

Personal Story

Michael, father of Ben



BUILDING A JUST SOCIETY

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I came home from work and was wandering around the house looking for our son, Ben. He'd moved back home temporarily when he and his wife were having some marriage problems. It was strange having him home but we were glad to have him with us because we were a bit worried about him. He wasn't taking the separation well, he was upset, missing his kids. We tried to be supportive but it didn't seem to be enough.

Anyway, this day, I was looking for him and eventually I heard the car running in the garage. My blood ran cold and well, I found him, called 000 and the ambulance and police and then had to call my wife and the rest of the family. They were the hardest phone calls I ever had to make. It's hard to think about it even now. We tried our best, we told him what a good dad he was, that his kids loved him, that they were missing him too. But we couldn't seem to get through to him. We also told him that we loved him and that he was a good son to us.

He was one of my best mates, growing up he'd come fishing with me, we'd watch him play footy. I miss him. It's so bad some days I don't know what to do with myself. I think that maybe this is how he felt and he couldn't bear not being able to see his kids. I started to drink more than usual for a few weeks, but cut this out when I realized it wasn't going to do any good and would probably make it worse.

It's hard seeing his mother so upset. She cried every day at the start and she'd talk about it all the time; I wanted her to stop. I was angry with her for crying all the time and then angry with our son for doing this and causing so much pain. I'd think, how could he have done this to his mother and to his kids. I still don't understand it – I guess he couldn't see how he was going to live without his kids, but we would have worked it out.

As a dad I'm supposed to provide for and protect the kids. Early on I'd go over in my mind all the things I said to him, all the things I thought I should have said – would it have made a difference if I'd said this or done that.

Did something I say make him do this? I felt responsible and guilty a lot of the time. Then sometimes I'd feel angry with his wife, Jess. I know I shouldn't; she was struggling as well. But I'd think, well, if she hadn't wanted the separation he'd still be alive. It's more complicated than that, I know, but there's days I just want him back.

It took a long time but now we see Jess and the kids and it's getting good again. At first it was hard. We found it hard to be around her and I think she found it hard to be around us. But it's great to see our grandchildren. I can see some of our son in them – which hurts a lot but it's also great; they bring some happiness to us and we thought we'd never feel OK again – that we didn't even deserve to feel happy again.

I worry sometimes about our other kids – will they be OK? Can we protect them? This kind of thing is a blow, it shakes your trust in yourself. What sort of father am I? But in my good moments, I know we loved him, that we did the best we could for him, and that we would have done anything, absolutely anything, to help him if we could have.

At the start, I took a bit of time off work, but it was good to get back to it after a while. I wasn't up to much at work, couldn't do as much or concentrate as well, but if I was at home I would just mope around all day feeling awful and missing him. It gave me some relief from how bad it was.

I guess because I found him, I had these memories of him, in the car. It was so bad – I think that's why I was drinking, trying to block them out. I couldn't remember how he looked other than when I found him in the car. But we got some photos out and I went to see a counsellor and I don't have the bad pictures so much in my mind any more. I remember him how he was in the good times. We'll always love him and we do special things on his birthday and on Father's Day – sometimes with his kids too.

For support services:

www.supportaftersuicide.org.au

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