



Royal London presents Lost for Words

KEY: **Unable to decipher** = (inaudible + timecode), **Phonetic spelling** = (ph + timecode), **Missed word** = (mw + timecode), **Talking over each other** = (talking over each other + timecode).

Andrea Fox: Hello everyone, welcome to Royal London's Lost for Words live event. Just to introduce myself, I'm Andrea Fox, presenter, broadcaster, and, most importantly today, I'm the host of the Penny Drops podcast with Royal London, and I'm delighted to be hosting this event for you today. Now, Royal London believes that everyone deserves to be informed, prepared, and financially able to die well, and they believe that everyone, no matter who you are, benefits from talking about death. That's why Royal London have launched Lost for Words, a free digital exhibition in collaboration with the acclaimed portrait and fashion photographer Rankin. You may have already seen this on the news, you may have looked at the exhibition yourself, but it shares the stories of a few familiar faces, including Malin Andersson, Ashley Walters, Divina de Campo, as well as people who've faced bereavement very recently during the COVID-19 pandemic. Now, in this exhibition they all reflect on their feelings of loss, what they've learned from the process, and how to deal with the practical, the financial, and the emotional side of death. Royal London hopes that the Lost for Words exhibition will encourage people to have conversations around dying to help lift the taboo about death and to help people be better prepared to deal with loss. I'm delighted to welcome some of the Lost for Words exhibition's familiar faces. So, a good afternoon. Joining me today, Jeff Brazier, Konnie Huq, and John Stapleton. We're going to be putting-

John Stapleton: Hi, good afternoon.

Andrea Fox: Hi guys, thank you so much for joining me today. Everyone at home, if you are watching live, if you have any questions for any of our guests today I'll be putting them to our guests after we've had a little chat and had a look at the exhibition. So, if you haven't already, scroll down, there'll be a little purple box that says 'ask', that's where you can put your questions for our guests today, and they'll all be anonymous. So, please, there's no such thing as a silly question, so please do pop them in that box and we'll get around to them a little bit later on. Thank you so much to our guests for being here, thank you so much to you for

tuning in at home. Now, before I talk to each of our guests about their experiences with loss, let's take a little look at some footage from the Lost for Words exhibition.

Divina De Campo: Somebody dig a hole in a forest and throw me in. I don't need a marker or anything else. For me, it's not about there, that's not where they are, it's here and here, and all the things that they did. Those are the things that that person has left. That's where they are.

Ashley Walters: I had a really rocky relationship with my dad. I mean, before I found out that he was dying, that he had cancer, we hadn't spoken in, like, two, three years, and I felt that he was saying that he was dying in order to get back into my good books, because I was that adamant that I was never gonna speak to him again. I remember a moment where I, kind of, went to call him, and then it hit me. I know it's gonna sound stupid, but it surprised me how much I, I missed him, and how much I loved him, even though all that time I had to spend with him when he was there, I didn't.

Konnie Huq: The taboo around death comes from that people deal with it so differently. Lots of people will give you a wide berth, because they just don't know how to act, which, kind of, isn't helpful. You know, the person grieving can lead you, but it's nice to know that everyone is there for you.

Ben Brooks-Dutton: I put something on Twitter the other day, I said, 'If you're trying to do something for someone who's lost someone they love, there's actually a million things you can do.' Just don't ignore them, because they still need to laugh, and they still need to eat, and they still need to drink, and they still need to talk, and if you're sat there avoiding the phone because you don't know what to say, then you're gonna regret that one day, because there's so much you can do.

Malin Andersson: As humans, we feel awkward around the conversation of death, because we don't want it to happen, we don't know how to act or respond about it. It's unnatural, even though it's very natural to die. Everybody has to die at some point, right?

John Stapleton: I think we don't confront death with the optimism and the confidence that we confront other subjects, because we're just nervous of upsetting people, but the fact of the matter is we can't avoid death, it's not an option. You can't say, 'Oh, death, I'll, I'll, I'll give that a miss, if you don't mind.' You know, we've all got to face it, and so we might as well embrace it, I think, really.

