so unreal, this cant be happening, how can this be happening to me, to us, to my boy's ? This is not right.

We have to see Mat next, Neal goes in first, then my turn, my little Mat, oh my god, only one half of his face visible, the other half covered in bandages, he bore the brunt of the accident. I could see his beautiful teeth all broken; I touched his forehead, again so cold. WAKE UP MAT I screamed, but he didn't...

Oh god my boy's are dead, the rest of the time we spent there is blank to me – we drive home in silence.

Even today as I re write this entry I cry, I cannot believe this has happened, even eight and a half months on, I cannot believe it. Why have we been dealt such a blow, what lesson can possibly be learnt from such a tragedy?

I don't remember much else from that day – visitors came and went, useless conversations, hugs – all pointless. By the end of the night I wanted to scream “SHUT UP” – I feel so empty, so gutted, I don't want to breath, i pray for my heart to stop beating, but I have to breathe for Georgia – but it's hard.

The next few days lead up to the funeral, the 20th of July- don't remember much from those days, lots of visitors, and lots and lots of flowers (god if I never get flowers again in my life I wouldn't care less). I feel so numb, so unbelievably empty. I don't eat or sleep much – fainted after a couple of days, actually on the Sunday after the accident at 2:00 am, gave Georgia and Todd quite a fright.

Had to go to the dentist the day before the funeral as I broke my front tooth falling to the floor when I fainted, not a pretty sight.

The day of the funeral has arrived, I can't believe what I am preparing for, please someone wake me up I don't like this nightmare. All the boy's mates had jobs to do and will do the readings, they are great kids (I am confused about the time) I don't remember the day – too painful, I think the funeral was about 10:00 am, another long agonizing wait, I only remember the church music playing when I walked in, approximately 600 people attended the funeral – the biggest in Morpeth's history so they say. How proud I am of my boys, they have touched so many lives, we have touched so many lives, they have so many friends, and so do I, I can't believe it. (we have a DVD of the funeral, for

that I am grateful, other wise I would have never known how many people came and how beautiful it was)

The cemetery, still all so unbelievable, Georgia, Todd, Neal and I all stand close, we are all in shock, I watch my boys being lowered into the ground, never to be seen again, never to be touched, the coldest, saddest, loneliest day of my life. Seeing my son's buried, 16 and 19 years of age, life just beginning for them, how unfair – LIFE SUCKS – I want to crawl in the ground with them, how can I go on??? Why???

We go home, but home to what, it's quiet, and it's empty. I'm empty, I feel so numb, I have nothing to give to anyone, Georgia seeks the company of the boy's friends, I am no help to her, a huge part of me has been buried with them, my heart and soul.

I remember the day I kicked Brendon out to live with his dad, we hadn't been getting on and I felt it was the only way if we were to ever have a relationship. I felt very depressed and sad that day because he said he would never speak to me again, that killed me inside, I told my partner, "God forbid anything ever happen to them, I would not cope, I can't cope with him not speaking to me, I know I would never cope with anything else happening", anyway he came around after a few days and we were on the road to friendship.....little did I know that 4 months later they would both be gone from my life for good.

The days that followed the funeral just seemed to roll into one another, I didn't care to eat, or chat although I had lots of visitors who insisted on chatting, they bought cards and flowers and plenty of food, know one really knew what to say – heck what could they say? Nothing they say will help me, I am in the darkest saddest pit of despair, I have never in my life experienced such pain. Who will help me? !!!

Back to work

2 weeks after the accident I returned to work, so hard, back to TAFE, long hours, all day I have to hold in my tears, I am so empty inside, I feel so heavy and have nothing to give, so heavy with sadness, HOW WILL I COPE?

How do you go from having three children to one?, how, someone please tell me how?????

I go to class and get through the first week, it's all do-able, everyone's happy to see me back at work, but I don't care, just working because I have commitments, I really want to sit at home and mourn the loss of my babies.

I start back at MAS (my other job) the following week after returning to TAFE, 2 jobs now, work is a small distraction. I want to just sit and cry and cry and cry, my partner says I seem to get better each day, how do you get better if you are not sick? I am not sick and I wish people would stop saying "you will get better soon" don't they know I have a broken heart and nothing will mend it. I really wish people could see me on the inside, broken heart, empty gut; I am just a shell going through the motions of everyone else's day.

No more visitors, the lonely journey begins

So now we have no more visitors, all the cards have stopped coming, everyone has gone back to their normal, but WHAT ABOUT MY NORMAL, what is it, I am so lost, our normal will never be, my partner along with most people say we have to find a new normal, but what's that? Normally I have 3 children, now I have one.

Georgia seems to be ok, I think it has finally hit her because the steady flow of visitors has now stopped, its just us at home now, she seems to worry about me a lot, I try to

explain to her the way I feel, but how can you explain to a 10 year old that you feel like your life is over, when she is still a very big part of it? I am not really sure how she is processing any of this. She's out playing now- I wish I had the resilience of a child. God give me strength to cope with each day – I am not sure if there is a god, up until this point in my life I never seemed to believe in anything but myself and what I could achieve, now I find myself asking for some sort of higher assistance, I ask every day, “ if there is a god up there, please give me the strength to get through another day”. So I continue on day after day, people think I am fine, I only get the odd phone call now and the occasional visit, if only they knew.

Wednesday the 10th August

Well I survived another big day of work, when I get home from TAFE work at about 9:30 pm I am faced with the funeral bill and also the death certificates had arrived in the mail, OH MY GOD!!!! That just crushed me, I lost the plot, my partners no help, and he hasn't a clue about how to help me.... Something so final about a death certificate, again, another reality check for me, YOU WILL NEVER SEE THE BOYS AGAIN, a voice inside my head tells me, they are gone for good.

I cried and cried for what seems like ages, so much pain, so sad, not my boys, how can this be?????? It says on the certificate Mathew – Student, never married (he used to say he couldn't wait to get married and have kids of his own, he thought it would be so cool) , Brendon- occupation, night packer – never married, all those plans and thoughts their dad and I had for them and their future – GONE in an instant, never to get that great job, never to be married.

Something so final about those death certificates, I feel angry at my partner for showing them to me, why couldn't he just put them away? But its not his fault! This throws me for a six, I just cry and cry, don't sleep well- my babies are dead. How can I be warm when they are cold? How can I do anything, I just want to mourn the loss, such a loss, I pray for my heart to stop beating through the night.

Thursday the 11th August

I wake up and start crying – today feels like the day after the accident, but I have to go to work, lots on today – by 8:15 I am still crying, I really don't give a shit about work today – I ring work and cancel.

I'm staying in bed today, cant be bothered to get up – still crying on and off- Pj's on all day – occasionally I get up and lay on the lounge, but I am so tired and in so much pain. Today I feel so alone and so so sad, I stay in bed pretty much until 3, ... what's the point of getting up? Mat won't be home from school at 4pm, Brendon isn't going to call in and Georgia's in Sydney for sport – no point to the day, I feel very depressed today, can't eat, I know I have to build up my strength again, at 3 I get up and eat some cereal.... I don't want to, self deprivation seems like the way to go right now, it feels like I deserve to not eat or sleep, after all I have been a slack mum, that's why my boys were taken, isn't it, well why else would they have been taken from me? All these questions in my head, I hate today, I hate me today and more importantly I hate life today.

6:10pm Todd and Georgia are home from Sydney, someone to share my sorrow.

Friday the 12th August

Went to work today, got through the day – Todd asks “ how did you go today” I think what does it matter, I'm doing for everyone else now not me. But I got through the day, only cried a few times – had a bad thing happen though, when writing down names for my new students one was called Brendon, that hit me like a hammer, Oh my god!!! I couldn't breath, had to leave the room – I go through what has become a common

process for me now – self talk, telling myself to be calm, breath, don't cry at work, don't lose it! I compose myself – its ok another day complete.

Saturday the 13th

At 5:10 am I am awake and have been for a while so I get up – must have slept ok cause I dreamt of a vacuum salesman selling to me – how stupid, slowly other things are creeping into my head, but still no dream of the boys. When I put on the telly there is a story about a new born baby, it reminds me of Mats birth, what a little bugger he was, impatient to come into the world, 2 weeks early I almost had him at Nambucca heads, spent the whole day in Maxville hospital, then the long drive home to Maitland because he decided not to come after all. We arrived at Maitland hospital where I waited for another two weeks until he finally decided he was ready to come into the world, 7lb something, I can't remember now, but it was winter time, 2nd of June he was born. So begins the life of Mat, what a terror he was as a little person but boy he turned out to be a beautiful young man, so caring and understanding, a real sweet nature. At about the age or 15 – 16 he started to change, I thought the aliens had swapped him, but really it was just normal teenage stuff, I know now.

We had an argument before I went to Fiji and we never really got to resolve it, for that I am truly regretful and sorry, I wish I had understood him rather than got cross with him, it was just hormones on his part. I am sorry Mat, I love you mate, I am sorry I wasn't a better parent.

Now I will never get to hug them again and tell them how much I love them. I never told them enough, something not so easy for me to say, I just expected them to know it because I gave them everything they ever wanted, everything I never had, but clearly its not enough.

I wish I had never got cross with Brendon, he and I had a struggling relationship – he is so much like his dad, I think that's why we clashed a lot, a head strong opinionated young man – who made him that way? ME of course, so I shouldn't complain. I love him and was very proud to have him, them as my son's, my big boys I used to call them when referring to them at work, Oh god, why did they have to be taken from me? I was trying to be a better parent – god I hope I do a good job with Georgia, she's all I have left, I have to make sure she knows I love her.

I am glad it's the weekend – I hate work, there is no purpose to it all now, just fulfilling my commitments and getting paid. How will I find the strength to continue? I feel so empty, so alone, so sad, crying on and off, no one can help me get through this, I have to live with this for the rest of my life, I pray for a short one.

Such heartbreak, so sad, so heavy with sadness, thank god for the weekends so I can just lay in front of the T.V, don't have to push myself for the sake of others.

I wish they could give me a sign so I know they are with me – sometimes I get a feeling that Mat is, but I think it's only wishful thinking.

I started going through the boys things today, found some special things of Brendon's, packed up some of his clothes, he hasn't worn them for ages and most are too big now – cleaned Mat's computer desk, it looks great, he wouldn't like it though, too tidy.

One of Mat's friends came today and bought his school photo's, it made me cry, I can hardly bare to look at photo's, he looks so handsome, even with his long black hair. Some of the boy's came today – Tom, James and another I hadn't, met before, he has some great mates, they all share a laugh or two with me, share their stories, things I would never have known... they give me a hug when they leave, wonder how long it will be before they fade into the memories and visit no more?

Haven't seen Tim in a while, I hope he is going ok. Tim and Brendon are like 2 peas in a pod- listening to Tim is like listening to Bren.
I feel so sad, such a heavy weight. Todd and Georgia have gone out – LIFE GOES ON I SEE!!!!

Sunday the 14th August

One month to the day that I lost my boy's, so, so sad, still so unreal to me. I have trouble comprehending the fact that the only way to talk to them today is at the cemetery. Todd, Georgia and I go today. Oh my boys I miss you so much the pain is unbearable for me, I wish I wasn't breathing, how can this be?

Collected the remaining posters from the side of the road today before they get wet and ruined. Todd and Georgia went to the football, I feel so angry with everyone who is resuming life as NORMAL!!!. I wish the world would just stop for a minute and realise what has happened. Why they are gone, I shut the blinds and put the TV on. My aunty and uncle came today, I got upset, my uncle had a mambo shirt on exactly like the one Brendon used to wear- I guess I am going to have to deal with that.

Just an entry...

Imagine as a parent, specifically the mum knowing that you will never see your children grow into adults, never see what kind of men they would have been,
Never see them get that great job, or start their careers
Never see them get to 21, oh god no 21sts
Never seeing them have children of their own (Mat always said he couldn't wait)
Never seeing them get that great car they have talked about since they first began to drive.
No more birthday's
No more Christmas's – Oh god how will we cope it's less than 6 months away?
No shopping together (Mat loved it Bren hated it)
No hugs from them as grown men
Georgia has lost her protectors, how will she cope?

Monday the 15th August

Starting a training course for my work today 9-4:30 in the safety of one room, one small group, it's where I feel the safest. Given the choice I would rather stay home. Have to go and teach at TAFE after that, everyone else crap, just another week.
I miss you boys, love you, have started tidying your rooms, its very sad and still so unbelievable.

Tuesday the 16th August

Tim came to visit today, he is so like Brendon, their mannerisms, the way they talk, I had a good chat to Tim he is not coping so well. I gave him Brandon's Kira Knightly poster as he has memories from when they got it, he cried, we just sat on there in Bren's room and hugged and cried together. He stayed for dinner which was nice and he is coming for dinner on Wednesday night as well with Todd and Georgia, I will be at work so might not see him. He is feeling very lost without Brendon, as we all are.

Wednesday

Tafe today, I feel really sad just going to be one those days today I think. Went to TAFE difficult to hold in the tears, I really did not want to be there, but did the best I could – just feel really sad today am waiting for Georgia to come home then back to work.

Thursday the 18th

5 weeks today since the accident, feels like yesterday to me. Such a sad day- even Georgia is showing sadness today, we have decided to NOT have Thursdays anymore, we have Wednesday and Wednesday B Thursdays are just too sad. Didn't feel like working but got through it.

Had my first experience of being shunned today, instead of being greeted by friendly chatty people at one of my workplaces they all looked at me, said hi and that's it, I know they don't know what to say, but surely they would realise ignoring me or acting different is not the way to go.

Thursday night – Georgia is very sad tonight, she had a big loud cry before bed, followed by a very restless night, no sleep and lots of tears, she misses her brothers. I wish I could take her pain away, she is so little and I feel so helpless, to help her when I can't help myself.

Friday.

Just another day, thank god the weekend is close, one more day to get through then I can grieve, I have to put on a smile and be so strong all day every day through the week, the weekends are such a release.

Saturday

Feel really sad today, Todd's going out tonight, so is Georgia, I hate being home alone but I can't stop them from doing things, why won't the rest of the world stop? Mine has and I am so angry that everyone else goes back to normal- what is 'normal' no normal for me anymore. I miss the boys so much, how can this happen to us??

Sunday

I feel sick in the stomach today, we go to the cemetery, they have started preparing the land, the grave site looked so small, I really felt sick today, we stayed at the cemetery for a while then tidy up the road side, get rid of dead flowers etc.

Oh Brendon, Mate, I so miss you both, how can I have you both in my life for so long and then deal with you gone?

Monday 22/8/06

Another day of everyone else crap, I really do not want to go to work today, Georgia is off to camp for 2 nights, I will miss her. Teaching all day at Kurri, then teaching at TAFE, it's a long day no time to grieve today. As soon as I get in the car, the day is over, reality hits, I am going home but the boys won't be there, they will never be there again. How do I cope with that?

I wish I could talk to them, I would tell them how much I love them, how proud I am of them and how sorry I was that I was not a good mum, too cranky, worked too much, never paid enough attention to them. All the things I have learnt about Mat, how could I have not known what mischief he got up to? If I had paid attention to him more then I would have known, did they know how much I loved them, still love them? Did they know everything I did I did for them?- now what is the purpose, No PURPOSE!! DON'T CARE.

Tuesday

Same old shit

Thursday

Bad day today – so depressed, struggled with work, went to the dentist first, while under the gas was crying. I was remembering the day that Mat had gas for the first time, boy did he laugh; we had a real effort to keep him quiet I couldn't stop thinking about them, couldn't stop crying.

Went to class, one student asked me a question and I started to cry had to leave the room, boy it was hard to come back in.

I just can't handle one on one discussion; I can only focus on the task at hand.

"I miss you boy's so much and am truly sorry I never told you enough just how much I love you"

Friday 26th

Another week almost over, all I have to do is get through today and then I can rest, no thinking, no planning, no discussions.

Boys dad told me I should try to learn to live my life the way the boys would want me to, but I feel I have no purpose, I can't imagine ever going back to the gym, no shopping, can't go to Greenhill's too many memories.

I don't really care much about anything, everything seems so meaningless, 6 weeks on and it feels like only yesterday that our lives were turned upside down. What are we to do without them?

How will I cope? I miss them so much. I love you Mat and Brendon, can't wait to be with you again.

Saturday

Nothing to say, just time to mourn.

Sunday 28/8/06

Went to the cemetery today as usual, it doesn't get any easier; actually, I am still left wondering why? How? Georgia is very quiet when we go – I wish I knew what she was thinking, how does a 10 year old make sense of this? I am an adult and I can't

Its evening now – another week about to begin Wk 7, I miss my boys, did some work today, a small distraction. Work tomorrow, crap, other peoples shit, I can't wait until December when all work finishes.

Monday 28/8/06

Another begins, big deal, I have the usual early morning headache as I sit here and prepare for the day. I hate going to work. Week 7 begins for us today, but it won't matter to me if it's week 7, month 7 or year 7, I will always feel like this – my son's are gone, I miss them and love them – I feel so empty inside.

Friday the 2nd of September

Just another week, same old shit! Nothing to report this week, everyday is the same, total sadness, such a sense of loss just different degrees, depends on what's going on

The following are my on- line journal entries

The loss of a child

I am sure that many parents who have lost a child feel as I do that no one can help because no one can possibly understand the pain of their tragedy. The sadness, the exhaustion, the disruption to home life, the panic, the horror of laughter and the endless feeling of sorrow and despair.

