

A SIBLINGS JOURNEY OF GRIEF

By Jacqueline Cairns of TCF QLD

When the writer Mark Twain lost his daughter suddenly to illness, he described his grief in just three words 'the unutterable sorrow.' I remember being incredibly moved by his words and could only begin to imagine the depth of his sadness and pain that lay hidden within them.

Grief is an emotion we would like to believe is experienced only by other people. It is not until one day when it arrives on our doorstep that we are suddenly faced with the reality that we will *all* experience it.

My own grief arrived a few years ago with the tragic death of my brother to suicide. My brother did not have cancer or a life threatening illness but unknown to those around him, he was slowly dying. Unlike cancer, the physical symptoms were not visible to us. We simply could not see that he had lost his will to live. His depression was masked by the sound of infectious laughter. his smile concealed his pain. Even so many years on, it still seems almost impossible to believe.

Suicide. It's a word I had never really heard until the day my brother died. I knew what it meant, and I knew that it happened to other people. Suddenly though, it had invited itself into our home. It had befriended my brother. It was his comfort when no-one else was there for him. It promised to be the solution to all of his problems and tragically he took its hand.

Unbelievably the world somehow kept turning and life went on for other people. My own world, however, stopped and I stood helpless as I watched it crumble around me, unable to prevent it. I was completely broken by my brothers' death and shattered pieces were simply too great ever to put back together. To ever make me whole.

The days, weeks and months that followed my brothers death meant that I relived the same horror every morning I awakened. He was gone, he had died and I had not imagined it. It wasn't a bad dream from which I could ever be wakened. It was simply an inconceivable reality that I struggled desperately to grasp. Mornings were awful for instead of the sound of sleepy yawns there would be muffled cries. My only comfort during that time came from sleeping in my brothers bed. Somehow, feeling a little closer to him in my dreams. this was the place where he had slept peacefully at night and where he had been safe from his demons. unlike most of us, his real nightmares were not during sleep but while he was awake, making them increasingly harder to run from.

The loss of my brother was like losing a limb but instead of learning to walk again I was trying to learn to live without him. it took years before I was finally ready to take the first step and years before I was finally ready to take the first step and eventually break through that dark period of my grieving. I look back on that time of my life with a few regrets because it was a period of healing which I believe was completely necessary for me to go through. I am no longer confused by the sadness and pain of my loss. Whether I run from it or not I know in my heart that I will always grieve for my brother. I am tired of running, so now I accept it as part of my life, as part of me.

My brothers life and his death have enabled me to look at myself with a greater sense of clarity. He has given me the gift of compassion, of caring and of being able to express without reserve my love for those around me.

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In loving memory of her brother Colin*