Jeff Brazier: I personally embrace planning for my death. It sounds really odd to say that, but, firstly, if I've already told my kids what I want, where I want my ashes to go,

the music that I want played at the funeral, so on so forth, then there's a relieve in that, because I know that they're prepared. I know it's one less stress for them. You know, your life was, hopefully, a piece of art, if you like, and, you know, how and what happens to you when you go, it needs to be fitting. It's a huge, massive deal, and for those who are left organising it, they want to get it right.

Nikki Dalgleish: We never spoke about whether he wanted buried or cremated, we didn't know. He was 28, we weren't supposed to say goodbye to him. I now know what my mum and dad want, everybody knows what I want, I want cremated, in case you want to know, but you should have that conversation with people, what you want to happen when you're no longer here should be something we speak about.

Claira Hermet: I just want something really simple, and I've said this since I was a kid, that I want to be cremated and have my ashes scattered from a galloping horse, that's it.

Alec King: As long as wherever I'm going down, there's a disco ball, and nobody can wear black. Just have me on trend, that's all I care about. I want you to look at me and be like, 'God, he killed it, didn't he? He killed it, and died.' That's what I'd love. Just a little iconic piece.

Claira Hermet: The way that I look at losing my mum and my sister now is that it's my life. Like, this is the way it was supposed to be. So, I can ask, 'What can I learn from this, how can I grow from this,' rather than feeling like, 'Poor me.' That's my two choices. There is no other choice.

Malin Andersson: You can go down two routes with death. You can become a victim and you can stay accustomed to that, and live like a victim your whole life, feeling sorry for yourself, you can go down the partying, the drinking, the numbing your pain out, or you can use it and take it and you can grow with it. You know, I look at life completely differently. I, I wake up with gratitude in my heart. I leap out of bed, and things that once bothered me no longer bother me at all.

Divina De Campo: The only thing that we're all going to do is die. Most of us will pay taxes, unless you've put them off in Panama, and then you won't pay any taxes. So, the rest of us will pay taxes and die, and that's the only thing that everybody is going to do.

Andrea Fox: Now, I'm sure you'll all agree that that exhibition, the Lost for Words exhibition, looks really beautiful, really moving, but as Rankin himself has said, there's also some moments of lightness in there as well, and before we get onto your questions, which I've seen coming in, so, thank you so much for those, keep

them coming, in the ask box at the bottom, going to move onto our first guest today. Jeff Brazier, thank you so much for joining me, hello.

Jeff Brazier: It's a pleasure to be here, I really enjoy speaking about the subject, and it sounds odd for people to hear, maybe, but I just, in, I think it's a vital subject, a subject that will touch us all in life, and so I think it's a, a really well kept, or badly kept secret, depending on what perspective you borrow, but things get better when you do share it.

Andrea Fox: Yes, completely, and we've chatted quite a bit about this topic, Jeff. If you haven't already listened to the Penny Drops podcast, Jeff was a recent guest, and you speak really eloquently in the exhibition about your nan. So, my first question to you today would be, like, why did you decide to take part in this exhibition?

Jeff Brazier: And that's a lot of pressure to put on me, Andrea, to be honest, eloquently, I'm not sure I can match up to that today, but I decided to be involved firstly because I'm attracted to the subject, for obvious reasons, I've lost nans, granddads, aunties, the mother of my children, you know, and, and it's something that you have to learn to live alongside, to be honest. It's a, a part of life that manifests itself in, in lots of very difficult ways, but there is absolutely, there is, there is a way to navigate through life, I think, whilst, kind of, carrying it, maybe, in your pocket. You know, keeping memories of, of loved ones with you. The reason why I got involved is because I feel like I have some value to add, to be honest. I feel like I've studied the subject. I've observed it, I've felt it, I've lived it. Mostly as a dad. I would have, as a regular person, tripped over grief in the same way we all do, if it wasn't for the fact that it happened to my children quite early on in their childhood, and so naturally I wanted to help them as much as possible to, to navigate it, to, you know, to not be defined by it, to not use it as an excuse, but also to embrace it, and to embrace memories of their mum, and to be proud to speak about her when and as they feel like they can. So, to, to come to all of those conclusions, I think, requires a lot of time, a lot of effort, but also a lot of mistakes, and I find that in life, generally, you know, the biggest lessons, and the, and our greatest knowledge probably comes from getting it wrong several times, which, which I absolutely have, both as a dad and someone, as I say, who's tripped over grief in many, many respects.

