

## **WSPD 2020**

It's estimated that 400,000 Australians think about taking their own lives every year and we know over 2,500 actually do. So many also attempt.

We didn't know Elliot had ever thought about. But he did. He planned it - he did it on his first attempt - leaving no note just a gut-wrenching great hole in a devastated family, school and wider community.

Elliot died on Muck Up Day 2011; 10 days shy of his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday and before the Year 12 exams. Our much loved first born son from a 'normal' middle class Australian family. *Suicide can happen in anybody's family.*

No one could believe that Elliot had taken his own life. "No, not Elliot!" one teacher told me.

Elliot was School Captain in both Primary and Secondary School; a testimony to his standing as a leader. Loved by teachers and students; that is a hard line to walk. A talented guitarist / songwriter, hard-working, kind and smart. He navigated life seemingly well. Or so everyone thought.

He socialised every weekend, had one shift of work a week and played guitar and sang around the house, even in his last days.

"R U OK?," I'd often ask him. "Yes Mum I'm fine. You worry too much."

We'd even discussed suicide, amongst other topics.

Why couldn't they have asked for help? I said. Suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem. Those poor people left behind...

It NEVER occurred to me that we could be the ones left behind.

Children bury their parents, right? Not the other way round.

In the awful months after he died, my husband and I discussed every aspect of our parenting and every conversation we could remember. I researched suicide and read widely.

We contacted Support After Suicide in Richmond. To find other parents who had suffered this immeasurable loss, was so healing. To find a counsellor who knew specifically about suicide bereavement was crucial. We had another son to take care of which became our highest priority. He attended a Music camp weekend run by Support After Suicide, with other adolescents. All these things helped. We slowly resumed work which was a good distraction but it never felt the same again. In fact, nothing feels the same.

In this strange year 2020, there is talk of a 'Covid normal'; everyone now has a glimmer of what it means to have your life changed forever.

I know this audience won't judge Elliot, or us for that matter. Fear of being judged may have been the reason for Elliot not putting up his hand to say "I'm suffering". If we'd known how desperate he was feeling, we would've moved Heaven and Earth to help him; we would've done anything. And sadly, sometimes 'Love is not enough'.

On the day Elliot died, the school counsellor asked him how he was and he said 'Fine'. Well he wasn't fine. *Suicide can happen in anyone's family.* **Why didn't he ask for help?**

We need to make it 100% acceptable and the **norm**, to get professional help when mentally things go awry just as we would if we had a broken leg. Stigma around mental health issues should be long gone.

As a community we need to know how to ask for help and how to give it. (Or direct someone to it.)

**Do you know how to ask for help?**

**Do you know what to say when a loved one or a colleague opens up to you and says, "I'm not travelling that well".**

We need to be aware of the large scale tragedy that takes more people than road accidents, the absolute waste of human potential and the trail of broken hearts of those left behind.



I'd like to finish with this. On the first anniversary of Elliot's death, we held a memorial service just for his friends and teachers to celebrate his life and to see how everyone was coping one year after the trauma.

A girl I'd never met or heard Elliot mention, came and hugged me and said, "Because of your beautiful boy, I got help for my mental health issues. Elliot saved my life". We need to talk about suicide.

Oh how I wish we could've saved him.

Lisa  
September 2020.