



## Royal London presents Lost for Words

I went to counselling almost straight away just cos I thought that's what you did. And I think that what I've learned since is that counselling is a job interview, you know, you don't necessarily have to pick the one that's in front of you. It's like a date, you don't necessarily get on with them, you don't have to carry on seeing them. And the first one just didn't work for me. I expected this person to be able to fix me. And she looked more emotional than me. I was in shock and I was telling her the most awful story, and she looked like she was fighting back tears the whole time. And I was like, "What's wrong with you, it's me that's meant to be getting looked after here." But I wasn't ready for it. And I think that it is personal. And you can't tell someone how to grieve or at what pace to do it, because it'll come back at a different time.

Humour really got me through. I remember, one night, my two best men - they lived in different parts of the country - and one of them came to see me one evening, and he took me to the pub. And he asked for a table in the corner, cos he said we need to talk. And he sat there and I sat in the corner, crying. And he reached out and he put his hand on mine. And then the next day, the other one came, and he went to the same pub, and he asked for a table in the corner and he sat and I cried and he put his hand on mine and I turned to him and I said, "Can... Can you just not touch me?" And he said, "Why?" And I went, "Because I was in here with Lee last night, and he was doing the same thing. "And I've not been able to keep a woman and now it looks like I can't keep a man either." Cos it actually looked like both of them were breaking up with me. And we were pissing ourselves laughing about it, but like crying at the same time. That is grief as well. I think that people expect you to be totally on the floor, but, like, gallows humour comes in. That's survival. That's really what it is.

I remember finding this organisation called Care for the Family. I think it's like a Christian charity for many different aspects of family life. But there was this downloadable document that said these are the things to do and the things not to do when someone has lost someone young or when someone's been widowed. And it was a list of typical dos and don'ts of things that you can do to help. What I used to find quite exhausting was



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when people would say, "Let me know if there's anything I can do to help." That's my cue to make you feel better by allowing you to do something. But I've got to think of it, I've got to brainstorm it, and then ask you to do it for me. I sent it to all my closest friends and family and said, "I know you all mean really well, but you're putting too much pressure on me. So, here's a list of things, if you want to do some, do them, if you don't, that's fine."

I always remember saying to my poor mum, "This must be so devastating seeing your own child, however old they are, in pain." And she said to me, "I just wish there was something I can do to help." And I said, "You can, you can clean the bathroom, cos there's so many of you here. Mop the floor, clean a bathroom, do something."

In time, people did start to step forward and really take on some of the practical things, cos they didn't realise that they were the only things that helped, you know? It was the small things. I don't think, really, that people, in the immediate aftermath, can make the massive gesture that they want to do to make things better, cos there's no such thing. It's coming over and playing with my son, I didn't have the energy for that. But, I think, what I found was that I needed true empathy rather than sympathy. I couldn't bear people feeling sorry for me.

I was living in a poxy flat, with no money and no savings. And then, like, a week later, I was given a house, basically, because we got life insurance seven months before. And that was very strange, cos I thought, like, in a sense, it felt quite demasculating. Cos I just thought I'm meant to work for all of this stuff, like my Northern, working-class parents, and then it's just been given to me. You know, when I spoke to a financial advisor about it, thinking, I've got a bit of an issue with things I don't necessarily deserve. And he said, "Look at everything you've gone through, and this is you living your life, go for it." And it really resonated with me, cos I just thought why do I keep telling myself that I should hold back on stuff? Why don't I just think, right, I could have five months, I could have five years. I could have 50 years. But they should be great, because I don't want to just sit



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there, focusing on when I might die. It actually doesn't factor for me. I don't feel more vulnerable since my wife died. I don't feel more cautious. I feel scared of not living.