So, I want to obviously always add that value where I can. I know that when we speak about the subject, which we're doing now, the people that are listening to this that have maybe not managed to find their way through the subject particularly well, maybe it's because it's happened quite recently, I know that there is a lot that can be gained from hearing the subject, but also speaking on the subject. So, if I can be a part

of something that helps that, then I would always like to be.

Andrea Fox: Yes, completely, and for anyone watching this at home that isn't aware, this came up on the podcast when we were discussing it, but Jeff has trained in bereavement counselling, you've written a book about grief, and you have some really lovely, sort of, advice for people, and you mentioned there, you know, tripping over grief, and, and you talk about, in the exhibition, talking honestly about it means that people tend to fare better. So, how important was it for you, when you went through the losses in your life, to have someone you could really talk to about it?

Jeff Brazier: Well, for me, it's, it's funny, I'm not going to sit here and pretend to, firstly, be an expert, because there's no such thing, but also to have navigated it perfectly, because I definitely didn't do that. Again, mistakes are really where you, where you, sort of, learn it, but if we can pass on those mistakes and the knowledge of them then I guess that we can help people to sidestep it in their own experience, on their own path through loss, but yes, for, for me, I've always been interested in the subject, I've always been interested in human behaviour, and the two are obviously very closely interlinked, and, yes, you, you do notice how some people seem to fare slightly better in loss just simply because they're kinder to themselves. If you are open-minded, if you are courageous enough to be able to share the, you know, the pain, you know, in any, in any particular moment, then you have the ability to release and offload. Don't get me wrong, that pain will come back the next day and the day after, but if you get into the habit of being able to feel it, share it, you know, and offload it, then ultimately you can imagine that you're, you're regulating your, your sense of well-being, despite the enormous burden that that loss has placed on your shoulders.

So, yes, again, if I can encourage people, the benefits of sharing, and, but also to show empathy, and the fact that I know that it's, you know, I think a lot of us are pre-programmed to, to want to hold onto things that are difficult for us to express, you know, that, that's obviously where the term 'depression' comes from. I always remember that (inaudible 11.57) and people that, that, that don't share, you know, they're, they're carrying things. In order to keep on carrying it, they have to make huge alterations in their life, and they have to almost change the path that they're heading on in order to avoid certain conversations, certain people, certain triggers, you know, in order to protect that sense of self-imposed safety, but there's, there's such, you know, so many detriments, detrimental impacts of that that we can avoid if we just get in the habit nice and early of just being, 'I'm feeling this, I'm going to name it. I'm human, and therefore I forgive myself for feeling this way, but, as much as it's going to hurt, I'm going to share it, and, you know, and as a result I might just temporarily feel better, and feel that ease.'

Andrea Fox: Yes, I think that's such an important thing, like, keeping your emotions boxed up never works well, whether it comes to financial worries, you know, mental health worries, and I think grief is all part of that. It's a financial worry, it's a mental health issue as well, and you mentioned, sort of, talking about things, but in the exhibition you have some good advice for, there's no one perfect phrase that's going to make someone who's suffering with grief feel better. So, what are some of the, sort of, ways you think would be a good way for people to approach conversations about death?