Although the journey through pain has only just begun for me (4 months on the 14th November) I share your bereavement, I know this pain we feel cannot be erased, but I feel and hope that by sharing with others we can find a unity in our grief and console each other, for no one else understands best where we are coming from and where we are heading than another grieving parent.

My story begins.....

I was returning home from an overseas trip to Fiji, where I had been holidaying for 10 days with my partner of 6 and a half years. We had collected my daughter from her dads and proceeded home. I was excited about getting home, although I had left the boys before and knew they were in capable hands I had missed all of my children and looked forward to resuming our normal routine.

I had rang my eldest son Brendon at 3;30 pm from Sydney to say we were on our way home, my other son Mat had not returned the message I left him, as I later found out he was at the movies with his girlfriend.

We arrived home at 4:30 pm on the Thursday, and by 5:50 pm the police were knocking on my door, I was home alone as my partner had taken my daughter to soccer and I was to do a few things at home so we could all sit and discuss what we had all done during the holidays.

Little did I know that that day would be the end of two beautiful lives, my life as I knew it and the beginning of a very sad and hard road for the rest of our lives.

And so it begins

Over the past few months I have tried hard to arm myself with as much information about this new learning process I am going through. I say learning because as a mother most of what we do for our children comes from intuition and good old fashioned common sense, we aren't given a parenting manual at the hospital when we have our babies, we are given what everyone else terms as a beautiful bundle of joy, its not until we get home that we wonder where is that beautiful bundle of joy they mentioned, there must have been a mix up at the hospital, somehow I have been given someone's else's child, this little bundle of joy who cries all night, sleeps all day, poops and wees when ever, cries for the sake of it, keeps us up at night, causes us to sleep on the floor because they have wind and have to be on a hard surface, decides to throw up that last bit of milk after you and baby have bathed and are ready for bed. That little bundle of joy that gives you unconditional love, that little person that teaches you the real meaning of life, that little bundle that gives you a sense of purpose, a reason for all that you do, that little precious person that you have created. We do in a sense learn to be a parent, but motherhood is built within, it comes natural, its part of a woman's makeup.

Grieving to is natural, but so UN-NATURAL is the grieving for a child, there is no intuition to tap into for this learning process, I find that I have no clue, yes I have had the passing of a grandparent to endure but the pain is nothing compared to the loss of a child. When I was pregnant I didn't read much, it was a time of uncertainty but with that uncertainty came excitement, anticipation and happiness, I didn't feel the need to read, now I find myself reading absolutely everything I can get my hands on, because I have no clue as to how I go about this, so yes the learning process begins !!

Stages of Grief

Something I hear a lot is "There is no right way or wrong way to grieve" this statement is of no consolation to me really, as I am an organized, methodical, planning, basically black and white type person, I often find my self wondering if I am doing this right, should I be crying every morning when I miss the routine I had with my sons, should I be sad when I know I won't be picking Mat up from school, should I be feeling angry with everyone, why do I find it hard to concentrate, how come I was so goal driven before and now nothing motivates me at all, why do I get annoyed with people when they say stupid things like "oh well at least you have your daughter" or " gee you look well, you must be feeling better". Because I am the person I am I want someone to tell me the right and wrong way, I crave for direction, deadlines, goals and a plan of attack for this phase of my life, but sadly there is none.

I feel like I have checked out every website and every book (I know there's more out there) and still I get the same and only consistent thing, "The stages of Grief" the only thing is you don't really go through these stages in one even continuum, you experience these stages all over the place, any time of day, night, week or month. You experience some on their own but mostly I have found they are interconnected depending on the day or time of the day.

These stages are consistently described as;

DENIAL (this isn't happening, it can't be happening, and boy do I do this, at least a few times a day I say this to my self)

ANGER (Why, who is to blame, it seems a necessity for me at this stage to blame someone or something, of course, I have no control so yes someone else must be to blame, or better still I will blame my self, that works for me)

BARGAINING (I promise I'll be a better mother if you give them back to me, I'm sorry I stuffed up, I promise I'll do better, JUST GIVE THEM BACK)

DEPRESSION (I don't care anymore, I say this so much I surprise my self at my lack of motivation for even the basic things)

ACCEPTANCE (well I feel at the moment I will never accept this, but common sense tells me I will find a way to accept what has happened, I have to or I'll go mad trying to figure out why)

One thing is for sure although our grief experience will be intensely personal, these seem to be the typical stages of bereavement. I guess if we can identify the feelings and emotions we are experiencing in each stage, and talk about them or write them down we

will be able to reflect on them throughout the grieving process and deal with them in a productive way.

A friend told me today that once we get to acceptance then we can accept spirituality within, then our loved ones will come to us, I look forward to that day.

Just a thought

Today I thought I might share something that I did to make me feel good, something to take the focus off the day for me..

Thursday's for me are very difficult as it's the day of my son's accident. My daughter and I (she is 10) had decided to remove this day from the week, heck from the calendar but unfortunately that is not possible so we grit our teeth and get on with the day. I don't start work at TAFE until 12 on that day so from the time my daughter leaves at 8:15 I start the downward spiral into that emotional pit I call the black hole of sadness, as much as I try I just can't stop thinking about that day, the events of the day and how the evening ended up. Usually by 11 I am feeling fairly crappy, been crying, have a headache and in general just do not want to go to work, but I start to get ready anyway. Well this week while I was getting ready I thought to my self, I can't keep doing this before work I have to try something else, So I decided that I would do something nice for someone else to make me feel better, I would give a little and then emotionally I might get a little back.

I went to woollies and bought a bunch of yellow roses and a bag of kids party toys for my students. In my class I have about 3 ladies and 8 young boys, interestingly enough they are the ages of my son's, so I knew what would make them laugh.

I bought a fancy bag to put them in, some curling ribbon, came home and quickly started preparing the gifts. I cant describe what a relief it was for me for 15 minutes to just focus on someone and something else even for just a short time, I can't say I was happy but if my son's were looking down on me they would have been because for the first time in 4 months, there was no fake smile and gritting teeth, I was smiling at the thought of the reaction from everyone, my whole mind set about going to work changed, if only briefly.

So off I went to work, and before class started a couple of them asked how I was and I responded with my new response " crap, its Thursday, BUT I have a surprise for everyone, its as much for me as for you so I hope we get a little fun from it" I told them all to shut their eyes which they did, I then placed the roses on the table for the ladies, told them they could open their eyes but the guys had to keep them shut, they had to reach into the bag like a lucky dip, laughter filled the room, smiles everywhere, even on my face, I was having fun. The guys selected their little gifts, which ranged from flutes, yoyo's, spinning tops to parachute men, when they all opened their eyes we all had a chuckle, they played, the girls smelt the flowers and the tension in the room was lifted (they all know what has happened so I guess they feel like walking on egg shells at times).

I suppose the moral of the story is that, I made a decision that day to do something about my own emotional state, it was a small step outside of my grief, A brief respite and it worked. I am not saying this will work for you and I am not saying I will do this all the time, what I am saying is that for the first time in 4 months I actually had control of something. TRY IT, IT MIGHT WORK FOR YOU.

I just can't believe it

There are many times a day that I find myself saying "I just can't believe it". I find it very difficult to cope with the reality of the death of my sons and accept the changes in my life and those around me. It is hard to accept that despite my feelings, behaviours and regrets, nothing will bring them back, nothing I do or anyone says will change the fact that my beautiful son's are dead (I think it has been a long time since I told them how beautiful and precious they are, sadly its too late for that, I have to hope that somehow they knew how much they were/are loved and how special they are.

This acknowledgment of our new reality is even more difficult when the calendar marks another day, week or month since I last saw or spoke to them. This Monday the 14th marked the 4 month mark for me, It has been 16 weeks since I spoke to Brendon, 16 and a half since I spoke to Mat and probably closer to 18 weeks since I saw them last, I cant believe I'm living this damn nightmare. I MISS THEM SO MUCH!!!

They say that grief can come in waves, I pray for the waves because everyday for me feels like a tsunami. Monday as usual was a very difficult day, for some reason as much as I tried I just could not stop replaying the events of that day, I try so hard to keep busy and not think about it as life goes on for everyone and sadly I have no time to grieve that day I have to go to work.

The pain inside for all grieving parents is different, so individual, but I liken it to... Well I cant match it to anything I've ever experienced, the hole inside feels so black, so big, sometimes I feel that it will swallow me from the inside, the pain in my heart is crushing, so overwhelmingly heavy that its really hard to get out of bed and carry on with everyone else's day.

I asked a friend of mine "how will I get through another 16 weeks knowing that I will not see them or hear them? She said "the same way you have got through these 16 weeks, it will get a little easier as time goes by. I read a quote the other day, which is so true, " TIME, is an important aspect of grief. For the bereaved, TIME-stands still, weighs heavily, passes & heals" They say painful feelings will diminish with time, I cant imagine this but common sense tells me I must believe it other wise I will be left with no hope, a hope that someday I will be able to enjoy the sun, smile, laugh and appreciate life again
Wednesday, November 16, 2005

Special dates - The first of many first's

Yesterday was my daughters 11th birthday; she had invited friends of my son's and was looking forward to such a great time. The morning started out the same for me, convincing my self to get up and face yet another day, this time though, I was supposed to be excited, after all it was Georgia's birthday, she was excited and so should I be.

Little did she know that since the Thursday before had I had been working myself into some kind of frenzied state, the mere thought of having this celebration for the first time in 11 years without my boys was devastating to me. By the weekend prior I was well and truly on a downward spiral towards that abyss of emotions that we as bereaved parents experience. I had, by Sunday evening cried more tears than I thought possible in a weekend, I was sick in the stomach, couldn't eat and had the worst headache imaginable, as if the emotional turmoil of grief isn't enough we have to endure the

physical aspects as well.

Monday I had to go to work as usual but as Wednesday came closer I felt sicker and sadder, How will I do this? How can I face all those kids knowing they are only here because Mat and Brendon are not?, and How dare I even begin to think about having a laugh, A PARTY OH MY GOD!!! And all the while knowing how excited Georgia was getting, and why shouldn't she, after all its her party, and that is the defining statement that got me through a 2 hour party, It was her day, all I had to do was get through 2 hours, that's not too much to expect is it?????

During the course of the evening the weight in my chest I cant describe but I felt so heavy, I just felt as if I was being kicked while I was down, the kids were all laughing and chatting as teenagers do, Georgia was having a ball, everyone eating and drinking, I had to keep going to sit in a quiet room just for a brief moment, to gather myself, then I would rejoin them, not doing much just sitting and watching, then I thought I should make an effort so I attempted to help them out with party games etc.

It was 7:50 when I felt I couldn't contain it anymore I had to go in side and leave them to it, by then I felt like I had been holding my breath for 2 hours and when the tears started I just couldn't stop, got my partner to start to get them all moving as it was a school night. Then came the good byes, I felt like I just wanted to hold them all so close, I wanted to say don't go, stay, I MISS MY BOYS SO MUCH.

Still all was quiet by 9 and I thought to my self, well self you got through it, relatively unscathed, everyone had a good time, and most were oblivious to the intense pain that I was going through.

I think I got through the evening because I handed over most of the evening to someone else to organize, I only sat and watched, plus I planned or rather Georgia planned, I think planning in advance for these special dates is important, although it is hard. I have asked my friend to help with the planning of Christmas as I don't even want to contemplate it, I think too that making some kind of contingency plans are good, after all, what if on the day, as often happens, you find that you cant go through with it, you find that you would rather be on your own, keep someone on notice. So now I wait for my first Christmas, What a thought!

How quickly one can change

GRIEF is such a wicked thing, so all consuming, it can turn even the strongest of people into the saddest, most lonely and lost souls. How do we continue? The questions the bereaved ask, why me? Why my son's? When will the day come where I will say, ok I know how to go on, I know the direction I must take? These questions are pointless to ask really, there is no answer, I don't think there will be a defining moment, perhaps it just blows over you one day, perhaps as they say, time is the healer, although the idea that I could reach a point where I would no longer miss my son's is obscene to me, I must go on, some how I must find the strength to create a new normal. I say a new normal because once you have lost a loved one your normal ceases to exist, the reality is I will never be the same person again, what is left when you feel that the best part of your heart has been cut out and buried with your loved one/s. What is left? That's the true question to ask, but again who can answer that, I think from my own perspective, only I can answer such a question, only I can determine what is next.

I guess how we deal with each day is determined so often by those swinging moods that we have on a daily or even hourly basis.

What do you do when the grief is so raw, so deep that it can hit in the most unlikely places. Sometime ago I had to attend a dentist appointment, something that has never bothered me in the past, this time it was painful, emotionally, I remember sitting in the waiting room thinking about the last time Mat, myself and my daughter were there, Mat was getting work done to create a beautiful smile, of course I already thought he had one but he wanted his teeth to be straight so we had embarked on a long journey of dentist visits, so here I was thinking about the time he came and I let him have gas for the first time, it was so funny, he laughed, we all laughed, and yet the fact that it was so funny couldn't give me the strength to get through my dentist appointment without crying in the chair, usually the gas made me laugh, not this time, I found myself apologizing to the dentist for the tears, I said " normally I would be laughing, I'm so sorry" he said " Ah!! but what's normal?". The wave of grief can come when your out buying a chicken at the supermarket, the noise of the people, the rushing here and there, the crowd, for me this was a terrifying experience, here I am about to purchase a chicken and then I feel that wave, Its almost as if I could see the storm cloud, it was that visible to me, my legs start to shake, I want to bite my nails and all the while saying to my self, " please no not here". Over the past 4 months I have had many occasion where I have become so overwhelmed with the gut wrenching pain that accompanies the emotions of grief, I find myself saying, " please no not here, just let me get this job done, just wait until I get to the car" I want to scream at everyone around me, "don't you know, my son's are dead, what are you people thinking?" But that's just it isn't it, they aren't thinking, they aren't thinking of you, why should they, your no part of their life.....

This brings me to something I have learnt and perhaps it may help others, if you don't tell people how you are, how you truly are then how will they know, I have had to learn to accept that I will cry at the drop of a hat, that I will be angry for the littlest thing, that all the people around will not know what to say or do even though I expect it... For this reason I say, feel the grief, talk about it, share it, then perhaps it will become faded. Surround yourself with people you know will listen, ask the people around you to talk about the missing loved ones, when they ask how you are , tell them exactly, if they don't want to hear it or deal with it then that's their problem, you have enough emotional crap to deal with without worrying about how others feel about the way you are dealing with this.

To the friends of the bereaved, please don't think you will upset us by doing this, think about it, how could we possibly be any more upset? We are experiencing the unthinkable, the imaginable. I said to a friend recently, I am upset and sad everyday, its just the degree of sadness or upset that changes, nothing you say or do will change that, NOTHING!!

Grief and Anxiety

Yesterday I was faced with a most awful thought, I actually had to leave the house for something other than work or to visit the cemetery. It is not the first outing I've had, no, actually it's the 3rd, the other two over these past 4.5 months were out for a picnic lunch, something I thought I could do, because I knew that there would be only myself, my partner and my daughter, even though I was filled with sadness and fear at the thought that I might actually go out, and god forbid even enjoy it, I went, both outings were only 2

hours or less in duration, my daughter loved it, I guess to her it was almost some sense of normality, some sign to her that mum is ok, and it was for that reason that I knew by making an effort I had done the right thing, little did she know that the pain inside me was almost unbearable, I cried silently on the way to the picnic ground, put on a brave face there and cried silently on the way home, I asked my self, how dare I feel the sun on my face, how dare I be eating a picnic lunch, doesn't anyone know that for me I am permanently in winter and I only eat because I know I have to, there is no enjoyment for me anymore in such things..... But still I try.

So yesterday I knew I had to have a remedial back massage, as I have a bad back and I could not put it off any longer, I chose to go to my local gym, where I had frequented for the past 5 years, on most occasions twice a day, after all how hard could it be I knew everyone there, I am familiar with the surroundings... How wrong I was. I walked in and it felt so big, so noisy, so absolutely bright, as I walked through to where I had to sit, I started to feel like I couldn't breath, suddenly it felt like everyone was staring at me, the walk to where I had to sit seemed to take for ever, I felt like I was running but I wasn't, actually I tried to remember everything this morning, what triggered the panic attack, but all I can remember is the white, the brightness of the place.

I sat and waited for my appointment, I would like to say calmly but that was not the case, I was shaking, trembling, I started to breath fast short breaths, the tears were starting, I felt hot and sweaty, all I could say was *please not here*, thankfully a close friend of mine was on hand and as with other times, while she was quietly talking to me I could focus on my breathing, I counted to 10 and eventually calmed my self down. I hate this, I find myself asking "WHAT THE HELL IS HAPPENING TO ME" once a person in total control now turned through the anguish of grief into a blubbering idiot, it makes me feel like I am going mad, loosing my marbles, when will this stop? Will it ever?

This event prompted me to find information about these feelings, I jumped on the WEB and began to research, after all they say knowledge is power, plus it was much more productive for me than the usual morning tears. So I began to research and it became apparent to me that I am not going mad, this is all part of the process of grief, and it is a natural reaction to the stress of grieving. I have inserted some information that I found along with some sites of interest.

Could Anxiety and/or Grief Be Putting You at Risk of Panic Attacks?

Out of the blue, you feel terror. Your heart is pounding. Panic attacks can also include, but is not limited to the following symptoms

*Palpitations, pounding heart or accelerated heart rate, Sweating, Trembling or shaking
Sensations of shortness of breath or smothering, Feeling of choking, Chest pain or discomfort*

Nausea or abdominal distress and Feeling dizzy, unsteady, lightheaded or faint

What is Panic Disorder-and Who Gets It?

