

Personal Story

Tracy, wife of Ray



BUILDING A JUST SOCIETY

other people's stories

It was love at first sight for us, for Andy and me. He was a couple of years older than me but his brother was in my class at school and we met at an end of year party. That was 22 years ago. He was an apprentice plumber and our first few years together were great. We did some travelling and then we worked to build a family life which was great because we had the same goals and values and we worked hard.

We have two children, Andy who is 14 now and Jade's 11. I got along well with his family, we'd have barbecues on the weekend and have them over. My family wasn't close so it was great to be part of his family. The kids loved their grandparents. He liked his work and was reliable and well-liked. But then things started to change. In the last few years before he died we started having some problems. I didn't really notice it at first, I just thought it was the normal ups and downs.

He couldn't seem to hold a job. The one he had for almost 10 years ended suddenly and I never really understood what happened. He said that there was too much pressure and the boss was a tyrant, but it didn't really sound right. And then he couldn't seem to keep a job. He'd start out OK and then after a few months something would happen and he'd come home saying he'd had to throw it in.

And something else which I found really hard to talk about was how he was at home. He started getting really moody and uncommunicative and then really

angry over little things. He'd yell at the kids and they started to get scared of him. I didn't know what to do. And I didn't tell anyone – not even his family. I tried talking to him but he would just tell me he was OK, nothing was wrong, and to leave him alone.

He didn't ever hit me but I think he came close. I was desperate – he was so hard to live with and I was worried about the kids. Seeing them scared of him was heartbreaking. I begged him to get help, I talked to our doctor but he wouldn't keep appointments. I was so worried, nearly out of my mind. I asked his brother to have a chat with him – but because I didn't really let on how things were...well, I think he may have told his brother that his home life was giving him grief.

He would come home from work, and sit in the shed or in front of the TV and yell at the kids and at me. He would fly into rages if the kids made noise or left toys around the lounge. The last straw was when I came home from a trip to the supermarket to find him yelling at Jade for leaving a book on the dinner table. She was crying and frightened and when I asked him to stop he stormed off and punched a hole in the back door.

So I asked him to leave. And two weeks later he was dead. And everyone said it was my fault. Well, his family did. Some of the things they've said to me...I can't repeat them. They sent me texts and emails and left voice messages saying awful things. They think I killed him really. I've even heard rumours that I

Support After Suicide

PO Box 271
Richmond VIC 3121
Phone: (03) 9421 7640
Email:
aftersuicide@jss.org.au
Web:
supportaftersuicide.org.au

A program of
Jesuit Social Services

was having an affair. I know they're grieving; they are really hurting, and so am I.

I didn't leave him because I don't love him, I do love him. I miss him so much, my heart aches, I miss him. I thought we had to separate – but I didn't even see it as a permanent thing. I thought we'd find a way to work it out.

His family told me not to go to the funeral. So I couldn't say goodbye and neither could the kids. His brother even came over and was banging on the door one night, calling me all sorts of names.

The kids have lost contact with their grandparents and his parents are angry about me getting money from superannuation and life insurance. Basically, they think it's my fault. I wish I'd told them what it was like with him, how he was. But now it's too late and they think I'm making it up.

It's not like I don't feel guilty. I do. I go over and over and over things. I wish I hadn't asked him to leave, I wish I'd told his family what was happening, I wish I'd pushed harder to get him to a doctor, I wish, I wish, I wish...mostly I just want him back, I want him here with me and the kids and how it was before .

I found out a few weeks after he died that he was gambling, that it was out of control and he had a lot of debt which I didn't know about. I didn't know he was gambling again. I knew it was a bit of a problem early in his life but I thought that was in the past. He must have been feeling really bad, feeling like he was letting us down, he must have been desperate.

It was three and a half years ago that he left us. We're doing alright now. We've lost a lot. We lost Ray and we lost his family and we lost the house too. I had to pay some of the debt back. I'm working now, part-time and we have a new home which is nice.

I think some people would be able to get through something like this on their own, but I couldn't. I needed help. Counselling and a support group

have been really helpful, a lifesaver. Some days I didn't think I could keep going, but I have. I worry about the kids still. They don't understand, they're hurt and sometimes angry and they miss their dad and their nana and pop.

Support

Telephone counselling

Lifeline www.lifeline.org.au
13 11 14

Suicide Callback Service
www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au
1300 659 467

Hope For Life suicideprevention.salvos.org.au
1300 467 354

Kids Help Line www.kidshelp.com.au
T. 1800 55 1800 (5 to 25 years)

Mensline www.menslineaus.org.au/
1300 78 99 78

Suiceline (VIC) www.suiceline.org.au
T 1300 651 251

Suggested reading

- *After Suicide: Help for the Bereaved*, Sheila Clark, 1998.
- *Why do people die by suicide*. Thomas Joiner, Harvard University Press, 2007.
- *Darkness Visible*. William Styron, Vintage Books, London, 1990.
- *If only: personal stories of loss through suicide*. Belinda Woolley & Pauline Meemeduma (eds.) University of Western Australia Press, 2006.
- *Healing After the Suicide of a Loved One*, Simolin and Quinan, 1993.
- *After Suicide: a ray of hope for those left behind*, Eleanora Ross, 2001.