Jeff Brazier: I've just, do you know what, I've just had to go through that process a little bit this morning with, with a friend who's just told me that his, his father is battling cancer. There's no good time to battle cancer, but we also understand that, you know, a lot of people are, are missing appointments right now because of other things that we're battling, and, you know, immediately I, kind of, borrow that sense of dread and fear that my friend, who I really care about, must be enduring. So, what I did, and what I would advise anybody, is to not shy away from asking how they are. You might think, 'Well, this is a really obvious question, and they might almost be upset with me for even asking such a stupid question,' but the truth is, is that, you know, they, you give them the opportunity to, to, to say how they feel in the moment, therefore you give them the opportunity to express something, to share it outwardly, and they might in that moment really, really appreciate, I know I have in the past when someone has given me the opportunity to talk and share, I really appreciate somebody having the, the courage to be able to stand there and, kind of, front a difficult conversation out, especially, actually, when we realise that that subject might trigger something for the person who's asking the question, it might be difficult for them, but I wouldn't be being a good friend if I didn't, you know, make sure that you're, 'Look, you're going through this. I won't feel what you're feeling, but I'm, I'm willing to try, and I'm willing to hold, and give some space to you, in this moment, for what you're going through.'

So, yes, don't be scared of saying the wrong thing. There's no right or wrong, necessarily. Alright, there are some really insensitive things that people can say to someone, you know, who's, who's, who's lost somebody, or has someone that's, that's not well, but just, just, just say, 'How are you? This must be horrendous for you,' and let them talk. It's about what they say, and it's about you listening as opposed to you coming up with some magic phrase that's going to somehow alleviate all the pain that they're feeling.

Andrea Fox: Yes, exactly, that's so true. 'How are you,' goes a very long way. Thank you so much for that, Jeff, I'm going to bring you back in a little bit later, but we're going to move onto our second guest joining me today, excuse me. Thank you so much, John Stapleton, hello, how are you?

John Stapleton: I'm fine, well, you see, there you are, you say, 'How are you,' because my, my loss was only seven months ago.

Andrea Fox: Exactly.

John Stapleton: Don't feel bad about it, don't feel bad about it. The number of people who've said to me, 'How are you? Oh, oh, God, I shouldn't say that, should I?' Of course you should say that, it's a perfectly neutral question, and the answer isn't necessarily, 'I'm feeling absolutely terrible,' you know, because some days I'm not feeling absolutely terrible. I'm coping with it, I'm, I'm managing it, but yes, people should, as Jeff was saying so eloquently, you know, people should engage, people should talk about these things and should, if it's necessary to say, 'How are you,' say, 'How are you,' and let's have an exchange.

Andrea Fox: Yes, and do you-

John Stapleton: Carry on, sorry. My apologies.

Andrea Fox: No, not at all. You, thank you so much for joining me, as well. Your, your loss is so recent, and during COVID-19 as well, of your wife Lynn, who passed away. You were married for 43 years, and you say in the exhibition it came as such a shock to you, do you think it's really sunk in? How are you, how are you feeling right now?

John Stapleton: It came as a shock to me because I, I took the view that if anyone, anyone deserved to go first it was me, because my lifestyle was such that, you know, I certainly warranted to be first, you know, 30 fags a day for 30 years, more white wine than, well, enough to sink the, a, a battleship, basically, and very little exercise, but here I am, you know, and, tragic, really, that, that Lynn suffered in, in the way she did, and, and desperately unfair that she went first. How am I now? I'm doing okay, thanks. I'm, I'm doing better than I thought I would, in many ways, and I don't know whether it's, I'm in, in a, kind of, denial, it's only, less than seven months ago, and maybe I'm in a kind of denial, I'm not sure, but I'm, I'm feeling fine, in fact, I, I've felt guilty, a little bit, from time to time, about not being more emotional, you know, not, I haven't burst into floods of tears. I've been sad, I've been lonely, I've felt isolated, and COVID of course has accentuated that, that sensation, but I was, I was, I was talking to a very good friend of our family, Linda Papadopoulos, a psychologist, about this, and she said, you know, 'Don't feel guilty. Everyone, everyone deals with this in a different way, everyone copes with this in a different way, everyone has different emotions.' As, as Jeff was saying, there's, there's no rulebook, you know? There's no thing you can refer to. I mean, I'm sure he's written an excellent book, but there's no, there's no absolute dos and don'ts, you've just got to do what feels right for you at the time and makes you comfortable,

and do bear in mind, in my view, don't feel you have to do anything. I mean, you have to clear up all the bureaucratic mess and all the probate and all that nonsense, which was a nightmare. Thank God it's more or less over for me now, but apart from that you don't have to do anything, so just let it be.