"Panic attacks," which are the hallmark of panic disorder, are believed to occur when the brains normal mechanism for reacting to a threat--the so-called "fight or flight" response--becomes inappropriately aroused.

Initial panic attacks often occur when people are under considerable stress, for example, having experienced a particularly traumatic event, or suffering from the loss of a family

member or close friend.

Panic attacks usually take a person completely by surprise. This unpredictability is one reason they are felt to be so devastating. Sometimes people who have never had a panic attack assume that panic is just a matter of feeling nervous or anxious--the average intensity of feelings that everyone is familiar with. In fact, even though people who have panic attacks may not show any outward signs of discomfort, the feelings they experience are so overwhelming and terrifying that they often are really convinced that they are going to die, lose their minds, or behave in such a way that they will be totally humiliated. While such disastrous consequences don't occur, they can seem quite likely to the person who is suffering a panic attack.

The Cause of Panic Disorder

Typically, a first panic attack seems to come "out of the blue," occurring while a person is engaged in some ordinary activity like driving a car or walking to work. Suddenly, the person is struck by a barrage of frightening and uncomfortable symptoms. These symptoms often include terror, a sense of unreality, or a fear of losing control. This barrage of symptoms usually lasts several seconds, but may continue for several minutes. The symptoms gradually fade over the course of about an hour. People who have experienced a panic attack can attest to the extreme discomfort they felt and to their fear that they had been stricken with some terrible, life-threatening disease--or were "going crazy." Often people who are having a panic attack seek help at a hospital emergency room.

Some people who have one panic attack, or an occasional attack, never develop a problem serious enough to affect their lives. For others, however, the attacks continue and cause much suffering.

Understanding Panic Disorder - People who develop panic-induced phobias will tend to avoid situations that they fear will trigger a panic attack, and their lives may be increasingly limited as a result..

Strategies For Coping With Panic

1. Remember that although your feelings and symptoms are very frightening, they are not dangerous or harmful.
2. Understand that what you are experiencing is just an exaggeration of your normal bodily reactions to stress.
3. Stay in the present. Notice what is really happening to you as opposed to what you think might happen.
4. Label your fear level from zero to ten and watch it go up and down. Notice that it does not stay at a very high level for more than a few seconds.
5. When you find yourself thinking about the fear, change your "what if" thinking. Focus on and carry out a simple and manageable task such as counting backward from 100 by 3's or snapping a rubber band on your wrist.

5 OF THE 10 STEPS LISTED IN THIS ARTICLE more info can be found on the following link<http://www.panic-attack.us/readmore.html>

Grief and Loss - Grief is an emotional reaction that follows loss of someone or something of great value. There is a difference between normal sadness and grief.

Normal sadness is your emotional response to most losses, disappointments, and frustrations in life. When you experience normal sadness, you are able to:

- describe why you are sad
 - respond to your environment in a normal way
 - get over your sadness in a relatively short period, usually less than a month.
- Any loss can cause grief. Death is the one that usually comes to mind. The grief and mourning process associated with the loss of a loved one (especially if it was unexpected) often has the following three stages:

- Stage 1: Shock and Disbelief
- Stage 2: Developing Awareness
- Stage 3: Resolution

There are ways to help you deal with grief and loss. These include: More information can be found on the following link -http://www.med.umich.edu/1libr/wha/wha_grief_bha.htm

Another informative site I have found is, Grief Healing, found on the following site <http://www.griefhealing.com/>

I am a little clearer now on these attacks, I realise that again I am not alone in such experiences, and maybe I will feel a little more in control when the next one occurs. I found this poem on the grief healing site mentioned above and thought I might share it, as it is a question that I often ponder.

When Does Grief End?

*Grief hits us like a ton of bricks,
flattens us like a steamroller,
hurls us into the depths of despair.
We know in a flash when grief hits,
but when does it end?
Like the month of March,
grief rushes in like a lion
and tiptoes out like a lamb.
Sometimes, we don't know when grief leaves,
because we won't let go of the lion's tail.
Why do we hold on so long?
Grief offers us safety,
protection from the world.
We don't want to let go
because we secretly fear
that we'll forget our loved ones,
and we don't want to forget Â– ever.
We don't want to let go
because we fear the future
and having to face life without our loved ones.
We don't want to let go
because we make the mistake
of measuring our grief with the depth of our love Â–
when neither has anything to do with the other.
How do we know when grief has run its course?
How do we know when we've grieved enough?
Cried enough?
"Died" enough?*

*How do we know when it's time to let go of the tail?
We know when we feel joy again, in something or someone.
Joy in living. Joy in life.
We know when we wake up in the morning
and our first thought is on something other than our loss.
We know when we look ahead with a smile
and back with fond memories,
and when we no longer dread the nights.
We know when our life starts filling up with new interests and people,
and we start reaching for the stars
Grief ends when we let go of the tail.*

Margareet Brownley,

"When Does Grief End?"

Bereavement Magazine , January/February 2002

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A new normal????

That is the reality that I am faced with on a daily bases, accepting that our old life no longer exists; we now have to find a new normal. How much we take for granted in life is now very apparent to me and its sad to think that a tragedy of such magnitude had to bring it home.

I DON'T WANT A NEW NORMAL, I was happy with my old life, this is not life to me now, it is simply an existence, no sense of purpose, no direction, I know from people I have spoken to and from what I have read that a *new normal* will emerge. I ache for the old normal, the normal that had me dropping Mat off to school, collecting from school, dropping him off at the train station at 4 am, coming home to his 1800 reverse message, " mum can you pick me up", yelling at him to get out of bed in the morning because he's going to make us all late, listening to his cheeky often silly remarks, watching him and Todd wrestle - Mat in pain and loving it, I want to hear Mat and Georgia fighting again as siblings do, I want to hear his computer running to the wee hours of the morning, I want to hear him complain about having to mind his sister, or grumbling about dinner, I want to see him get angry at me for not letting him do something, I want to have arguments about his hair and lack of hair cuts, *I WANT HIM BACK.....* I want to see Brendon again, I want to hear his computer running all night, I want to rouse at him for being lazy, I want to be able to ask him for help with my computer, I want to see him pace the floor in that annoying way while he was talking on the phone, I want him to ring me in the middle of the day and say " mum are you bringing home any food" which meant I'm too lazy to make a sandwich can you bring home takeaway, I want to buy it for him and then grumble about it. I want to be able to ask him to help his sister with math's, and take her shopping, I want to see her stand beside him again and look up at him as only a little sister can, I want to hear his voice, I want to hear him call me 'small's' (his nick name for me on occasion) ***MATE, I WANT YOU BACK..***

I miss my young men so much, I don't think about them every day, I think about them every minute of every hour of every day. I wasn't aware of just how much I spoke of them through the day, I am know because every time I mention them someone inside me says, they are not here anymore remember!! I don't think they ever knew just how much I spoke of them, just how much I loved them, of course they wouldn't because I never told them, that's just it, we don't tell people how we feel about them enough, how true it is the saying *you never know what you've got until it's gone*' I don't think they even

knew how proud of them I was, regardless of my winging at them, and for that I am truly regretful.

I see and hear often, parents grumbling about their kids, yelling at them and complaining, don't they know how lucky they are? NO, and as parents we don't, we complain that the kids take us for granted, that we will be there for them always, to cook, to clean, to wash and to guide, when reality is that WE TAKE THEM FOR GRANTED, how dare we presume that we own them, that we are to have them for the rest of our days after all they are ours! We bought them into this world, we control them, when in actual fact they control us, they give us a sense of direction and purpose, they guide us in the decisions we make, all be it in a subconscious way.

At the moment I feel I will never understand why or how this could happen to me and mine, I try to find some reasoning in it, how could they have been here for such a short time? Had they served their purpose? Did they teach me all they needed to? Or is the lesson only just beginning??????

Internal Torment

I have recently had the occasion to visit a close family member who has just had a new baby, her first baby. This occasion would ordinarily fill me with excitement, I love to see new babies and the excitement of the mum and dad, its especially good when you can visit them and don't have to take them home. I remember those early days, having a new baby in the house, the crying, the lack of sleep the loss of ones self and the many changes that this new life brings to your old.

On this occasion, however, I was filled with panic, firstly it meant that I had to leave the comfort of my own 4 walls to which I retreat each Friday afternoon, not to resurface until Monday morning for work, and secondly it meant that I had to celebrate a new life when I have just lost the lives of two of my own. I can't describe the feelings, on one hand I felt like I was being selfish, how can I put my own feelings before such a special event, on the other hand I was happy for her, but both thoughts caused me to remember the births of both of my sons which in turn reminds me **AGAIN** that they are no longer with me.

We went to see this precious little miracle, and boy was he little, so tiny, approximately 6lb, my own daughter was only 5lb so it reminded me how tiny she was. While at first when holding the baby I was fine but within minutes that deep deep feeling of sadness came rising up from somewhere so deep within the pit of my stomach, all I could see while holding this baby where my sons, and I thought to my self, how quick they grow up, one minute they are baby's, and then before you turn around they are teenagers, and then as quick as all that, as in my case and many others like me they are gone. I ask so many time how can some supposedly almighty power create such a precious miracle and then have the audacity to take them away?

I held the baby for as long as I could, I felt the tears well up, started to shake and then felt sick how could this happen while holding something so beautiful?, I had to give him back and continue on with my brave face, of course by then I felt so alone in that room I couldn't take it any more and suggested we leave, after all, it was the new parents special day and I didn't want to ruin it for them. We got into the car, but I still tried to maintain a brave stance, my daughter does not like to see me cry, but I only had the strength required for about 4 minutes, I had to let it out, the pain inside me was overwhelming, I felt gutted, I actually felt physically ill, I just couldn't stop crying, I cried all the way home. That event drained me of energy for the rest of the day, those of you who have grieved will understand that grieving is so trying.

Later that evening I retreated to a book I have been reading, like many books lately it is on life after death. It is amazing to me how my own beliefs have been brought into question as a result of such a tragedy. Prior to July 14 I would have said "once you are dead you are dead", even the death of my only close family member five years ago, my beautiful grandmother didn't change that thought, she was old and sick, I thought it would be nice to think she was with me but didn't give it much thought, now I am desperate to believe that my boys are with me, I can't believe that they have been buried and that's that, I need to know they are with me, they still had so much to do and experience, I've even been to a clairvoyant, as I suppose most bereaved mums might. She told me some things that only I and my family would know, she told me that Mat needed a haircut (something which we argued about constantly) she also mentioned that he loved music and played an instrument (he plays a guitar) as for Brendon she couldn't say much, he never was a great communicator, often very quiet, she just said that he was sorry, and felt such remorse for what had happened (he was driving the car), anyway I guess that gives me hope that they are around me in some form. I have even been thinking about going to church, I have read that if you find an inner peace and forgiveness that it will open you up to them more and they will be able to contact you, apparently they can't contact you when the grief is still so raw and painful. Who knows, all I know is that I am now questioning my own beliefs because I am looking for guidance through this quagmire of grief.

The death of a child is tragic, there is no disputing that and despite what I write there are really no words to describe the pain. Since my sons have died, I don't think a day goes by where I say to myself "I do not want to live" I find it difficult to imagine a life without Brendon and Mathew, how in the world can I ever expect to be happy again?

I guess I have to believe that death is just a new beginning for them and not an end, and that they will always be present with me in spirit, my practical side tells me to draw strength from this, but my heart is left of my heart won't hear of it yet, perhaps one day. One thing I know to be true is that one day I will see them again; I just hope it's not too long into the future.

I read this the other day and it rings so true:

Mothers and fathers hold their children's hands for just a little while...And their hearts forever

Christmas

It's almost 11:30 pm, I went to bed 1 hour ago and just couldn't get to sleep. My thoughts are wondering forward to Christmas after all it's only 19 days until I experience something that I never imagined possible, my first Christmas in 19 years without Brendon and my first in 16 years without Mat... if you are a parent reading this try to imagine for a moment what that thought might be like, you can't can you?, it's almost unthinkable, well for me it will soon be livable, let alone unthinkable. For many the celebration of Christmas on December 25th is a high point of the year. From November onwards, it is impossible to forget that Christmas is coming. In streets around my home as with many, Christmas

trees, lights and decorations adorn everyone's front yard and house, there is absolutely no escaping it, even if you wanted to.

I personally have never really enjoyed Christmas because of the lack of connection to my own family, my siblings and parents; we are a disjointed bunch and have been for as long as I can remember. When I had children I was glad to have my own family and looked forward to starting our own Christmas routines. As the kids got older the morning seemed to get quieter but the surprised and happy looks remained the same, *WHAT WILL I DO THIS YEAR??* How will I face the day, how can I put on a brave face for my daughter with such pain and anguish in my heart?

I can already feel myself going into that awful downward spiral of emotions, and I notice it in my daughter, for her and her brothers the 1st of December meant "can we put the tree up please mum?" she hasn't asked yet, I feel so bad for her, she's so little to be going through such a tragedy.

I am almost at a loss for words tonight, I feel so sad, and strangely so alone, grief is a really lonely place to be regardless of how many people are around you. I went to bed and started to cry, while my partner started to sleep, how can he lie there, how can even sleep? How dare he breath, I wish everyone could feel my pain and in some sense I wish those closest to me felt it like I do, I hate sometimes that life for everyone else has gone back to normal, where is the fairness in all that?

Its ironic that I have started to write this BLOGG so I can help myself down load the emotions and thoughts going through my head at times when I need to have a clear head to sleep or work, but here I am crying and thinking, I just feel so sad, I just want to sleep though Christmas and wake when its over, sometimes I think I don't even want to wake because it would be an easy way out of this pain. I know people close to me will not like to hear that, but know it, its the truth and I hope that you never know such a feeling of despair that could drive you to such thoughts.

This Christmas is going to take all the strength I can muster up, deep from within me, I hope I can find it..... I LOVE YOU BREN and MAT, and miss you so much. I am going to imagine you are with me everyday in some way, hopefully you will give me strength.

I found this poem; I think it will help my friends and friends of other grieving parents...

Please See Me through My Tears

you asked, "How are you doing?" As I told you, tears came to my eyes . . . And you looked away and quickly began to talk again. All the attention you had given me drained away.

"How am I doing?" . . . I do better when people listen, though I may shed a tear or two. These feelings are indescribable. If you've never felt them you cannot fully understand.

Yet I need you.

When you look away, when I'm ignored, I am again alone with them. Your attention means more than you can ever know. Really, tears are not a bad sign, you know!

They're nature's way of helping me to heal . . . They relieve some of the stress of sadness. I know you fear that asking how I'm doing brings me sadness . . . but it doesn't work that way.

The memory of my son's absence is with me, only a thought away. My tears make my loss more visible to you, but you did not cause this sadness. It was already there. When I cry, could it be that you feel helpless, not knowing what to do? You are not helpless, and you don't need to do a thing but be here for me. When I feel your permission to allow my tears to flow, you've helped me. You need not speak.

Your silence is all I need. Be patient . . . do not fear. Listening with your heart to "how am I doing" validates what I'm going through, for when the tears can freely come I feel lighter. Talking to you releases what I've been wanting to say aloud, clearing space for a touch of joy in my life. I'll cry for a minute or two . . . then I'll wipe my eyes, and sometimes you'll even find I'm laughing in a while. When I hold back my tears, my throat grows tight, my chest aches, my stomach knots . . . because I'm trying to protect you from my tears. Then we both hurt . . . me, because my feelings are held inside, causing pain and a shield against our closeness . . . and you, because suddenly we're emotionally distant.

So please, take my hand and see me through my tears . . .

A scary experience.

Yesterday I was forced to relive the horrible experience of the night of my sons accident, not that I don't already replay that day and the events leading up to their deaths over and over in my head, but yesterday was different. I was traveling to work on the same road I travel on about 3 days of each week, its nowhere near there accident site, I was just driving as usual when the car in front started to slow down, apparently we were being directed to stop so we did, I was just in a world of my own waiting to be told we could continue, but when we did get the signal to move on and as I came closer to the reason why we had stopped I realized there had been a car accident, **OH MY GOD!!!** Was my first thought, as we were guided past, I saw the car was upside down with the roof crushed, I tell you now it was a pale mustard colored car, but at the time I saw my son's maroon ford, I saw their bodies in it, everything came flashing before me, I saw there faces at the morgue, I saw the crushed car, I started to continue to drive but felt that overwhelming sensation of despair and sadness build up, I think I only drove for about 3 minutes it might be less and started shaking, telling my self the whole time, breath, breath, just count, just keep driving, but I couldn't do it, I had to pull over.... I was a wreck. I rang my office and basically said someone has to come I can't drive... I sat there waiting for what seemed to be ages, I watched the police cars, I watched the fire brigade. I saw the traffic come and go and all the time thinking, that's what it would have been like on the afternoon of my son's accident, I was paralyzed with shock, fear, I don't know what I just couldn't move and couldn't stop crying. Thankfully a lady from office was driving past and saw me, I don't remember her coming to me or talking to me or driving us away from the accident site, but I do remember her holding me tight to stop me from shaking.... I was reliving that horrible night and the following days, both emotionally and physically, I felt physically ill.... Is it not bad enough that we as the bereaved have to deal with this on a daily basis in our own minds but we have to also some how prepare ourselves for the what if's, how can one prepare one's self for such a shock, its damn near impossible... I sat in the car for the longest time just screaming and crying, but who could hear me? Could my boys hear me? The lady that was with me said" your boys are with you Michelle, always," well that may be the case and I am yet to really believe it but I'm sorry but it just doesn't cut it.

