

Personal Story

Lexie, wife of Joe



BUILDING A JUST SOCIETY

other people's stories

Joe was the love of my life. He was my soulmate. He was truly my everything. I still believe this and I will forever.

18 July 2002 was the beginning of the end. It was on this day that I received a call that Joe had been involved in an accident at work and that he was in hospital suffering serious injuries. The months that followed were difficult. I recall being concerned at times about his psychological wellbeing. He was in pain often and having trouble sleeping.

Joe was a very proud man and finding himself in a position where he was unable to do things for himself was an enormous struggle for him. However with both time and a significant effort on his part he appeared to be making small steps towards recovery. He began to show interest again in activities he enjoyed, designing and building me a beautiful dressing table and bedside tables. He also arranged for us to spend a week away, taking me to a beautiful restaurant for dinner on more than one occasion. He was so attentive during this time; it was such a beautiful holiday.

At the time I can remember thinking that these events were all signs of his recovery and felt relieved to think that the worst was behind us. Now I reflect back and know in my heart that he had already made the decision to leave. He was preparing to say good bye.

On the morning of the 5 July 2003 Joe left home without saying goodbye or letting me know where he was going. This was totally out of character for him. To me the morning had started as normal even though Joe hadn't been himself the past few days.

We had enjoyed breakfast together. He then went into the garage which was also his workshop. I remember that the phone had rung. He called out to say it was our daughter Cassie, saying she was going to

Coffs Harbour with friends for the day. I had stripped the sheets from our bed and was standing at the top of the stairs when he relayed her message. I simply answered 'okay'. This was the last time that I saw Joe alive. He ducked back into the garage and I continued down the stairs to put the washing on. I can't remember what I did after this; it is a complete blank ... I don't know.

I do however remember calling out at some point to talk to Joe and being concerned that he didn't answer. I remember being troubled enough by his lack of response that I wandered down stairs to check on him. I was surprised to see that he was gone and so was his car. He had left the garage door wide open which was something that he would not usually do. I can remember thinking that this was all so strange and looking back I know that even then I knew that something was wrong. I tried to carry on with my usual routine, but found it hard to do so. I felt chilled and fearful knowing that something wasn't right.

I prepared Joe's morning tea as usual. After an hour or so I packed it away again. It was the same at lunch. By this time I was so concerned I got into my car and drove all around town looking for him. This was to no avail. I returned home but was unable to stay calm or sit still. My stomach was churning with worry.

When Cassie returned home from Coffs she was shocked to hear the news of her dad's disappearance. She called the police. I explained to the police my grave concerns for Joe's safety and his state of mind, plus the pressures that his insurers had been putting him under since his workplace accident.

By this time we had contacted all family members. Joe hadn't been seen by any of them that day. The police with family members conducted a search of the forest

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that night which proved negative. The police organised a more thorough search for the next morning. No one slept well that night. I remember feeling torn between my fears for his safety and my anger towards him for causing such worry. I punched the hell out of Joe's pillows demanding to know where he was and why he wasn't there next to me. It was a terrible night for us all.

Family members began arriving at 5:30am, some to sit and comfort, some to help with the search. At 8:35am we received word that Joe's car had been located in a plantation forest. I was being told to get my shoes on quickly in preparation to travel to the hospital. For reasons I can't explain I refused. In my heart I knew that Joe was never coming home again. This feeling had been with me for many hours. I am sure that they didn't understand my behaviour at that point of time. I felt cold and shaky, my legs felt weak.

When the police arrived I had to be led like a child to the front of the house to speak with them. The police had been waiting for my son Mike to get home. I later learned that he had just put his girlfriend Lyn in hospital as she had collapsed with the shock of the news. I recall Mike bounding up the stairs crying, 'Mum, oh Mum!' He threw his arms around me and Cassie. Everyone was crying.

I lifted my head up to look at the policeman and I said, 'It is bad news isn't it?' He replied, 'I am sorry, your husband is now deceased.' I asked how Joe had died. He told me that they had found a firearm by his side. This news was shocking, so shocking. In all of my wildest dreams I would never have dreamt that Joe was capable of such a violent act. He was such a beautiful and gentle person. How could he have shot himself? I remember thinking that they were wrong, surely they were wrong! I so wished that they were wrong. The shock, grief and pain was just too much to bear. There was absolute agony on everyone's faces. My pain quickly turned to anger. How dare Joe do this to us! How dare he leave us in the lurch like this! I felt this anger for a long time afterwards. I'd throw his pillows off the bed at night, turn his photo over so as I couldn't see it; then I would get out of bed, pick them up and hug them sobbing.

News travelled fast, Joe was a well liked and well respected man in our home town. The phone rang constantly as did the doorbell. Flowers and cooking arrived in abundance. Thank God for all of the beautiful people and for my children and Lyn. Although they were hurting just as much, they were able to draw on an inner strength to carry them through that I wasn't able to at that point of time. My brothers and sisters

and Joe's family were a tower of strength, the love and support that they gave me was never ending. The funeral arrangements were made over many tears.

Joe's funeral took place on a beautiful but very cold Thursday afternoon. The funeral director and our Minister were marvellous, so kind and caring. Somehow we managed to get through it, I don't know how. There are so many things that no matter how much I try I just can't seem to remember.

In the days and months that followed Joe's death I was often consumed by tears. I found it difficult to go down town or to face people. I had moments of sheer anger; I almost hated him for what he had done to us. Suicide was like a dirty word to me and still is. I hate and most times refuse to admit that Joe suicided.

There were many nights that I would sit and wait for him to walk through the door. Of a night I'd wake up and put my arm over his pillow thinking he would be there. Whenever I sat on the lounge I would leave his seat vacant for when he returned home. It was and still is so hard to live without him.

Although I loved the beautiful home in which I had shared my life with Joe, remaining there became increasingly difficult. Whilst I was able to find some comfort in the memories that our home held, it mostly became a stark and painful reminder of all that I had lost. Losing Joe did not just mean losing the man I loved; it was a loss of so many things in so many ways. I coped by working around the home but this quickly became an unhealthy obsession. I found that I was unable to stop. I cleaned, I painted, I climbed to clean windows and believe me this was no ordinary feat with our house being over two storeys high! I just could not stop.

After nine months of this I realised my desperation and told my daughter and son-in-law that I needed to go. They were concerned for my wellbeing and health. After much discussion we resolved to swap houses. They now live in my house and I live in theirs. Our lives have changed forever following Joe's death. We will never be the same people again. To never be able to know or understand why I lost my 'everything' is the hardest thing to have to live with. Not a day goes by that I don't miss him and ask 'Why?' It helps to remind myself that I am surrounded by love and it is this love that I draw upon for support as I move forward through each day.

For Support Services:

www.supportaftersuicide.org.au

<http://community.supportaftersuicide.org.au>