Andrea Fox: Yes, yes, and you mention, as well, in the exhibition, that you, kind of, think it's important for us to embrace death and talk about it more. Do you feel like your experience, most recently losing your lovely wife, do you think that that has made you have to face up to it in a way that you just hadn't really considered before?

John Stapleton: Yes, I, I, I think it has. I mean, Lynn and I didn't really talk about it. She occasionally said to me, you know, 'Just in case I fall under a bus, this is how a washing machine works,' you know, and thank God I listened, because otherwise I'd have been in real trouble, you know, but we hadn't really it in any depth, despite the fact that she'd had three very serious illnesses. She had cancer of the colon when our son was just three years old, she got skin cancer, and then she finally got this thing called antiphospholipid syndrome, which no-one's ever heard of, but is an auto-immune disease which causes blood clots and strokes and, and, and things like that, and is sometimes prevalent in miscarriages and, and other illnesses, but, you know, so, that was all terrible, rotten luck. You know, we hadn't, we hadn't discussed it much, and I, I, but I do feel now I'm coming to terms with it, put it that way. It's not easy, as I, I, both of your other guests will, will tell you, it's not easy at all, but I think I am coming to terms with it.

Andrea Fox: Yes, and you mention in the exhibition having, because obviously you lost Lynn during COVID-19, you had to get special permission from doctors so that your sons could come and stay with you, and do you think, maybe, you're having those conversations with them around your own death, maybe, that, that you hadn't really considered having before?

John Stapleton: Yes, I mean, to be quite honest with you, had it not been for my son, Nick, and his wife Lisa being with me during that period, I don't think I'd have coped, because apart from anything else they just helped me with all the bureaucracy, which is so wearing, and when you're at your lowest ebb, you know. They, they were a terrific, terrific value, and I, I think that experience probably has helped me think about my end, because, you know, I'm older, considerably older than your other two guests, put it that way. You've got to address these things, and I've, I have talked to Nick about it, and I, I have, one of the things I've done, if I had, if I could offer anyone any advice at all it's make sure you are prepared for this, because, you know, make sure you have made a will, for a start. Make sure that you have actually told your, your, your sibling, or whoever's, whoever's relevant, where the money is, you know, where, where

various things are. They will need to know, because, I remember when my, my dear old dad died, years ago, and, because then, my mum and dad were lovely people, and I loved them, loved them dearly, but, you know, my dad did all the admin, my mum did all the cooking and the housework, you know? It was old, a very old-fashioned partnership, and, and my mum knew absolutely, absolutely nothing about where the money was, or where various insurance policies were, and I had to dig around and find all this, and it was a nightmare. So, be prepared, and, you know, you know, if you need professional advice, take it, because it'll save you a lot of time and trouble, and, indeed, a lot of grief.

Andrea Fox: Yes, and you say older, I'm going to say more experienced, but I think what you describe of one partner dealing with all of the finances and then, you know, the, not, the partner's left with no idea of how to do things happens so often. So, yes, I think that's definitely a really important point to, to flag up. Thank you, John, for sharing with me, we're going to come to you again in just a minute, but I'm going to introduce our third guest today. Konnie Huq, thank you so much for joining me, hello.

Konnie Huq: Thank you for having me, great to be here.

Andrea Fox: It's, it's been so lovely to see you, your exhibition as part of Lost for Words. You talk about losing your parents, how do you think you help people who maybe are giving advice right now to someone who's lost someone? Having been through what you've been through losing your parents, what sort of things do you tend to advise them?