I keep reading that you must prepare yourself for such things as they are bound to happen, reminders of the kids or the tragedy, try to count and breath when they happen, but its all crap!!! Again my guts were ripped out yesterday, what's left of them. Needless to say I didn't sleep too soundly, I couldn't eat much and basically have that overwhelming feeling again of I just couldn't give a shit. While I was sitting in the car waiting to be rescued I was wishing my heart would stop, it would be so much easier (for me anyway).

I am sure there are many people who could relate to my experience, as I know now that I haven't joined an exclusive club, there are many of us out there, but boy don't you just feel so alone when things like this happen?

No real purpose for this BLOGG entry today other than hopefully I can get a clear head after down loading it, plus I just wanted to say **IT SUCKED.**

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 07, 2005

The search for answers and help

When you lose a loved one or as in my case two, regardless of who you are the pain will be different for each of us, we will deal with it in different ways, some care to hide from the emotions and keep busy, some care to talk about it and others will seem to stumble through the maize of grief not really knowing what to do and how to do it. I feel I am in the later category, quite contrary to the type of person that I am. As I have said before I don't have a clue as to how I should be dealing with this, or how to help others help me, I can only do what feels right for me at the time, literally one day at a time.

Well today for the second time in almost 5 months I went to a clairvoyant, something that I know a lot of grieving mothers may have done. I came home as before, feeling a little worst for wear, no better off..... What was I expecting you might ask, I don't know, I guess what I want to hear is someone say to me that my boys are standing right beside me, that Mat says... And Bren says..., I want someone to fill in the gaps for me, I want to know what happened for them in their last minutes, what was their last conversation as they drove down the road before they took that fatal corner, I want someone to tell me they felt no pain, I want to know they are at a peaceful place, I WANT SO BAD TO KNOW THEY ARE WITH ME. The Clairvoyant told me today that they are, she said they are trying to contact me but I am stopping them, rather my grief is, she said to allow myself to be open to them..... I came home and just thought, "get real, they aren't coming back, they are gone" I know they are in my heart because they are a part of me but how the heck am I supposed to draw comfort from that when the pain of not actually physically seeing them is at most times unbearable.

I have now got 2 candles ready for Christmas and yesterday I had their names engraved on a plaque for each candle, while I was attaching the plaques to the candle my daughter said, "mum you seem like you are having a good day" I said to my self how could I be having a good day I should be wrapping their presents not putting some crappy little silver plaque on a candle for them. I said to her "no I'm not I'm just occupied with a task that's all" when really I should have just said to her (as a wise and experienced friend said to me) thank you darling, and left it at that. I really wish I didn't get angry at everyone for every dumb thing they say (clairvoyants included), we have to realize that know one knows what to say, to that I suggest that sometimes saying nothing is the best thing, often there is no need for words, as a matter of fact most days especially after work I am too drained to speak, I just want silence.

So will I stop going to see clairvoyants you might ask? I think not because supposedly they are the only ones who can have some aspect of real connection to our loved ones and while there is hope of that connection I'll take whatever method I can..

2 things I find most difficult to comprehend..

1. The fact that I have lost my beautiful boys and I will never see them again, EVER
2. The fact that this is truly a life changing experience, I , my life and everything around me will never be the same.

I truly feel that I am treading water and sometimes I wish I could just let myself sink, because it is too damn hard!!!

And right now,I feel like I have fifty broken bones and when I'm still, it hurts,and when I move, it hurts even more,no matter what part of me I move,all those broken bones grinding together.

Worst of all,anyone who tries to comfort me moves those bones,hurts me worse.--

Jane Howard Samuels, in Wombmates

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2005

Answers and Milestones

This week marked the 5 month mark for the death of my son's (wed the 14th Dec) it may as well be the 5 hour mark to me, I don't feel any different, should I feel different, I thought I might as time went on, but I think when they say time heals all pain, when your grieving they mean time as in years not months... As I said it may as well have been the 5 hour mark, the sadness was so heavy in my chest that day I felt suffocated, I found it very difficult to breath, to think, to care, and I spent the best part of every minute shaking my head and saying this can't be happening, why am I living this nightmare? **HOW CAN THIS BE?**

Something did happen though, that has given me some peace as strange as it may sound, and I think I will take it as a sign from the boys, perhaps its there way of helping me. For most of this 5 months I have been saying to my friends that I have a 2 hour and 20 minute gap from when I spoke to Brendon to when I found out that they had passed away, that needed to be filled, of course as the mum (as I expect would be normal for anyone) I filled that time gap with my own version of events, but now I have them filled, I had the opportunity to speak with the Chaplin who was at the scene of the accident almost from the time it happened till the end stages... This man filled my time gap, I was able to ask him questions like, describe the scene to me, who was there, where the boys alive even if only for a moment? Did they call out for anyone? Were they alone? And many more questions, all of which he was very forthcoming with the information. I cried the whole time, he was very patient, but these were things I needed to know, finally I know. So where did that leave me, I stayed up for a little while just trying to process everything I had heard, I had a restless sleep, and have felt fairly bad since, but I needed to know and I know from people that I have spoken to who have experienced this nightmare and continue to live it that this is all normal.

so maybe it was a sign, I have now witnessed an accident scene as I mentioned in an earlier entry, I no longer know what happened on the day so perhaps my boys have answered my thoughts, perhaps this is their way of saying ok mum now you know, you have what you asked for.... There is nothing to be done with this information really, I will share it with some, but mostly it is for my own sanity, I can stop wondering, I'll never know the full version of the events from their perspective but at least I have the peace in knowing they had someone with them and for that I am truly grateful.

So as the 5 month mark passes we face a new milestone, Christmas, my daughter said the other day "mum its only 11 days till Christmas" in my mind I said OH MY GOD!! Out loud I said to her" is it, I guess you might like to put up the tree" I know this is equally hard for her, I see her pain, the sadness in her little face, the moods and attitude(which I might add are usually there, but are now compounded with grief)for her the 1st week in December usually marked the time when her and her Brother Mat would put up the tree, Brendon became too big for such an event, he and I would just watch, but this year I

think she has tried to put it off, I suppose she is facing her own internal torment, being 11 she has the excitement that Christmas would usually bring but she also has the loss of her brothers and her first Christmas without them to contend with.

I have tried to research how best we can cope at this time, how I can help her and others, but how can I help others when I can't help myself?? The tree is up now, so that horrible thought I had when she told me how many days were left is now a reality, I have to look at it every day, last night her and Todd wrapped presents, I wish Todd could have realized that watching them caused me such sadness (I had hoped they would do it in the other room and I could remain oblivious to it, I think Georgia wanted to involve me), don't they realize that that is usually my job, and because I couldn't give a hoot about it and didn't want to do it and asked them to do it that it's a stark reminder to me that my boys won't be here? Everything that is now done different to the way it has always been done is a reminder of the **new normal** we are trying to find.

Christmas is supposed to be a happy time, well to all that know me and read this I want to say for me it won't be, of course for all of you Georgia included I will put on a brave face. But please be patient, if I ask to be alone please let me, if I don't want to eat or drink please don't insist, I realize that people who haven't experienced this kind of loss will never truly be able to understand where I am coming from, you will (and I pray you will never)

Never understand the incredible yearning, the sadness and the anger that comes with such a loss and how it is 10 fold at these 'special times' . Just remember on the days leading up to, the Christmas day and the days following that I can't simply shake off the feelings of grief for that period of time, I can hide my feelings but I am sure there will be a cost, remember this added stress may cause me to slide into depression, or I may even have a huge hissy fit, please don't take anything I say or do personally over the next few weeks, just help me get through it by listening, allow me to cry, cry if you want and most of all, even if I don't , please talk about the boys, although I can't think of any good stories at the moment it doesn't mean that I don't want to hear about them, and I know Georgia loves to talk about them so if you only do it for her.

Just remember that Christmas and the new year will bring with it the realities of the loss and the changes that Myself, Todd and Georgia face... I realize that you cannot help me unless I tell you how I am feeling, for this reason I share my feelings and thoughts with you about this time, this is my way of helping you cope with me not coping.

A very special friend is always telling me to **BELIEVE**, well I have to believe that I have had 2 signs from my boys to help me cope over the past couple of weeks (seeing the accident and talking to the Chaplin) and I have to believe that I will enjoy Christmas again (well as best as I use to, never really liked it) maybe I will even enjoy life again..

" Happy Christmas " to everyone, I love you all and ask you to, and thank you for supporting us through this most terrible and unthinkable journey.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2005

An experience to share

Something both wonderful and upsetting happened to my self and my daughter yesterday and for those of you that know me and read this, I thought we might share it, as strange and unbelievable as it may seem I have to truly believe that it was a sign.. Well after thinking about it most of the night I see no other explanation other than it was a message from our angels, but in particular Mathew.

My daughter was at the fridge, standing there with the door open looking for a drink as they do, when she shut the door and turned around, she could smell something familiar, she called to me and said " mum can you come here there's something familiar here" I proceeded to the kitchen, when I saw her face I could see she was up set, I said "what's up" she just said smell. When I breathed in a big sniff I could smell Mats deodorant, my heart skipped a beat, I started to cry and said to her that's Mats deodorant, and she said I know. Little tears started rolling down her cheeks, and I have to say that she doesn't as a rule cry in front of me or anyone, we both stood there, we could smell it so clearly, it was the smell we used to smell when he would have a shower and come to the kitchen to make peanut butter toast, it was as if he was there but we couldn't see him, we both just stood there, arm around each other, not really knowing what to make of it.

It seemed to last for a minute or 2 and then was gone, we looked around the room and both agreed that Mat must have been there, or maybe he was still there. I asked Georgia if she had sprayed it, as you do (I was looking for a logical explanation) Georgia went to get Todd's deodorant, we sprayed it but it wasn't the same. We knew it was Mats smell.

We sat back on the lounge and just cried a little and then spoke about them, I told her I mostly miss calling out to the boys, saying there name, its not normal for a mum to not be calling her children for one thing or another.. She then told me that often when she walks down the boy's end of the house (where their rooms are) that she feels funny in her tummy and heart, I said maybe that's her self sensing they are there, she agreed.

Now if this event had occurred to only Georgia I would think she was making it up, despite what I have read about such things I still have an element of doubt, If it had happened to me on my own I would have tried to explain it and find some logical explanation, however; as it happened to both of us what else can we believe, the fact that it made Georgia cry meant it had some impact and that she too truly believed he was there. I think Mat was trying to let us know that he was there, or that they are both with us in some form even though we can't see them. I guess they see me cry daily about the impending Christmas celebrations and the new year, and they would hear me saying how much I miss them and love them, and I guess they have even heard me say can we have a sign, just something to show you are here, maybe my thoughts have been answered??? I have to believe so.

Over the past few weeks I have mentioned things that have occurred, me witnessing a car accident, me talking to the Chaplin and having the 2 hours and 20 minutes of missing time filled in, and now this.... There is also something else that happened in front of my self and my girlfriend a couple of days after the funeral, an ornament that Mat & Georgia had broken and I have patched up, the broken part fell off, I put it back on and it fell off again, now this broken part hasn't fallen off since the day I repaired it, that has

been several years since. So I guess I have had 4 signs, I just didn't see them through the fog of sadness that is now my daily companion.

So where does that leave me this morning, I guess it gives me comfort knowing that they are here with me I just cant see them (it is by far no a consolation though), and if I believe then I will feel them with me, its just really hard when all I want to do is see them, hug them, talk to them.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2005

Christmas Day

Well what can I say other than thank goodness its over, it was one of the hardest days I have had to deal with yet, the sad thing is that it will come again and again and again, there will be no escaping it. Christmas is supposed to be a time of happiness, celebrations, party's, good food and friends but for me and anyone in my situation it's far from that, it is such a stressful time and very challenging. Unless you have experienced such a loss I don't think you could understand the incredible yearning, sadness and anger that seems to intensify around this time.

Imagine how hard it is to put on a brave face for everyone else around you knowing that they are supposed to be celebrating, they don't want to see tears or even shed them at this time, but inside that's all you want to do. For me the reality of my new life hit home, **my god I thought**, it's really true I will never see, hear, feel or talk to them again.

Something that I find hard to comprehend is why won't people talk about the missing ones from the table or the celebrations, why was not a mention of their names given at any point in the day, is it because everyone thinks that they will avoid making the grieving person sadder by mentioning them? (That's not going to happen, its not possible to make us any sadder) is it because it's too hard for everyone else? Is it because people fell safer not to say anything in case they ruin the party? While the reality of the empty chairs at Christmas breakfast is painful the memories of events or Christmas past can be sweet, I think, I cant say for sure because there was not one mention of my boys at the breakfast table, not one mention of their names or things they had done in the past, its as if they don't exist or never had, they are out of sight so no longer required to talk about them.... Can I say from the grieving person's point of view, that's what we want to hear, we want to hear fond memories of Christmas past.

I know that people cannot assist the grieving if we as the bereaved do not tell you how, I find myself often lost for words, and even if I did have the words you wouldn't want to hear them because although they have the undertone of sadness, more often than not they are filled with anger, and although not directed at the person they are said, I often think that offence may be taken so it's best not to speak at all.... But for me on Christmas morning all I wanted to say while watching my family and friends celebrate was " hey they are still here, can someone speak of them or to them, or acknowledge them some how"

I managed to survive the day as I am sure many have before me and sadly many will after me, but it is not without a cost.. Mentally, emotionally and physically it is draining, Christmas eve all I wanted to do was sleep and Christmas day I couldn't wait until everyone left so I could sleep, it's as if its our bodies way of helping us to recover from this tragic change to our life.. For me I want to sleep so the time goes quick, plus; while I

am sleeping I am not thinking or crying, it's a brief reprieve from this tragedy which is to be the dictator of everything that I do from now on.

Some tips on how to help the bereaved (from my own perspective, these may not work for others) :

- *If you would normally buy a present for the family member who is missing, how about making or buying a special tree decoration in their memory, it will show the bereaved that you still think of the missing loved one and it will make you feel good because although you feel helpless at this time you will feel that you are doing something.*
- *Make a toast to the person or in my case my son's, they are young men they would appreciate that, share a story or 2, you have no idea how much the bereaved person will welcome that, it will help them and others around.. The 'remember when's' will get everyone chatting and laughing*
- *Write a Christmas card for the person who has died, the grieving will cherish that and will put it away with other memories to talk about in the future, its important(for the person who has suffered the loss) to treat any situation as if they are still there.*
- *If you visit the grave site, tell the bereaved, in my case a friend of mine told me she had been and said a few words to the boys and that she saw someone else going there as well, that was comforting to me to know that she cared, that she took time out of her day to go.*
- **Most importantly;** *share memories and stories, we need to know that they are not forgotten and that the mentions of their names or things that they had done are not now a taboo topic. When you are grieving as I am memories are hard to re-call and its very helpful for others to help out in this area.*

Merry Christmas, my special angels, I know you were with me... Bren I know you would have loved the big breakfast and eaten all the food you wanted without any consideration to anyone else getting any, and you would have had some of those long winded over exaggerated stories to share with us all and Mat I know you would have loved being the centre of attention and entertained us all in some form whether it be some of your silly faces, sayings or just your cheeky ways, we all miss you boys but I miss you most, I look forward to sharing a Christmas table with you again.. Love mum XX

Just something to share

I received this lovely email today:

Hi Michelle,

I just wanted to share something with you that my 5 year old daughter Tali said this morning, My mum went to visit my son's grave this morning, and I asked her to take photos of it for me as she had put flowers there and stuff, anyways mum came over this morning to see us and she was showing me the pictures she took of Tyler and my pop's graves and Tali piped up all serious like and said "Granna, did you see Brendon when you visited heaven? " ... it bought a tear to my eye the innocence of a child.

I just thought I would share this to let you know Brendon even has etched his memory into my kids hearts as well :)

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2005

A poem

One of Brendon's friend's wives sent me this poem today along with heart felt wishes and thoughts for Christmas. She also lost a child so understands my pain and especially the pain of those firsts, of which we are about to experience our first big one... Even Georgia said to me this morning it doesn't feel like it will be Christmas Eve tomorrow mum.... I wonder when we will be able to celebrate such events happily again.

***~Too beautiful for Earth~
If I could have a lifetime wish,
A dream that would come true,
I'd pray to God with all my heart
for yesterday and you.
A thousand words can't bring you back;
I know because I've tried.
And neither will a million tears,
I know because I've cried.
You left behind a broken heart
And happy memories too.

I never wanted memories,
I only wanted you.
An angel in the Book of Life
Wrote down my children's names
And whispered as She closed The Book
"Too beautiful for Earth"***

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2005

Reflections

Today is my birthday (New Years Eve) and it has me thinking, not only about the boys, I think of them every minute of every day, but about all the New Years Eve's I have missed with them. Having a birthday on such a special day has always meant party time for me, I wanted to be out with friends and celebrate, as I got older and my friends and I had children the going out wasn't so easy and staying up until midnight even harder, but we still managed to celebrate. All those times that I went out at night and left the kids with sitters or as in the past couple of years to their own devices, if only I had realized that the celebration for new years eve were going to come to an end so soon.... All those missed opportunities. Last year the kids, Todd and I all went out for lunch, I looked at the photos from that day recently and there isn't one of the boys and I, the memories I have in my mind are all that's left of that day. All the times I grumbled to Brendon to buy me a present "because I'm your mum" all the times I whined about how slack he was, why didn't I realize then that I had the best present of all I had them!! You know why, because we never appreciate anything until it's gone, isn't that the truth.

