

Tonia McLintok

By Fiona McLintok, in memory of her daughter

MAD, BAD AND SAD

A story written by Fiona about her grief journey after the death of her daughter Tonia whose anniversary is 26 August.

I was walking to our local shopping centre approximately two months after my daughter Tonia (aged 5) had died and I was suddenly struck by the fact that for, maybe one or two very short minutes, I had not thought about my dead child every minute of every day (and even throughout the long sleepless nights) for eight weeks. My mind up until then had been consumed, (or perhaps the correct word should be “subsumed”), by compulsive thoughts of her and my heart was struck in a deep crevasse of grief. This realization brought me to a halt (I literally scorched the soles of my shoes!) as I contemplated this utterly new phenomenon. It was a revelation that I hung on to as it gave me hope that someday I would be able to function as a normal human being who did not feel as though the entire world had caved in on her or a person who walked around in utter amazement that strangers could carry on their lives as though nothing had happened. How could they act as though everything was ok? How was I ever going to act as though everything was ok? I hated them.

In fact, there were many things I hated then. I especially hated happy people; I hated people who tried to make me happy, I hated people who still had three children (heaven help them if they had a cute young 5 year-old daughter!) and I particularly loathed people who trotted out the hoary old chestnut clichés – I (uncharacteristically until then) wanted to ‘smack them in the gob’ so to speak. One poor young fellow, who was lucky there was no large boiling cauldron of water nearby for me to dump him in, told me “Oh well, life goes on.” Unfortunately he is now a very successful sportsman and his name and face is regularly splashed all over the TV every Sunday and I still want to dump him in boiling water!

I hated seeing my parents cry every day and I hated seeing my other two young children act as though nothing had changed (they are now 30 and 32 and have been able to articulate quite clearly what they were going through). I hated thinking that my husband at the time didn’t care as he did not show any emotion (of course I now know that men and women often react differently) and I hated what I thought was the false look of compassion on other people’s faces when they tried to look sad for me and say something meaningful as though they really did understand what it was like to lose a child but in fact they hadn’t a clue what it felt like.

Yep, I was mad at the world, at God, at myself, at the medico’s – you name it – I was mad at it. I was mad and bad but mostly just profoundly sad...

All this from a preciously placid, passive and non-violent person. A person who suddenly wanted to tear the lungs out of innocent, well-meaning but naïve people. I wanted to scream “my daughter is dead, my daughter is dead, my daughter is dead” and shake them until they grasped what a momentous tragedy had occurred and they had no right to be happy.

Twenty-six years later following many other personal crises, a diagnosis of cancer and many operative procedures later, the onset of panic attacks and mild agoraphobia, once more I was again mad, bad and sad. However I had learned some valuable lessons from the passing of my daughter. I made it a condition that there were to be NO clichés and if you didn’t know what to say then say nothing at all or else say “I don’t know what to say!”



I couldn't understand how strangers looked so happy and ordinary, how normal their lives appeared when mine was spinning down that crevasse again. I once again wanted to 'smack people in the gob' or look around for boiling cauldrons of water!

My mind was consumed with thoughts of death again until one day I again screeched to a halt. The world was not a landscape of monochrome vista's, it was just plain difficult at the moment and it was up to me to see that tiny sliver of hope I had once seen two months after my daughter died. When my husband (2nd) buys Tonia a birthday card and lights a candle next to it, when I receive a TCF newsletter, when I attend a special church service for those who have lost children, I stop and realize that "Yep Fiona, you're often mad which makes you bad (or think "bad" things) but really you're just sad."

Nowadays the sadness is stored in a safe place in my heart to be comforted when the time is right, brought out when the time is right and I can look at other people with three children and feel happy for them or see another little 5 year-old with beautiful hair and sparkling blue eyes and think how beautiful she is....