Konnie Huq: You know, like John was saying before, I hear a lot of people saying that they can feel guilty, or they almost punish themselves or feel bad about how they're dealing with it, and, and I remember at the time, as well, thinking, 'Oh, you know, you have some really good days where you're just like, oh, everything's quite normal today,' but it does, you know, for me, definitely, the grief came in, sort of, waves, and even sometimes you think, oh, you know, the further away from the death you get, you know, sometimes there might be, you know, a long period of time where you feel like, that's a couple of days and I haven't had any, you know, sadness, or any remorse, or I'm not mourning, or, you know, and the gaps might get further apart, but then something may happen. You know, I, I, I sometimes will see something that's really subtle, like, I don't know, someone walking down the street that has the same posture as, you know, my dad, or something, like, tiny things can just trigger it and, and bring it back, and like both John and Jeff said, everyone is different, and everyone deals with it differently, and there's no right and there's no wrong, and you, you, you know, it's never over, and it was lovely how Jeff said, you know, you can carry it with you in your pocket.

It's always there, it doesn't mean that it's gone away if you're not sad the whole time, and in fact, you know, the loved ones that have passed away wouldn't want you to be going round grieving the whole time. I certainly don't want that for my children when I go, or people I leave behind, because, you know, it will happen to all of us. None of us are immortal, we come and we go, and it's so important to not punish yourself or feel you're doing anything wrong.

Andrea Fox: I think that's really important, yes, and, like you say, anything can throw you off guard. My sister-in-law had red hair, and if I see a redhead, it's suddenly, that's, so, you talk about the posture of your dad.

Konnie Huq: Yes.

Andrea Fox: Those, sort of, moments, you, you can't really prepare for, and you just have to, sort of, be with it, and, and experience it, really, don't you?

Konnie Huq: Absolutely, and it's quite interesting, because another thing I found, you know, was that when I'm in control, so, if I bring it up, the subject, then I feel that I, I'm, I don't know whether it's I feel I'm owning it, or whether, you know, it's in my hands, whereas often when it creeps up on you you're not in control, because it's just been triggered. Even when people would bring it up to me and I wasn't expecting it, sometimes that might make me sadder than if I had brought it up, and so when you see the person with the posture, or, you know, the little reminders, that's sometimes when it comes out, because you're just, you're not expecting it as much, and it's almost like a little tap, and it's really important to have those releases, and that's why talking is so important, because if you internalise, as I think Jeff mentioned, that can lead to real, sort of, mental unhappiness, because everything is thrown off-kilter. You really need those releases and those outlets, which is why this exhibition, it's so important, and the message that it sends out, that you have to talk about it and keep talking, and as, as I think we touched upon it before, you, if you ask someone how they, they are, you know, you're giving them the opportunity for them to own it and offer to you what they want to, and then they might find that, you know, that, sort of, triggers a, sort of, outpouring of stuff that they really wanted to say, or maybe that, you know, they've, sort of, released the tap a bit that week already and they just say a few bits, and not too much, but, you know, it's giving people that opportunity to share, and to release that burden that they could be carrying with them. It, it's so important.

Andrea Fox: Yes, and I think when people worry about upsetting people, or worry about asking how they are, that really doesn't help either, and you mentioned release, and I thought it was lovely, in your Loss for Words exhibition video, that you brought up humour and how important that was for you. So, can you explain why that was so important, to keep some humour around your experience of

loss?

Konnie Huq: Yes, so, I, I lost both my parents in quite a short, a couple of years of each other, and at the time I had two, I had a baby and a toddler, and, you know, I had to keep going on, because, you, you know, you have to make sure the mouths are fed and the nappies are changed, and so on and so forth, and actually I found that almost a real help in that they brought me happiness at a time when I was really sad. Little things, and it was really difficult, because both of my parents, they had, you know, it wasn't a sudden death, it was a decline, and, you know, I would see, you know, my, you know, my mum had dementia, so, you know, you would see, sort of, like, 'Oh, I'm not going to have that conversation with her again ever, because she's got a bit worse,' or, 'Oh, she'll never cook me that meal,' or, you know, little things would happen, and then you see it in reverse with your kids, 'Oh, they've learned this word, they're learning to walk,' you know, and it was kind of poignant, because it's that, sort of, circle in life, of life thing, but joy will keep coming, and it does keep coming, and, you know, having those loss, sadness and, you know, sadness, you wouldn't experience without joy, we'd just be stoics. You have to know one to know the other, and, you know, like I said before, people don't want, when they pass away, for the world to stop and for everyone to, you know, just end their lives as well, in effect.