The main present I ever remember the boys getting me one year was when they might have been about 7 and 10, Brendon all serious bought me a desk pen set, it was very him at the time, really into school, quiet and sensible and Mat, well he bought me a mirror that when you picked it up to look in it screamed, so absolutely Mat. Those presents were so special because they were so individual... What happened to those gifts, who knows, they have been lost as is often the case, again we take things for

granted, thinking that they will always be around, if only I had known.

So today Georgia wants to celebrate, she asked me last night if I was excited about my impending birthday, I said "no", after all what is there to celebrate, the fact that for the rest of my life I will have to have birthdays with out them... I cant imagine ever celebrating again, and besides who wants to start a new year not me..

A mum's role

"While we try to teach our children all about life, our children teach us what life is all about." Angela Schwindt

I went to the cemetery today, (as is often the case for a Thursday, it's the day my son's lost their life) before I left home I prepared some flowers that I had and then called in to the supermarket for more, then off I went.. While I was walking up to see my boys I said to my self, " I know they aren't really hear anymore, only their bodies remain" so why is it that as a mum I feel that I need to attend the cemetery several times a week when I have already experienced things that make me believe that they are with me at home? I realized today why, its because its my job as the mum to do things for my kids, I am supposed to prepare things for their day, I am supposed to buy things for them, I am supposed to clean their room when the mess is more than I can stand, SO it is for that reason that I feel I must buy flowers, prepare things from home to take, clean their head stone and grave site when I go to visit.... Because I'm the mum and I'm supposed to be DOING for my kids, after all that's what we sign up for the moment they are born, once you are a mum your world as you knew it is no longer yours, it becomes theirs, that precious little bundle, now relies wholly and sole on the love and attention given it by parents.

Over the years as my children have grown I feel as though I've gone from an individual person into an extension of them. My main purpose in life has been predominately about them - to protect and provide for them, love them, nurture them, to give them everything and every opportunity I never had, as we as parents often do. In the blink of an eye those sleepless nights, dirty nappies, constant feedings and unconditional love that can be both exhausting and exciting disappear. Before you know it they are grown up....

So what happens when that sole purpose or part there of is no longer??? I feel so lost, I am used to doing for them, I want so bad to be doing for them, I know I have my daughter and I love her more than words can describe, but the hole that has been left as a result of the passing of my son's is unbearable and I am sure permanently un- fillable.

I often use to say to my friend while grumbling about the boys and the things they got up to," I'm sure in 10 years time when they are grown men we will be sitting here saying what was I worried about, look how they have turned out, great men, great careers, their own families " well sadly we will never live to see how they would have turned out, who would have thought I would be writing this, who would have thought we would be traveling on such a rough, bumpy and very sad road!!!

I guess in time to come as I watch my son's mates grow up and begin their own adult lives I will be able to imagine what my boys would have been doing, it's a small consolation really, but I am glad that I still have contact with mates and hope for all our sakes that it continues way into their adult life, I know I will need it, but in the mean time I

will continue to do what I can for my boys anyway possible and I will make everyday count for Georgia, remembering never to take her for granted, you just don't know how long you have these little people, that is now my reality.

QUOTE: **DON'T TAKE FOR GRANTED THE THINGS CLOSEST TO YOUR HEART. CLING TO THEM AS YOU WOULD YOUR LIFE, FOR WITHOUT THEM, LIFE SEAMS MEANINGLESS*

Author unknown

I found this poem today, it made me smile because anyone who is a parent will be able to relate, especially one who has teenagers. The poem went on to talk about "them Growing old and gray" I have chosen to omit that part as it made me sad to think I will never experience that era of their lives.

Very touching Mother facts !

When you came into the world, she held you in her arms.
You thanked her by wailing like a banshee.

When you were 1 year old, she fed you and bathed you.
You thanked her by crying all night long.

When you were 2 years old, she taught you to walk.
You thanked her by running away when she called.

When you were 3 years old, she made all your meals with love.
You thanked her by tossing your plate on the floor.

When you were 4 years old, she gave you some crayons.
You thanked her by coloring the dining room table.

When you were 5 years old, she dressed you for the holidays.
You thanked her by plopping into the nearest pile of mud.

When you were 6 years old, she walked you to school.
You thanked her by screaming, "I'M NOT GOING!"

When you were 7 years old, she bought you a baseball.
You thanked her by throwing it through the
next-door-neighbor's window.

When you were 8 years old, she handed you an ice cream.
You thanked her by dripping it all over your lap.

When you were 9 years old, she paid for piano lessons.
You thanked her by never even bothering to practice.

When you were 10 years old, she drove you all day, from
soccer to gymnastics to one birthday party after another.

You thanked her by jumping out of the car and never looking back.
When you were 11 years old, she took you and your friends to the movies.
You thanked her by asking to sit in a different row.

When you were 12 years old, she warned you not to watch certain TV shows.
You thanked her by waiting until she left the house.

Those teenage years

When you were 13, she suggested a haircut that was becoming.
You thanked her by telling her she had no taste.

When you were 14, she paid for a month away at summer camp.
You thanked her by forgetting to write a single letter.

When you were 15, she came home from work, looking for a hug.
You thanked her by having your bedroom door locked.

When you were 16, she taught you how to driver her car.
You thanked her by taking it every chance you could.

When you were 17, she was expecting an important call.
You thanked her by being on the phone all night.

When you were 18, she cried at your high school graduation.
You thanked her by staying out partying until dawn.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 05, 2006

***A letter I sent to another grieving mum who suffered the same tragic loss,
not farr from where I lived – 9/1/06***

I wanted to take this opportunity to express my genuine sympathy and empathy to you and your family.

I understand how you are feeling today and how you will feel in the weeks and months to come as I too lost my son, actually I lost both of my sons in the car crash at Morpeth on July 14th, not quite 6 months ago, they were also of similar ages to the young men that you and your family have lost, 16 and 19 years old.

When I heard the news my heart went out to you, the mums of these young men, I know at the moment you are in a state of shock, asking yourself, why, how? Because I have been there and 6 months on I am still there.

I watched on the news the friends of your young men and it reminded me of all of my boys mates and how this also ripped them apart, they will be your strength and remaining connection to your boys, lean on them you will be surprised at how strong and mature they will be during this time.

In the weeks to come you will get lots of support, flowers, cards and sympathy but be prepared for the day you wake up and find its just you and your immediate family, that's when you realise how truly alone you are, that's when you realise that for everyone else life goes on and for you life as you knew it will never be the same again.

Be mindful that people will say the silliest things, not to hurt you but because they don't know what to say, they will also in some cases say nothing and stay away, again its not because you have some contagious disease, its because they don't know what to say and they think they will upset you if they mention the boys or the accident (tell them nothing else in this world could upset you more, as a mother you are enduring the worst pain possible)

One piece of advice that I can give you, and you wont be able to do it yet, help them, those around you help you, tell them its ok to talk about the boys, tell them its ok to cry and tell them you need them to do so, it will help you and them deal with the grief.

If you have a partner or husband, take it from me they don't deal with grief the same as we do (the mums), it will feel at times like they don't care. But they do and you just have to keep telling them, communicate with them about how you feel, communication is the key, love wont be enough to get you through this, because while they may love you, for you, you will feel that you have nothing to give, after all your heart is broken and a part of you has died (that's how I fee)

I'm not sure what will help you because everyone's grief is different, for me in the days and weeks following the death of my sons I started to write in a note book, just how I was feeling on the day and if I was angry (*you will be angry*) it helps to get it out because know one really understands truly how you feel unless they have experienced the loss of a child. I stopped writing for a while and went to a

meeting for mums who have lost teenagers at the Newcastle SIDS for kids support group, I only went for one meeting out of desperation really, as I was feeling like I was going insane and really needed help with how to deal with grief and loss (at the 8 week mark) at that meeting I made friends with another mum who had 2 sons the same age as mine, she had also lost one at the age of 14 yrs and also had a child left at home as do I, I never went back to another meeting as she has become my support person, I can ring her when I need, and believe me I need often, after all who better than her to discuss my feelings with, she knows exactly how I feel and what I am going through, she can totally relate to me and I find this more comforting than talking to my best friends at times.

This event will cause you to question everything you believed in before, everything you have ever done, all the goals and dreams you had, nothing will mean the same, nothing will be as important to you. I am not religious but often find myself asking someone who I never spoke to in the past (*god*) why, how could he let this happen if he exists?, I never really gave heaven much consideration either, but now I read everything I can get my hands on to understand where my boys are and if they are ok (not the bible, things on after death communications etc)

Finding new meaning to life will be hard for you because for you as the mum, our kids are our life they give meaning to everything we do, I haven't found it yet but looking at my friend from SIDS I can see its possible and that is the only thing that gives me hope.

I know you may not be ready to read and absorb this yet, I know I couldn't think or concentrate in anything in the days and weeks and even months after their death, but take comfort in knowing that you are not alone, and that ***I know*** exactly how you feel, I truly know and if (*when*) you feel the need to reach out to talk to someone you can call me, even if one of your friends would like to call me, they may need to talk, they may want to know how best they might help you, they can call me that's ok, after all for most of them this is new territory and if you haven't before you will need them more than ever now.

You are in my thoughts

PS; I'm not sending you flowers, like me after a while you may come to despise them, they are a stark reminder of what has happened, In stead I'm giving you this book, I didn't read it for weeks after the deaths of my boys but when I did it gave me an understanding of the road I was about to embark on, it would be good for your closest support people to read it.

I have also attached my journal, what I have written so far, I though I might share with you how I was feeling at times, my closest friends read this as it is an on-line journal (WEB LOG) and it gives them insight as to how I'm feeling and how best to adjust to the new me.

Excuse the types note, my hands are still a little shakey and you would have difficulty in reading my writing, I don't know when the shakes will ever leave me.

I place this in my journals as a reminder that while we feel sometimes at our lowest and that there is nothing we can do, somewhere someone may also be

feeling our pain, and may need a voice of understanding. It helped me to write this letter and I have done it several times throughout this journey so far.

Grief - The changes it brings

I wanted to add this post, not so much for now but for in the future. When my daughter is old enough to grasp what she is reading this will give her some insight as to how I was feeling during this journey, and also for myself, the hope is that as I read through it again some time down the track I will be able to see how I adjusted to the loss of my beautiful boys over time.

I have just spent the night having a friend sleep over, not because we wanted to catch up and have some girl time, but because I was too scared and lonely to stay in the house on my own. Those of you who know me may find that really hard to believe (don't worry so do I) as a matter of fact I might guess that you would think, 'no' that can't be right, not Michelle, but yes it's true...

I have been given an opportunity this week that prior to July 14 2005 I would have loved, I have had the house to myself for 4 days, just me, total freedom and peace and quiet, my own space, things that in the past were so important to me, as a matter of fact I would go as far as saying, those characteristics helped define me. But this time I didn't like being on my own, I have never experienced the feeling of loneliness, because I have always been fiercely independent being on my own has never bothered me, and as for being scared well, I would usually find being scared (like watching a horror movie scared) very exhilarating, good to have the adrenalin racing etc, but not anymore.

This tragedy has rocked the very core of me, it has completely shaken my internal foundations, you know, those things that make you you, those things that get you through the toughest times. Your belief's, feelings, sense of self, your confidence and attitudes, every thing I knew about me and valued as my strength, all gone. To give you some insight; in the past, I was a very determined woman, very head strong, motivated and driven, that's what got me through life.. After all I needed those qualities, as I raised my boys on my own from the ages of 5 and 3 for some time, during that time I had to not only support and love them but I had to find myself, I had to re-design me, I had gone from living at home to being married at 18 and being looked after for 8 years (sort of). Suddenly being faced with life on your own with 2 small children would be daunting to most, but I took it as a challenge, it was my choice to be alone so I had to figure it out on my own, god forbid I ask for help, and so the new independent Michelle began, within 1 year I achieved what I wanted, I had bought my own home, I had gained fulltime employment and had began studies at TAFE, things were going good, I'm not saying there weren't trying times but what I am saying is that I chose that road therefore I had to deal with it and I did, that has been my philosophy through all of my life, you make your bed you lie in it so to speak, don't winge about life get on with it.... That attitude has seen me through 2 divorces and a car accident, all of which some good came from, I could see a sense of purpose to these road bumps in life, plus they have made me a stronger person.

But this event is far beyond any challenge I ever imagined I would face, I don't see this as a challenge, as with a challenge you usually find some sense of satisfaction in

achieving a good outcome, there is usually a sense of purpose, what satisfaction can be gained by knowing you have survived the loss of your children, what purpose can be found in such a loss??

In contrast to the Michelle above, this is the new me:

♥ I no longer care about my own space, sure I am like most people, some quiet time is good but as for space, the hole in my heart is space big enough to last me a life time.

♥ As for confidence and strength, what are they, I find I avoid any situation at work that may cause me to have to meet someone new, or discuss a new deal or contract, I don't have the confidence in my self to carry off such a conversation, I just avoid them now. Strength, I keep saying I don't have the strength to deal with this; I am not as strong as I was before. Strength to me means that you can stand your ground, that you can dig up the determination to fight, that you can overcome challenges and change.. Well I don't believe I can do any of that anymore, although I must have some strength left somewhere deep down because something gets me up in the morning, helps me get ready to face the day when all I want to do is sleep, so perhaps all is not lost.

♥ Independence, I have always prided myself on being independent, I don't need anyone, never have never will, well hasn't that changed, now I find my self wanting to ask for help more times than I care to count, I don't always do it, but like last night, I knew I couldn't have another sleepless night and that I needed company, its a dark sad place you go when you are grieving and left on your own, even if only for a short time.

♥ Motivation, something that I usually give to others.. There has only been one other time in my life that I lacked motivation and the desire to go on, 1999 when I was hit by a car, at that point in my life, when I could no longer do my job, no longer go out or go to the gym, no longer do lots of things I thought my life was over, I didn't care to live then, (little did I know the biggest challenge in my life was yet to come) I was so unmotivated, and because I had always been motivated and usually motivated others no one really realized that I needed help, not that I would ask for it.. Anyway I lack motivation for even the basic things now, I cant be bothered to care about what to eat, exercising (which was my all time favorite pastime) means nothing to me anymore, work which I once loved, does not motivate me at all, I am so unmotivated to motivate others (that's part of my job as a teacher). Despite the past difficulties I have encountered I have never experienced such a lack of motivation.

I think the biggest thing to figure out how to live with (apart from not having my boys at home) is the total lack of purpose, I've said before as a parent your kids are your purpose.

So how do I like the new me? I don't, I want the old me back, I want my old life back and most importantly I want my boys back... BUT I know this will never be the case, and we have to learn to live with the changes and adjustments to the life we now live... I often wonder how my friends and family will live with the new me, I have changed so much in the past 6 months, how will my daughter will cope, after all she's only ever known me to be outgoing, happy, active, busy and always achieving, and what about my partner will he be able to cope with the new me, I'm not the same person, those qualities that he loved in me before are gone, how will he cope with the change? Who knows, there is no

crystal ball to look into if there was I wouldn't be writing this because I would have known that the 10 days I was away were the last 10 I would have spent with the boys and I would have stayed home and kept them safe...

So what have I learnt so far that I could pass on to others?

♥ You can never be prepared for what's around the corner despite all the goal setting, study and hard work you do, but planning can help you get through one day at a time and when you are grieving that's the best you can hope to achieve, one day at a time.

♥ You have to learn to ask for help from those around you, they won't know you need it unless you ask, and learn to accept help and support from them.

♥ People can change but only when a life changing event happens to them as in my case I have changed because the impact is directly on me, but people around me haven't and won't and I have to accept that.

♥ *MOST OF ALL* I think I have learnt or am learning that when one is grieving /mourning, despite best efforts, intentions and all information given there is only one person that can truly help you, and that is you, after all only you know what you are truly feeling, for everyone else it is simply a guess based on what they see on the outside, they don't feel or live the pain.. Somehow you have to find a way to come to terms with the loss, but I imagine that is quite a way down the track for me.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 19, 2006

Everyone's Sadness

I was reminded yesterday that I am not the only one grieving the loss of 2 great young men.. It's not that I don't think that anyone else is, it's just that I can't see beyond my own grief most time, for me no one on this planet could be grieving like me and that's true, no one is or will, after all they were my children, I gave birth to them, I raised them, so NO no one will feel the same.. But I received an email from one of my son's mates (Mat's mate Tom) I almost deleted it as I didn't recognize the email address, it started like this,

"hey Michelle

how r u. I'm just emailing u coz I don't really feel good lately. I don't know what to do anymore I cant stand feeling like this all the time I just miss mat so much I cant stand it. I need the kid here so much not a day has gone by when I don't think about him I just miss him. I don't know if its a bad thing but I convince myself he's not really gone on Monday when I went to see him I couldn't stop thinking why am I coming here he'll be back soon n when I think of all the things we and him have done then I think oh its not going to be like that anymore i convince myself he's coming back. I just need him" It went on to say that he missed the silly things they used to do and say to each other etc.

After some tears on my part I realized that this young man, who probably like my boy's, thinks he's invincible, strong and everything's right mate, is reaching out, this young man is sending me an email because he would realise that maybe I am the only one who knows how he feels, this young man, who I might add I hardly know is grieving the loss of a great mate.... It got me thinking that these boys in their teens are at the most crucial part of their life, they are starting to deal with not only all the physical developments that young men endure but the emotional ones too, that bonding that they do that makes them mates, I was thinking in reality he would know my Mat more than I ever could, imagine the conversations they have shared about home, mum and dad, life, girls, the intimate discussions they would have had, the unbounded friendship they share, that closeness that as adults we don't always have... I tried to imagine for a moment the pain he was feeling, he has lost a mate, a buddy, a school friend, a body boarding partner.

