

Personal Story

Paola, mother of Anthony



about grief

My husband, Manni, and I both came from Italy with our parents when we were young. We met when we were in our 20s, married and started a business. We worked so hard, long hours but we wanted to make some money and build a life so we could start a family. We were so sad and ashamed because we didn't have children for a couple of years. We didn't know what was wrong and we could hardly talk to each other about it.

Then the miracle happened and I was pregnant with our son, Anthony. And then another couple of years later we had our daughter, Joanna. We were blessed and at last our prayers had been answered. We adored our children and we were so happy. But then something awful happened. We were devastated when our daughter died of cancer when she was 11. We didn't think we'd survive then, but somehow we managed to get through.

We wonder sometimes if this hurt Anthony more than we realized or maybe we didn't pay enough attention to him. He became the light of our life. He grew up well, he was good at school and he was a good football player as well. There was such potential in him, he could have done anything. He started at university and was being noticed by the big soccer clubs. We were so proud and happy.

Then things started to go bad. He was moody, up and down, sometimes he was up all night and then he couldn't get out of bed for days. We were so worried and didn't know what to do. Eventually we had to take him to hospital and they said he had bipolar and they gave him some tablets. These helped for a while but then he stopped taking them and he was in hospital again. We thought it must be our fault. That we'd spoilt him, given him everything and it was hard to understand him sometimes.

But things were just beginning to settle down again. We thought we were through the worst, he was back at uni and even playing football. He was living with us all through this time. A few days before he died he said he might give up football, we were surprised but thought he wanted to concentrate on his studies.

He went out one night and we thought he was out a bit late, but didn't worry too much. We hoped he was out having fun. Then there was a knock at the door, it was the police telling us Tony was dead. My world stopped. My son, my beautiful son. Dead. I don't know how we managed to get through the funeral. We hadn't told anyone he was ill and had been in hospital, we didn't want anyone to think he was mad. We didn't want to tell people he took his own life, so we told them it was an accident.

The shame and pain of losing two children. A few months after I wasn't coping. I thought I was going mad and would end up in hospital too. I thought my life was over. Our reason for living was gone. Without our children we had no purpose, no reason to live. And I thought it was my fault. I failed him in some way. Maybe God was punishing us for something.

I had to get help, I think I would have died from the grief. We went to a group and also to counselling. We didn't want to but we had to do something. I didn't think it would help, but it has. Slowly we have started to come back to life. I even told a few of the family what really happened and they were better than I thought. Not everyone is good, but some are. We will never get over losing our son, our two children, but they will always be part of our lives and we are looking for ways to honour both of them and keep their memory alive.

For support services:
www.supportaftersuicide.org.au

Support After Suicide

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