Like my Mat, Tom has only been on this planet for 17 years and for 4 of those critical growing years the boys have been together shared everything, of course he would be grieving, but what can I do for him, he further wrote this in the email.

"People used to always say to me oh it hurts now but in time it'll feel better. But it hasn't made me feel better I think about him everyday and they used to say oh just try and get on life but everything I do has changed and wont be the same what ever I do feels different and I want it to go back to the way it was but I know it never will" while reading that I thought to my self, I have said those same things, *"everything I do has changed and wont be the same what ever I do feels different and I want it to go back to the way it was but I know it never will"* despite the fact that he is a teenager, and the friend, he too is grieving the loss and feeling similar things that I as the mum am feeling.

I wondered how I might be able to help him, I jumped on the net to research how to help teens cope with grief, the first 10 sites I looked at had the same or very similar info, but nothing of substance, no encouraging words for me to pass on, and when you think about it, as I have said before there is nothing written to help with this part, the living with out them, there are no words of wisdom, all I can give him is my hand and shoulder for support.. I was thinking that if the tables were turned and it was Mat who needed consoling over the loss of Tom, what would I do, well I would cry with him, I would hug him every time I could, I would talk to him and let him know that what he was felling is crappy but if he shared his thoughts we could feel them together, I would certainly encourage him to talk...(I think that's a key thing to do when grieving, but easier said than done for guy's) so I guess that's all I can do for Tom, and I sent him an email saying words along those lines as well as sharing with him how I have been feeling to let him know he is not alone, although it doesn't seem to matter how many people are around you when you are grieving you feel so alone, all the time.

I suggested that Tom email me when he feels the need or ring (knowing kid's these days it either email or text) he can talk and I will just listen, after all its all new territory to me as well and I don't have any words of wisdom to give, the best we can do is one day at a time.

So today I will try to step outside my own grief, I will make an effort to look at others who are feeling the loss over the same young men as me, I have decided to email the boy's mates or send a text to those I can just to let them know I am thinking about them. Regardless of our individual links to the boys, we are all feeling the same sadness just at

different levels.

I finished off my email to Tom saying, Hey mate remember how Mat used to love being the centre of attention, knowing that people were watching or talking about him, well think how proud he would be knowing that he is in everyone's thoughts everyday, never too be forgotten.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 28, 2006

A poem

So now I have become poet, actually it's not hard when its written from the heart... Georgia was researching poems about brothers on the net, I decided to write her one...

Brothers

*I think of you often and wish that you were here, I remember all the times we've shared, the good,
the bad, the laughter and tears.*

*Remember when we would fight and mum would yell and scream, but deep down we knew we
loved each other, she didn't realise that what we said we did not mean.*

*I miss you both so much and wish I could share all the things that are going on in my life and
things that are to come, I know you still care*

*My memories are bitter sweet; I would rather have you here, but swap them I never would
because I know while I have them you will always be near.*

*I remember Brendon when you got your car, your pride and joy, how grown up you looked; I
remember how proud you were to take me for a ride, and instantly I was hooked. Look I thought,
my big brother almost a man, taking for a drive no other, how lucky I am*

*I remember Mat watching you skate, I was so impressed and you were so pleased, please teach
me I thought I just couldn't wait,*

*I looked up to you both for guidance, support, love and care, and even though you are gone I
know its all still there.*

*I remember many things, but I remember the love we shared above all, the way you cared about
me and the things you did for me, the places we went the fun times we had, and the things we got
to see.*

*The house is so quiet and many tears we've shed, but know that you are so loved and missed
even though those precious memories fill our heads.*

*I think of you often and know that you are close but no greater wish would I have than to have
those I miss the most, my big brothers!*

Written in memory of my brothers, Brendon and Mathew by Mum

Acceptance

The 7th month of my boy's passing has just been.... 7 months, its actually been 7 and a half months since I saw Mat and probably a little longer since I saw Bren. As a parent it would be hard to imagine not seeing your children for 7 long months, but imagine what it must feel like to know that you will NEVER see them again, imagine knowing that you will never see them grow up, never see what career they may choose, if they get married, if they have kids of their own..... I suspect I will always be thinking about these stages of their lives as I watch their sister grow and their mates grow.

I recently had the pleasure of seeing one of Mats mates in the shopping centre. I saw him walking towards me and my heart went in my throat, this young man, Callan is his name, reminded me that on that particular day of the week I used to pick them both up from school and drop them off at the shopping centre for their usual bit of socializing. He, like all the mates are a reminder of mine missing. We exchanged the usual pleasantries, hello how are you what you been up to etc, and then parted ways, I only walked on a little way and turned and looked at him and thought I wonder if he had the same thought when he saw me, oh there's Mats mum, oh Mats not here etc etc. When I looked at him walking away I thought 'I really missed seeing the mates', they are my only connection to Mat, the only way I may ever know what he might have turned out like, I turned around and walked towards him, he saw me coming and looked a little puzzled, when I got to him I put my arm around his waist and said "I miss him mate and I miss seeing you guys too, come and visit ok" he smiled and his eyes filled with tears, just a hint, he said " me too and I will". I just felt that I had to do that, as I know these young men miss their mate just as much as me all be it at different levels.

The past 7 months has been filled with many moments like that and I am sure there will be many more. Just the other day I felt like I was having a Brendon day, I had been to get some shopping and when leaving the centre was confronted with 4 of Brens mates all sitting in a row, one that I know well gave me a hug and we chatted briefly, then when I got into the car one of his favorite songs started playing from when he was younger, later that night I went back for some other groceries forgetting what time it was and was confronted buy all the night fill staff (Brens job was night fill at woollies) my heart went in my throat, all those green shirts and mine no where to be seen, I got through it but I don't know how, then when I got home I was flicking through channels and his favorite movie came on from when he was a little boy, about 5, Back to the Future, he so wanted to be Marty out of that movie and as a matter of fact wanted to be called Marty and would only answer to that for the longest time.... so that was 4 things in one day, I just sat on the floor crying and said what, what are you trying to tell me? I guess he just wanted me to know that he was there..

I suppose that's where I am now as far as my journey through grief goes, accepting that they are with me in spirit only, accepting that I will never see them again, accepting that there will always be reminders of them, not just in my head but constantly around me. I still say on a daily basis, " I cant believe it" but its not that I cant believe the accident happened or that they are dead, I have accepted that it did and they are, rather, its more that I cant believe I will never see or speak to them again, that is really hard, really hard to comprehend.

I guess now its time to try and find new meaning to life without them, the sensible part of me says I have to, I can't go on not caring about myself or anything for ever, but the other part of me says how can I go on? But I know people who have and who do, and while the sadness never stops and the pain of the loss will never go away, I know it will fade unlike my love for those little people that I bought into the world and raised to be great young men, that love will never fade.

My youngest support person, my daughter made me a power point presentation the other night on the computer (kids are so clever on these things) while I was at work..... Amazing to read how a young mind of 11 thinks, this is what she wrote:

We will get through it - By Georgia aged 10

Don't worry mum we will get through what were going through

- Just remember that we have each other and Todd

Just remember

Just remember mum that I love you and even though I do that no talking thing it dose not mean that I don't love you.

Mum I know

- Mum I know you miss the boys and so dose every one else.

I hope they know how much we miss them

I love you

- Well this is the end of the slide show I hope you liked it.

I love you so much mum that I can't show you but every day I say "I love you" and that shows that I love you.

She inserted a picture in every slide.

How very special, made me cry a little but smile a lot.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2006

Finding Meaning

Well another week has come to an end, another week of work and school schedules, another week of life going on, another week of that fake facade that I seem to have become so good at carrying out, that smile and general conversation that I have to have with the outside world, even though my world on the inside has been shattered.

The last couple of weeks I feel have been pretty tough, especially come the weekends, the depression I have felt has been at times almost unbearable, I seem to be able to handle it through the week because I have to, my work has me dealing with many people everyday, the trouble is I give so much to work and strangers through the week I have nothing to give physically or emotionally come the evening or the weekend. I come home from work and the first thing I want to do is draw the curtains and shut the door, its my way of shutting out the world, I usually have a sigh of relief; "ahhh I think, thank goodness another day over"

It's amazing to me how the mind works, I can go all day at work without shedding a tear,

but as soon as I leave the office, even during the walk to the car, the tears and emotions start to well up in side, it's almost like my body just knows its time to let go, I get to the car and usually cry on the way home, trying to get it out of my system before my daughter gets home so I can put on that brave face again, its such a roller coaster of emotions.

I have come to the realization this week that if I am too remain sane at all and get through this I cannot do it without some sort of medical intervention, I have resorted back to the antidepressants, much to my disappointment because I just want to experience this pain, this sad journey the way my body wants to, but unfortunately life and society just don't allow that.

It's also been pointed out to me that I am experiencing 'survivor guilt'. Even though the fact that I am still here is I'm sure a joyous fact for my friends and family, I find it hard to have anything to be happy about. I do feel guilty that I have survived my son's, after all it is not the order of nature. Many times over these past 7 and a half months I have questioned why I am here and the boys are not. This reaction; I have been told is called "survivor guilt" and apparently it is a normal response to a traumatic event, such as the loss of my boy's. It is difficult for me to to feel grateful for being alive while at the same time feeling such intense sorrow for the loss of my babies.

This is the reason I have no desire to go out, no desire to get dressed up, no desire to laugh, smile or enjoy a day out, everything seems to be such an effort, if it wasn't for work I am sure I would just sit at home, after all why should I enjoy anything they can't. Having said that though, there are times when I think I might like to go shopping with my daughter or have coffee or lunch with my friend but when it comes to the day or the time I just cant seem to get the right frame of mind to do it, there's no desire, most of the time I just want to be quiet, but I make the effort and I am sure as time goes on going out etc will be easier.

Something else that I don't get about this grieving process, while I understand that this is a time when I need the support of my family and friends, I also feel that I seem to spend most of the time resisting or pushing away those who care about me the most, I seem to have a need to resist that support or even believe that their support and caring isn't genuine, I still keep feeling that because no one is experiencing the pain ,like me then how can they really know. It is for this reason that I felt I should go back on the medication, what ever it takes to help me see through the fog of emotions that I seem to spiral into on any given day at any given moment, a friend of mine who has also experienced the same loss as me said that I have to do everything and anything I can to overcome the impulse to refuse assistance and to recognize the value of outside help as well as the need for it.

I suppose that like any other parent who has lost a child, life that was once full of meaning, makes no sense, that profound sense of emptiness and loss, that real sense that a part of us has died too is so overwhelming it

just seems to surpass any logical thoughts that we should have about the people and support around us. I have said before that the pain or heaviness in my chest, that feeling of depression and hopelessness about the future is so intense that you just don't seem to be able to think rationally. All the things that were once important to me don't really seem to matter so much any more, I suppose I am trying to find new meaning to my life,

which is in itself is not an easy task when your world has been rocked by such a loss... I guess the first step is knowing where to look, I look at my daughter, she is my meaning, she is my saving grace, the only aspect of my life at present that gives me any depth, if it wasn't for her I'm not sure where I would be right now, the second step I guess is knowing how to look, I think that means trying to look beyond my grief, which is hard as it is all so self consuming.

Maybe my 'new meaning' will be that I can focus more on parenting, being the best mother I can be, giving Georgia the support, love and nurturing that she needs, after all she has suffered an immeasurable loss as well, I am sure throughout our lives together as mother and daughter we will need to find strength to get through many events and we will need to lean on each other for that strength. She is my meaning, her wellbeing will be my guiding force for everything I do from now on, she is my purpose and she will give me the strength I need to continue, to look beyond me, to look beyond my pain, I will look at her.

"Finding meaning is no substitute for your loss, but it will help to sustain you and provide the substance from which you can rebuild your life"

SATURDAY, MARCH 04, 2006

Birthday

Tomorrow will be my son's 20th birthday (21st march), I have been beside myself with such a heavy sadness since last Tuesday, it seems the build up to these events is as painful if not more than the actual day..... How as a mum do I celebrate the birth of my child when I have lost him? Any mum out there knows that on the birthday of your kids you kind of re-play the events of the day that led to their birth, its supposed to be a happy day. As usual I will remember how scared I was on the evening before he was born, my first baby, I didn't have a clue really, I was staying over at the in-laws as Brens dad was on night shift, I woke about 11 pm, rather my waters breaking woke me and before I knew it I was in a car and on the way to hospital, about 9 hours later Brendon Mathew Gilson came into the world, that day I felt like I had grown up, I had a reason for being, I couldn't believe that I had a little baby... We took him home and he was perfect, slept most of time, ate lots and was just a quiet content little boy, he grew to be the kind of child that amused himself, kept himself busy with toys and T.V when old enough to watch it.

I was remembering this morning his fascination for less hiddens the " bush tucker man" he loved that show, kind of an 80's style Steve Irwin but not so wild, I would put a video on and sit him front of the telly and he would watch episode after episode.... Then came the movie "back to the future" I think he might have been maybe 8, he loved the main character 'Marty' played by Michael J fox, for the longest time he wanted to be called Marty and would answer to nothing else.

He grew to love books and was always asking questions, I remember we bought him a

book once on the evolution of man, he took it to school and came home very upset, told me the book was full of lies and that he couldn't take it to school anymore, when I asked why he said he took it to scripture and questioned the teacher about it compared to what she was teaching, obviously that didn't go down to well, but I told Brendon as I have with all my kids that you have to have all information and make your own informed decisions on what you believe is right, he stuck with the theory from the book.... Actually he liked scientific type information, he was at one stage considered to be a talented and gifted child, but he hated me saying that, he would say I am just normal, and I guess he tried for the rest of his school days to prove that because after yr7 at high school he pretty much went down hill with study from there, don't get me wrong he did ok but he was capable of much more, he was just one of those kids that didn't need to study for a test and still pass.

As Brendon got older more into his teens say about 15, onwards our relationship started to strain, he had become what I had encouraged him to, strong minded and willed, opinionated, wouldn't take no for an answer, and I didn't like it, funny about that, we raise them to have an opinion but when they have one we don't like it, he could be very stubborn and feisty (I have no idea where he got that from) but so clever... I remember one day I was so cranky I said the F word to him and said " see what you made me do" he said " mum no one makes you do anything you chose to do stuff" gggrrrr was I mad..... Anyway for the longest time I felt that he didn't respect me, wouldn't do anything at home, I was constantly ringing his dad and saying you talk to him he won't listen to me, I had said on many occasions that if you don't get your self together you will have to go stay at dad's, I knew if there was any hope of the two of us having a relationship that was going to have to be the way, anyway the day came and I booted him off to dad's, he was angry, Mat was angry, Georgia was angry I was devastated, felt I acted in haste but it was done.

Brendon told me he would never speak to me again, I was beside myself with what I thought was grief, (little did I know that 4 months later I would experience and continue to experience the real thing) the thought of never speaking to him again I just couldn't handle, I text messaged him everyday and rang him for about 2 weeks then finally he said, " Mum I'm over it , we are ok, I'm at dad's now and that's where I'll stay, from that point on he would visit on occasion and we could actually hold a conversation, he would come to dinner and it was nice, no fighting or yelling, finally I thought, I had done the right thing, however, it did strain things for Mat and I, he really missed his brother, but started to visit his dad more so good came from it I think.

The last longest time I spent with Brendon was a couple of weeks before the accident when I took him to the doctors for an ear infection, he said " mum do you think I'm too old to get you to take me?" I said " do you know what to ask, he said no , do you want me to come he said yes, then I said that's it then so off we went, we spent 2 hours waiting to see the doctor, we discussed, rather I listened, to him talk about the latest on line game, his car, his mates, it was good, I will of course cherish those 2 hours for the rest of my days.

So I will never get to see what kind of mum, son type of relationship Brendon and I would have had as he became a man, I can only imagine that it would have just gotten better and better with time.

Today I struggle with the emotions of losing him and never seeing him as well as the emotions of anger, how could he be so careless, his final selfish act, taking the life of him and his brother, putting the lives of 7 other people at risk and turning the lives of many other upside down, I find my self asking someone, some higher force to give me the strength to forgive Brendon because I know what happened was not intentional, I have to forgive him for his actions on the day, but its very hard to be angry with someone and not have it out in the open.... My aunty suggested that for his birthday present I give him forgiveness, how do you do that, how do you reconcile that in your own mind, I can say I forgive you mate, I can say the word but it doesn't take away the anger...

I miss my baby's so much I don't really have the words to describe how I feel today, god give me strength to get through my first born's birthday without him cause I don't know where I am going to get it from. I feel really alone in this...

Today I will try to think of other memories of that beautiful boy, and he was a beautiful boy, just a typically teenager, who like many of them thought he was invincible and knew it all... Rest in peace my baby, I love you.....

Another 1st passed

Well we survived my first son's birthday, speaking for my self I have to say I survived it in a physical sense, but I have to say on an emotional level it was more than I could bare... As any parent who has lost a child might agree knowing it is your baby's birthday and not having them with you to celebrate is more than one heart should have to bare... It was without a doubt the most gut wrenching day in my life, the night before I actually felt like I was preparing for the funeral all over again, I felt physically sick, I cant even find the words to describe how I felt emotional, there is something very very wrong about thinking about the birth of your child and knowing also that they are dead...

I prepared myself as best I could, I did what all the books tell you to do for such events, I planned, I organized for a plaque to be made for my son, I organized to have a couple of days off work, I even planned what time of the day I would go to the cemetery as I had to go twice, once for my self and then again to take my daughter, I felt that I was ready for it, I held my breath and hoped it would pass as quick as possible.

Something the books don't tell you is the heartbreak that you feel, and why would they, how would they, who could describe it (my pain is my pain and it couldn't possibly be compared to anyone else's, and visa versa) , that gut wrenching pain, the numbness, the sadness, its so all consuming. I quite literally felt myself start to spiral down hill the Tuesday prior as it marked the 8th month since their death and 1 week till the birthday, for me as I have read for others the build up is often more painful than the actual day, somehow when you reach the day you kind of breath a sigh of relief, knowing that you have made it that far you can surely go another day.

The night before my son's birthday I asked him to come to me in my dreams, I ask them to come to me every night, just hoping to see them one more time (I haven't dreamt since the accident) This time it happened... I asked my big boy to come to me so we could have it out so to speak, so I could get angry at him, or yell at him, or something,

anything so I could try to move on from this feeling of blame... Well my sons did come to me and although it was not my big boy speaking, I did speak to Mat, the interesting thing is that they were about 4 and 7, Mat was speaking to me so grown up but he was little, little enough for me to have both arms around him tightly..... Without going into detail it seemed very real to me and although I didn't get to talk to Brendon (I guess, as was the case when he was alive, the last thing he wanted to have was an ear bashing from mum) Mat was very good with answering my questions....

I awoke from that dream not knowing where I was for a moment, it seemed so real that I actually thought, oh thank god it was all a dream, they are not gone, it didn't take long for the reality to hit me and the tears just came, tears of relief because I had finally dreamt of them, tears because I got to speak to them, but tears because of the reality of it all, somehow though, having that dream seemed to make the actual birthday easier if that's at all possible, I felt a sense of relief, a kind of un blocking of my mind. I must also have tell you that my daughter too had a dream on the same night but coincidentally she only had Brendon speak to her, Mat spoke to me in mine.

So I guess that was a sign from them, they answered my request, they came to me, but really it is such a small comfort in the scheme of things, I am not ready on this journey to be grateful for such visits I would much rather have them here, perhaps grateful is not the right word, I'm not sure what is but I am sure in time I will be happy for such small signs, in the meantime I will cherish the memory of my first dream since losing my beautiful boys, and know that they will come again in their own time, when I am strong enough to handle such visits.

I guess I just want anyone who might read this, who is going through it, or knows someone who is, just know this, the birthday is not like Christmas day, it is far worse, the worst day to deal with, and made even more sad knowing that you will endure that pain again, and again, and again, be ready, if that's possible....

The picture above is how my boys appeared to me in my dream, although I couldn't make out Brens face, I recognized what they were wearing, that's how I knew roughly how old they were.

Entry 28.

Our first holiday since.....

We are preparing to take our first holiday since the boys accident, I have to say I so do not want to go, I am seriously having issues this week with the whole concept of actually leaving, not only the country but my house, my comfort zone, my friends who are my support network, my work which has also proved too be another hiding place for my feelings, thoughts and emotions... Georgia on the other hand is quite excited, she has always wanted to go to New Zealand and has quite a lot that she wants to do, how do I help her understand how hard it is for me to go away?

I think the best thing to do is be honest with her, and honest with my self, I don't want to go because I don't want to be put in a position where I might enjoy something, where I might have fun, I am scared to leave the comfort bubble that I have created at home, I am scared to be away from the boys, what if they are looking for me???? It has been said to me more times than I can count, that I must think of what the boys would want of

me, that is, they would not want me to be sad, crying all the time, staying at home, apparently I am to imagine if it had been me killed and I was looking down on them, what would I want them to do, well you know what, its all just words, I am the mum, I have never done anything that I wouldn't do or give to the kids first or as well, I cant simply say, oh ok they would want me to be happy and live life so I will, it is just too painful.

How do you live life when most times its an effort to breath, I don't want to look at life most times, let alone live life, its so hard... How can I possibly think of going away? This trip is not just a trip, for me it is a stepping stone, its a test to see how I cope in the outside world because other than work and the odd supermarket shopping I don't associate with the outside world really. My head tells me I must start, but my heart is so heavy.

I wonder how the three of us will cope in a confined space for 6 days (campervan) after all at home we can escape each other, we can retreat into our own space, perhaps it will be a test on the relationships as well.

I read that another mum who has experienced the same said it was a blessing in disguise to go away, good to be around people that didn't know, no sad looks, also good to come home and have something else to talk about, so perhaps it will be the same for us, who knows..

This I know to be true, I am sure to be just as sad in another country as I am here, the only difference will be the scenery, perhaps that will be just the ticket, if only for a short time each day to have different surroundings.

Entry 29.

It's been 18 months since my friend Michelle had her 2 sons taken from her in a motor vehicle accident, 18 months and it seems like yesterday when I think about it. That thud that hits me in the stomach when ever I think about them is still there, it's just that now, although there is still that heavy sadness, I often have a bit of a laugh or chuckle at some of those happy memories. I keep reminding myself that I'd much rather be remembered for my crazy antics and warped sense of humour than be remembered with sadness and for these two young boys there are plenty of crazy, goofy and wild things to remember them by and give you a good laugh.

Some time after the boys were killed Michelle asked if I could write a segment for a brochure she was putting together to help other parents and friends who are dealing with this kind of tragedy. Of course I said "Yes" and thought I'd get straight on to it. Little did I know that it would be one of the most daunting tasks I'd ever undertaken

I keep thinking to myself that I couldn't have been any help to her at all. I was numb, gutted, and working on auto pilot myself so how could I have been any help and if the truth is to be told, **I was scared of her**. I was scared that I'd say all the wrong things and make her sad or angry (Michelle assures me that no matter what I said there was nothing that could have made her feel any worse than she already was feeling). I was scared I'd let her down and that I wouldn't be strong enough to cope and scared that I'd not be there enough or there too

much, which one of those would be worse. Whatever I did must have been ok because she's asked me to write this and when I think back to what it was that I did I can honestly say I don't really know. Michelle is my friend, her boys had just been killed and I was going to do whatever she wanted. So here's how we got through it and if it gives just one person a bit of a guiding hand and reassurance that the feeling of helplessness you experience are shared by everyone who gets thrown into this nightmare then something good has come out of the sadness.

I think the main thing is to really **know the type of friendship you have** with this person because we're all so different and have different relationships with different people. In our friendship I knew Michelle never liked fuss or hoo haa as she calls it and she isn't a touchy feely type of person. So just sitting with her, chatting about anything at all and that includes the boys and having a bit of a cry was ok. I was always aware of staying too long. There were a lot of visitors coming by in those early days and I know it was very draining. Not that the visits aren't appreciated, it's just that everything is such a blur **So short visits are important**. Because I was always so conscious of this and scared of crowding I decided instead to give her a call once a week and that gave Michelle the option of talking or not. Most times we'd have a chat but sometimes I'd just leave a message on the machine that I was thinking about her. When we did speak she'd say "I got your message, thanks for thinking of me, I wasn't feeling up to talking". **Honesty & Respect**. We were honest, I was thinking about her, she didn't feel like talking. You've got to respect that. I'll be honest and say that sometimes I was relieved if she didn't want to talk because after most calls I'd get off the phone and cry for an hour and go to bed feeling really drained and then I'd be racked with guilt that I didn't want to feel sad when Michelle's life had been turned upside down was feeling sad all the time. I've kept the phone calls up but not every week now. Sometimes it can be 3 weeks and now Michelle even gives me a call if we haven't caught up for a while. So life is getting back to I can't say normal because it will never be the way it used to be but it is moving forward.

One of Michelle's biggest fears are that her boys will be forgotten. You know, you get on with life and they become someone you used to know. Well I try to reassure her that her boys won't be forgotten. They both made huge imprints in my life. How on earth will I ever forget the day that Mathew opened the door of the car when I was doing 100km on the way to the Bay, and how could I ever forget Brendon picking my daughter up off the ground and giving Mat a blast after Mat had given her a shove and she'd give a smile and say "sanks Benna". How on earth could anyone forget moments like that!!!! **So a little reassurance and a happy trip down memory lane can be beautiful.**

I can't imagine how she really feels and I never want to know. All I do know is that, if 18 months later I am still easily brought to tears when I think about the boys not being here anymore and I'm just a friend, not their mother, then she's feeling pretty rotten. I'm always amazed at the people who say "I know how you feel", "It's been however long now, you've got to move on" or "You'll be back to normal before you know it". Yeah right!! There is no time frame for grieving it will take as long as it takes. You can try to guide someone out of the black hole but you can't drag them come out. So be patient, try to be understanding, let them

know you're thinking of them and you're there. Be the same friend that you've always been, that's what made you friends in the first place.

Written by Cathy a friend of mine for many years.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 24, 2007

18 months

Well we got through another Christmas and New Year and a wedding; I'm not sure how perhaps the planning helped, what ever the reason we survived it, well I barely did. I think the 2nd one was harder than the first if that's at all possible, I still cannot imagine my life, the rest of my life without them. Its ok coping with the loss and work, but coping with the loss and living is a different thing all together. I feel that I am carrying such a weight with me all day every day, I miss my boy's voices, their smiles, everything about them, and in actual fact I miss them more every day.

I am no where near being able to love life or enjoy life again; I ask myself often how as the mum you could begin to live life again knowing that you kids aren't..... Today is a bad day, actually the week has been pretty tough, seem to have hit a wall of depression again, It started last week and was topped off by seeming Bren's best mates, Tim, Christian and Mitch together at the shopping centre, all three of them walking together, all in black t-shirts heading off to buy lunch, I hugged them all and made small talk, but felt physically ill after they left, what a reality check, knowing that Brendon would have been with them if only..... There was nothing I could do but cry, I cant look at them and think of good thoughts or passed memories yet I just see them and think about what I have lost, My children, sometimes, most times the pain is more than I can bare, when I try to think about them and their faces are in my head I feel sick, I feel sick at the fact that I will never see them again, I cannot believe my sons are dead.

Its a strange mask we have to put on everyday for the public, sometimes I wish I was see through so people would see that I am not ok, that my heart has been crushed and that I am struggling, in reality people don't want to see that I guess, no one wants to hear the sadness in my voice or look at my sad face. I sound like I am feeling sorry for myself, well I am, and its ok, sometimes I just need to feel sorry for me...

Brendon's 21st is fast approaching and I am sure that has something to do with my mood, after all how do you deal with such a milestone knowing they won't be there????? Foolishly I have made a couple of attempts to buy something special to put on his grave for turning 21, it only causes me great stress and upset in the end so I usually abandon the search, I ask him every night before I go to bed, mate please come to me, tell me what I should do, how should I cope with the day, maybe I will get a sign soon..... I guess that another entry

SATURDAY, MARCH 17, 2007

21 Months

This month is a significant month, not only does it mark the 21 month mark since I lost my boys but it is also the month of my son's 21st.

I feel like I must be in some kind of time warp, the calendar says 21 months but my heart still thinks it was yesterday, the accident. I had a colleague ask me out for coffee this week, of course I graciously accepted and said I will aim for it knowing full well that I would not go, besides this particular person made a comment to me that made me reflect on just how hard it is to accept 21 months.

She mentioned all the usual things people say, you are looking well, you are coping great, you are so strong, bla bla bla, then when I said I don't really do much other than work her reply was "oh come on shell its been almost 2 years" almost 2 years!! you know they were the only words I could hear after that statement, almost 2 years, I wanted to say it might be almost 2 years to you but to me its yesterday.... Why don't people realise that for apparent in this situation, the length of time is irrelevant, its almost like our thoughts, feelings and emotions have been frozen in time, and will only reflect the day that we lost our child, or in my case children.... I wasn't so much cross at her lack of understanding as I was saddened by the fact that it has been almost 2 years since I heard their voices, or saw their faces... I miss telling Brendon to get off the computer, or telling Mat to clean his room, I miss saying their names, sometimes I just say them out loud so I can hear them.....

It has also been said to me when I have a 'bad' day, are you sure there is nothing else that is making you sadder, why say that, what else in this lifetime could make me sadder than loosing my children, yeh, sure there are things that might trigger a bad day, but there is nothing that will make me sadder, I want to say "no I am just as sad today as I was on the 14th of July 2005.. "

I get quite angry at my self often when I think about how I or any other parent in my situation have to participate in this 'continuation of NORMAL life' I hate the fact that I have to go on like nothing has happened, trouble is your damned if you do and damned if you don't, if I came crashing down and let my feelings show everyday it makes others uncomfortable, and if I continue on as if I am fine it makes me feel uncomfortable.

I had 2 visitors this week, one each of the boys best mates, they both came on the 14th, now I know that people are probably over the 14th, but its so important to me to know that others think about them on that significant day, I need to know that I am not the only one remembering that day, I need to know that they are not forgotten, and that someone else knows I am 'having a bad day' on that day... I am so thankful for the visits, or the text that their friends often send on that day, they will probably never know how much...

I have decided to take some days off work in preparation for my sons impending 21st, I don't want to carry on as 'NORMAL' well everyone Else's normal, on the day or days following, I want to spend the time for me, letting my emotions do what ever they want, maybe I will be ok! maybe I wont, either way it will be a time for me and my heart not work and everyone else.

Its really hard knowing its such an important birthday and that he is not here, all those photos and memories that you say "gee we will keep that for the 21st party" what do I do with them know? Just have to reflect on them myself I guess, actually its hard to remember a lot without seeing a photo or something to trigger the memory

because my mind is still so vividly remembering the night I lost them, its almost like for some reason I still have to keep playing it over and over i my head, almost like being conditioned to accepting I guess....

I have spent quite a few weeks trying to write something to put in the paper for his birthday, after all I feel I have to do something, finally I finished it and submitted it to the paper only to be disappointed by the fact that it would have cost too much to have it all in, the lady was trying to be quite helpful, suggesting what words and pictures I could take out, why couldn't she realise what she was asking me to do, 'cut out' bits of his short life, I wanted everyone to know every special event that I had written while he was growing up, but in the end I have a short piece going in, and you know what their dad said something to me that, sad as it is, its true, he said, " don't worry, I know you want to tell everyone just how special he was and what he had done in his life, but there will be other times, besides the important people in his life already know" and that's just it isn't it, it doesn't matter what I write, what matters is that I know, and that I have things documented so I can remember and reflect on what a great boy he was, is... *This is what I wrote for the paper*

Brendon Gilson 21/3/89 – 14/7/05

'21 today'

How do we celebrate your coming of age when you are no longer with us? Although the sadness of the loss weighs heavy in our hearts perhaps we should give thanks for having the honor and pleasure of you in our lives.

Remembering the day you were born, 9:35 am on a Friday Morning, March the 21st 1986, a healthy baby boy, 7lbs 1/1/2 ounces and 19 1/4 inches long, blue eyes and little hair, that distinctive Gilson hair line, you looked like Pop.

I remember your first big trip out it was to the Blackbutt Reserve with the Newcastle Street Machine Club, a car rally of all things; it was on the 25th of May 1986. Perhaps that was the start of your love for cars.

Thinking back to when you started to become active, at 6 1/2 months you started to crawl like a worm, at 9 months you stood up on your own, and it wasn't long before you were walking, 10 1/2 months of age to be exact.

You had your first tooth at 6 months and you were talking by the time you turned 7 months old. Of course your first word was Dad, but that was ok, my baby was talking. I remember your favourite toy at the time, a huge stuffed 'Big Dog' doll It wasn't long before you realised that big dog went to bed far to early.

I think back to taking you to your first swimming lesson at Greenhill's, you were 3 and hated every minute of it, come to think if it you never enjoyed the water. You started pre-school in 1990, never really too fussed on it, too many people, it wasn't long before we had to find you an individual sitter, Heather. Heather and her family loved you and you enjoyed the one-on-one care.

Then came school, our little boy was growing up, you started on the 31st of January 1991, I cried, like all mums, although we were proud of you, we were sad to see you growing up so fast. At 8 you started soccer, that didn't last too long, too energetic I think, not your cup of tea.

So now we skip ahead to the teenage part of your life, you were so caring and understanding at the age of 13, always looking out for your sister and complaining about Mat annoying you. As you got alder you became very stubborn in opinion and attitude, you developed your own beliefs and thoughts on topics of the day. You were a very clever young man, if Georgia or Mat ever asked how something worked I would say ask Brendon.

As you became a young man, we clashed on many things you and I, with a silent understanding though of the love shared by a mother and son.

Like two peas in a pod you and dad, same ideals, same hobbies and interests, even similar mannerisms and the same to approach to life.

As I write this "Life memory" for you Brendon I realize we have much to be thankful for, we raised a beautiful young man, with a strong will and desire to do as he wished, and we wouldn't have it any other way.

How lucky we were to create you, how lucky we were to raise and how very lucky we were to know you. We miss you mate as do all those who were close to you.

"THINKING OF YOU TODAY"



Mathews Birthday

23 Months since the loss of my boys, we seem to be plodding along ok, I am managing work now, and realise if I am to survive this night mare at all I must work, its the one thing that keeps my heart from taking over during a general day, if that was to happen, then I would do as I imagine all mums in my situations, I would just stay in bed, its quiet, its warm, and you don't have to talk to anyone, you can just think... My daughter seems (as we do) to be doing ok, school and sport are her saviors, my husband, well as with us he too seems to be doing ok, I guess they both see me 'DOING' so they think things are ok, if only they could see my heart....

Friends all seem to be settled back into normal life, some I have lost, some I have gained and others that were lost due to busy lifestyles have returned, you learn lots about the people around you when such a tragedy has occurred... I have learnt lots about my self, one thing is that I didn't realise I was so resilient, I didn't know I had the strength inside that I have to call on many times to get me through a day, and what's more I didn't know it would be possible to continue on without my children, in the early days I never thought it possible, but I see now it is, its just harder some days than others.. This week has been particularly hard for me, again one of my boys would have celebrated a special milestone in his life, his 18th, sadly we will never know what he would of looked like as a man, I will never know if he would have had a hairy chest (although unlikely) I wonder if he would have cut his hair and gone back to his natural colour, I wonder what kind of job he would have had now since he hadn't yet decided on what he wanted to do when he left school... These questions will plague me for the rest of my days, to me he will always be a young boy, scrawny and very cheeky..

I have written a time line to him so that people may get to know him a little better, I know Georgia in years to come will appreciate the memories.

Mathew....

The lead up to your birth for us, as with any parents was full of excitement, waiting for you to come into the world, wondering what you would be like.. however it seemed that you could not wait, and whilst away on a holiday at Nambucca Heads you decided to start proceedings, you let us know you were on your way.. A quick dash to Macksville hospital confirmed our fears, you were on your way and early, we were told to stay in Macksville hospital as you were expected to be born that day, while your dad made calls to everyone who needed to know, friends and family sent flowers and I settled in for the impending birth...BUT you decided it was not to be and the hospital staff said we could go home, after we called everyone to say "sorry we are on the way, will be in Maitland hospital tonight" we headed off, your dad, your big brother Brendon and me (mum) it was the quickest trip we have ever had to Maitland as you dad was worried you might be born in the car.

We arrived at Maitland hospital where we were told that you had settled and changed your mind and we would have to just wait as you were doing fine and so was I, 2 weeks later, (yes I had to spend 2 weeks waiting for you to decide when you wanted to come into the world) you were born, Friday morning 2nd June 1989 at 10:16 am, you were a couple of weeks early but a good weight, 6lbs 13oz and 19 1/2 inches long, dark hair and blue eyes.

At 7 weeks you held your head up by yourself, at 6 months you were able to sit up alone and by 6 months you had also mastered the art of crawling around like a worm. I remember when you were 7 1/2 months and your first tooth appeared, finally a reason for the grumpy little man you had become, you were walking at 7 months, look out trouble was on the horizon!!!

Like your brother your first words were dad, Nan and Mum

As a baby you were a real pain in the bum, never slept properly, a fussy eater and hated being around people you didn't know.

As you grew older your true character emerged; I remember how you loved to dress up, play jokes on people and pull faces, what ever it took to make us laugh.

You always seemed to have a girlfriend from pre-school on and you were never short of friends to play with, you became a very social young man; I was always pleased that you had a such a huge circle of friends and always had time for everyone.

You were a real individual and strived to set yourself apart from the rest often. Always the leader, it was n o t u unusual for yo u to set the trend of what to wear to school whether it be Bob the builder socks or Spider man singlets, and even in your last week of life bringing yoyo's back in amongst your crowd. We shall all treasure those silly little things, whenever I see one it brings a tear to my eye, especially knowing that the orange one we found in the car that you were holding on to at the time of the accident, was the last thing your gentle hands touched..

As grew up you developed a passion for all things outside, especially skateboarding and Body boarding, it was not unusual to see you with a wet suit tan, brown hands, brown ankles and feet and brown from the neck up.

I remember being quite upset when you went through the body piercing phase (only ears thank goodness) then dying your hair Black, growing it long and going through the all black clothing phase, through it all we were never really surprised, after all it was you being you.

Once you were a teenager a new side of Mat began to emerge, a softer, more caring and understanding side, who when friends were down or needed your help were always there, many of friends have shared with me stories about how you always had time to listen.

I recall you saying to me one day not long before the accident that you thought kids were cool especially babies and that you couldn't wait to have one, sadly we will never know what you would have been like as a dad with your own babies, just know this you will always be our baby, my baby, that beautiful little boy that I nurtured inside me, that little baby that I said jokingly had been sent from hell to destroy me (oh what a terror you could be) that beaut boy who we raised to be respectful and thoughtful to others, my young man, always my middle baby!!!! I miss you, we all miss you XXXXXXXX

Labels: [Mathews Birthday \(18 Months\)](#)

posted by Michelle @ [10:00 AM](#)

The first step towards H.O.P.E



posted by Michelle @ [5:00 AM](#) [0 comments](#)

2 Years

On the 14th of this month, only 1 short day away it will be the **two year anniversary** of the loss of our boys, I find it hard to comprehend that it has been that time frame, especially since, to me and my internal calendar it just feels like last week, that our lives were forever changed.

As with the last entry we seem to be going OK, I have started to get out and function a bit better with My husband and Daughter, and work well work is doable, no passion for it yet but it is certainly doable. I have found this week to be very hard, I elected to continue working rather than take time off, bad move, tear have just been below the surface every day, and I have been so bothered by noise and busy people, I have been quite agitated.. Have found it difficult to eat properly and have even felt physically since the 1st of July, just an upset tummy, knowing that day was closer.

I have said before the build up to the day is worse than the day and that is especially the case this time around, next year I will be sure to take this time of the year off work so I can have time with Georgia and time for me. One of my jobs has been on holidays and that has been great, I actually don't want to go back, I will but it would be nice to stay home.

This week I have made a start in getting a support group together for other grieving parents, my self and my mentor on this journey have both been corresponding with other mum's in our situation and as a result realise there is no real support out there for people like us, so with that in mind, I have created H.O.P.E helping other parents cope, after the loss of a child, sadly we have about 6 for the group already and we shall wait to see what response we get from the local paper story to determine when it will start and where.

It helps to help others, I know for me to see my mentor 7 years down the track from losing her son, gives me HOPE that I too will be able to live again, fully, beyond simply existing for others.

There are some days when I can't imagine getting through another day, month or even a year without the boys, but I know I will, I have to for Georgia and Todd's sake. Each day now brings with it a different degree of sadness, a different level of strength needed, I find now that I am next to keep busy, I still do not being on my own, it's not a good place to be, and if I am I must have things to do. I am still emotionally eating, although not as bad, still don't like the crowds, and happy faces around me but am learning to cope with that.

I don't imagine many more entries from here on in, as I guess every special day, date or event now will be the same, just easier, still sad, but the degree will change.. Perhaps I will get into my book now, I have been writing it for the whole time so maybe that's my next project, that and the support group HOPE..

We have adjusted now, as best we can, to not having the boys around, not hearing Bren's car or Mat's cheeky wit, I still won't sit at the dinner table and find family things hard to do knowing 1/2 of our family is gone, but we seem to be doing OK, and at the moment that's the best we can aim for, still one day at a time.

For me how do I feel as the Mum, not Michelle the worker, the doer, the motivator, as the mum.... Shattered, heart broken, and only a shell of my former self, on the inside, tears every day for my beautiful boys and on occasion still wondering why I have been put on this path. As for my emotional self, all seems to be under control now, I can keep the tears at bay, still having difficulty in establishing relationships with my family and friends but I guess that will improve with time... I guess other mums new to this situation can look at me now as I have with my support friend and see that it does get easier, the potholes don't seem so close together or as deep.

Two Years and four months

I haven't written on here in a while, not because I don't have anything to write more because I seem to be so busy, of course some would say that's good "it's good she keeps busy, it's the best thing to do" well something I have come to realise is that 'busy' is not always good. I have come to a point in my grieving where I no longer need or want to be busy, I want to be quiet, those who know me prior to the 14th of July 2005 would be shocked to hear that I would want to be quiet and still, but I do, I often feel that I am giving so much of my self to work that I have nothing to give to anyone else that matters, me included. Having said that I can also see that I have made more progress in my healing because for the first 18 months or so I didn't care to do anything for me, I didn't feel I deserved it after all how could I, as the mum you always put the kids first, I have never had something or done something that my kids couldn't also experience, so it was hard to 'do for me' now I feel that I need to do just that or I shall go insane, explode maybe, who knows.

I have started to cut down on some of my work, working 3 jobs with a mushy brain is very draining physically and mentally so it's time to stop, I have left one job for now and cut back on another, and in January I will be having a lot of me time and I realise now how important that is.

People will find it hard to understand that after 2 years and 4 months now I need to be still, but perhaps if I hadn't returned to work so quickly maybe I wouldn't be feeling so

stressed at the moment, but so be it, this is how I feel and I am acting on it.

I had an opportunity to go away for 2 nights a couple of weeks ago, I sat still, read books and ate when I felt like it I cried lots and felt sorry and sad for me and I needed to do that, I had to get away not from Todd and Georgia but away from the routine of preparing for work and doing for others, just needed some time out, following that short break I felt quite rested, actually no tears on Monday on the way to work, usually I am crying because I don't want to go, such a baby I've become.

This has been a tough week, its the build up to Georgia 13Th birthday, she will be a teenager finally, a big milestone in her life and another milestone for me without the boys, they would have been so proud to see her grow up, sadly they wont be here in person to celebrate but she has chosen to have a family dinner and included amongst that family will be the boys closest mates, its nice that she has bonded with them in such a way and its even nicer that they still support and love her.

Another sad event this week was the death of the boys grandfather, I was so sad on many levels, sad for Neal (the boys dad) sad for his mum and family, sad for the boys, they would have been shattered as they were such a close family sad for me as they were such a big part of my life for a long time and I was even jealous, jealous to think that someone Else will get to see the boys before me, only for moment I wished it was me, but I know that they are now being looked after by their great pop, their pop and their great uncle all from the Gilson side.

The funeral was hard to attend, I haven't seen the family other than their dad since the boys funeral, just going to it was hard, I almost thought I wouldn't be able to go in the door, but like most things these days it was do-able, just took a little more strength than usual.

Other than that, how am I going, well it seems as each day passes I miss my boys more and more, and sometimes that sense of permanency seems so overwhelming I find it hard to breath, but also with each day I feel I get a little stronger, my support group is going well with over 30 members registered and my support of road safety programs seems to be taking a new path. Mind you they are the only two things other than Todd and Georgia that seem to give me purpose, all other work seems pointless to me and simply a means to end, however I shall plod along as I guess someday the passion will come back, or maybe I will take a new road in terms of career, who knows for now still just getting through one day at a time is the best I can manage, lucky for me I have many patient people around me.

3rd Christmas

Well my (our) 3rd Christmas without Brendon and Mat is almost here, it can't come and go quick enough for me. I suppose I should be grateful that I have Georgia and Todd, and for that I am but still it does not out way the immense loss I feel for my boys, with every 'special' event that comes I just seem to be less grateful for what I have and miss them even more, I imagine though that over time I will be grateful (perhaps thats not the right word) appreciative of what I have and the missing them may lessen, I don't know, who knows, I see people in my group that I know on the outside look strong and sound strong when they talk about Christmas but I know that deep down they feel the pain and

that almighty emptiness that you have when you have lost a child, I guess if I can end up with half their strength I will be doing ok.

We have only just put up the tree, I hold off as long as Georgia will allow, I have to remember that she is still only young and Christmas although sad for her is still exciting in a sense. She wants to have a lunch or something on Christmas day but I am just not ready for that, maybe next year.

I organised a week ago a very special and important event, a candle lighting to honour those children that we have lost, it was everything I had hoped it would be, for me, for one of the rare moments on this journey I did not feel alone, over 50 other people were there for the very same reason, we hugged and cried and smiled together, it was good to see that family and friends of others had come to honour the kids as well, it was one of the most special moments I have had yet in memory of my boys.

We, that is, Todd, Georgia and I are looking forward to going away for a weeks break, I personally am looking forward to leaving work behind, and spending some quiet time thinking about my boys, breathing in the fresh air and just having time together.

I can see that I am starting to function outside of the house and work a little better, I went to my work's Christmas function, out for end of year dinner with my TAFE students and then out for another work function, I don't seem to feel as bad afterwards now, but I do have to make a truly conscious effort not to think about where the boys are and the fact that I should not be 'out' its quite draining but despite what my heart says my head says I need to do it.

I still struggle with the way people struggle to cope with my loss, I guess eventually I will care less about what others think and more about what I think and feel, after all I am the one who has lost the children and this is an event that changes one for ever inside and out, no reason why others should change I guess.

Something positive for me is the work I am doing with my support group, although my mentor on this journey will be leaving for the States soon, and I will miss her terribly, I will have the HOPE group to work on, we have 40+ members now and its so good to see that many who were once alone have now made friends with people they can talk to who understand.

I am also doing some work with road safety programmes, for me this is the most important thing I must do, as I cannot, or will not accept that my boys lives have been taken for nothing, there has to be something to come from such a tragedy and getting young drivers to slow down is something that I am passionate about, if I can help to save one family, one mum from going through this unimaginable loss then I have done something worth while.... also for me its part of the healing process I think. talking about the accident and the boys to groups is usually the only time I get to talk about it or them because for most people around me its a subject they avoid. Actually I rarely hear their names mentioned anymore and this is very hard to take, sometimes I just want to yell out to them, and I do, just so I can hear their names from my mouth.

I wonder often what kind of person I am to become from this, I know I will never be the same person, I seem to be less tolerant with people these days especially those who don't stop for a moment and think about my (our) feelings, I am easily annoyed with myself for expecting too much from some, I get cross when some of the people closest to me don't send me a message on the 14th, I expect that everyone should know my

heart is broken and especially in pain on that day.... I wonder if I will always care if others are thinking of my boys, perhaps it will be enough eventually for me to know that I am thinking of them, I am missing them and I I

These journal entries are a chronicle of my thoughts, feelings and experiences prior to and since the death of my son's. It is also a record of some of the things, moments and events we shared. The entries don't just show the physical connection we had, rather it includes the emotional bond we have, the bond that seals the relationship between people.

Since the death of Brendon and Mathew I have come to realise (20 months on) that everyday we spent together was special. Although it would be great if I could remember and treasure every day as an eventful one, it is not to be, some days I am so shadowed by grief, sadness and the loss that I can't remember past times, most days I realise are routine and often taken for granted.

The days that I have spoken of in the journals and the days I of think of when I go about my business are the days and times to be relished, some were good and some not so good, they are memories and moments to reflect on none the less.

I guess the important thing to remember is, when I think of these days when we shared a moment or experience I am recollecting our history together, it is this history, these memories and moments that will get me through another day, a week, a month and even years on, these are the memories, good or bad that I will cherish.

Chapter 7

The journey continues

So to you the reader, and I will assume you are another mum, this I know to be true, while at the moment it seems almost unbearable to think about going on with life, sadly life does go on, at first only around us but eventually with us. It does get easier to get through the days, but you will still have those waves of emotions to deal with, sometimes I can have a good few days and then seem to be down for a whole week, there's no controlling or denying it, there's only going with it.

Vera told me that we will have many potholes along this road and at first they seem to be very close together and very deep, as time goes on they seem to be spread further apart and not so deep. I didn't believe her at first. I thought how this could be possible I will always feel like this. While it is true that the sadness remains, it is also true that it gets easier.

There is also no correct time line for recovery, everyone is different and you have to do what works for you. For me it was reaching out to other mums in my situation, it started with writing the odd letter to starting a support group, I have also taken on supporting driver education campaigns designed in particular to slow down our young drivers, as my son was speeding I now want to help stop any other parent going through such an unnecessary loss.

You may or may not want to reach out to help others, but you will need to reach out for help for you, it will be important to know who around you can be called on in those times of need, when you feel like you will explode if you don't talk to someone.

I also found planning for the special holidays seasons helped me get through special events like Christmas, Easter and birthdays etc. I always planned something during the lead up, for me the lead up to events has always been harder than the actual day.

Write a journal, if nothing else it gives you hope, when you pull it out thinking you have gotten no where in terms of recovery one day and you see that in the early days you couldn't even get off the lounge it becomes a document of determination.

I wish I never had to write such a book, but I have been put on this journey for a reason and as such I feel that this book may help you or someone you know get through this terrible situation. When I went searching for help in the form of anything I could read, there was little out there.

I hope by writing this book and sharing my journal entries that I am able to show how you can find a new normal, and above all you can go on, you will go on, trust me it gets a little easier with each passing day, you will find on occasion that you may go two steps forward and one step back, but above all YOU WILL GO ON, YOU CAN GO ON, there is HOPE.

Pictures.



Mat off to his first school camp



Mathew aged about 3



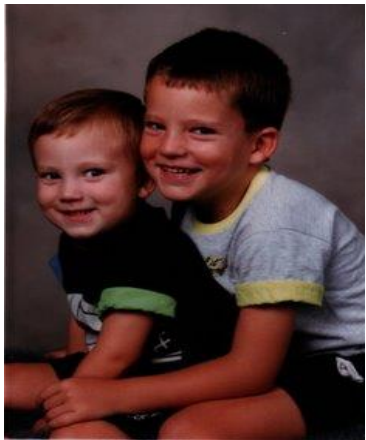
Brendon and Mat goofing around



Taken while on a Cruise in 2000



Mat, Georgia and Brendon



This is The image Of the boys That came to me In my first ever dream Of them.



Mats first day of sport in his sport Uniform



Brendon at 18, just Got his licence



Brendon and Mat On pop's Farm



Mat at 16 just weeks Before his death