You know, so, I think the joy, and the moments of joy are so important, because they make you see that, you know, it's okay, and this is what happens, and, you know, the circle of life will continue, and, and, I, I also think that in times of sadness is often when you can find humour in things, you know, and I think there is a reason for that, you know, mother nature thought it was very important. You can't just have the sadness, you need, you know, the balance and the feng shui, everything is interdependent and works together, it's all mutually symbiotic.

Andrea Fox: Yes, I think, and we've had lots of Lost for Words events, and one of the contributors said that no-one knew what was going to happen, but at the end of her uncle's funeral, the song that they played as they were all leaving was Always Look on the Bright Side of Life, and it was such an opportunity for everyone to release, and laugh, and have joy again, having just remembered such a sad thing, and I think you're so right in remembering that, that yin and that yang when it comes to losing people, and I also wondered, Konnie, if you had anything that you look back on now, having lost your parents, anything that you maybe would do differently now?

Konnie Huq: Yes, I mean, John touched upon it there, but, you know, there's so much admin that comes with the passing away of someone, and my, my, when my father died, you know, he died before my mother, so, I'd just had a baby, and, you know, my mum's decline started after that, it's almost like it triggered her illness, but, you know, we didn't do any of that dealing with all of the paperwork, the bank accounts, the

admin, there's so much of that stuff, and, you know, and then my mother passed away, and we hadn't even done my father's probate. So, it's like, double whammy, and then, actually, for ages, none of us could bear to, sort of, clear the house, it was left, you know, and actually that only happened now, during, you know, this year.

Andrea Fox: Really?

Konnie Huq: Yeah, and it's, you know, a gargantuan task, and I would say, A, exactly what John said, you know, prepare for it. So that everything is easy to deal with, because the tidier things are left, the less, sort of, burden is left on who you leave behind, because it's so difficult to deal with when you're in mourning, and, and also, sort of, don't sweep it under the carpet, because it won't get better, it only will get worse. But yeah, having, you, you know, I would have dealt with that very differently, but you know, like I say, we left it such a while. I don't know, maybe I was stronger in dealing with it now, because I felt more equipped, and maybe you know, like I said before, there's no rights and wrongs, and maybe I just couldn't face it then, I don't know. So, it's all very well for me to say what if, but I don't know, but yeah, definitely that is a mountain to contend with.

Andrea Fox: Yeah, true, and like you say, you had two small children, so your bandwidth, I think you only have so much mental and emotional capacity for certain things, so maybe, like you say, for you, it was right to leave it until you, you had that-, had that space. Thank you so much for sharing, Konnie, I'm gonna bring back in our other guests, John and Jeff. One piece of advice, before we head on to the questions from everyone watching today. From each of you please, anything that you think you would like to share, or a piece of advice to someone who's dealing with loss right now, who's watching. Jeff, do you mind if we come to you first?

Jeff Brazier: Yes I do, but I will-, I will try and pull something out of the bag. But what I've taken from listening to both John and Konnie, who have spoken, like, amazingly on, on, on, on their own personal situations, is, is that preparedness. I don't think you can prepare for the feeling of, of loss, because that's, you know, both natural, and a lot of it can be self-imposed as well, i.e. the guilt and so on and so forth. But we can absolutely, as individuals, before the event of our own passing, hopefully it won't be for many many years, but we can get things in a, a certain amount of order, that will absolutely enable our families to just deal with the natural measure of loss, and not have to put grief on hold in order to deal with the bureaucracy and the administration of, of death, because you know, you'll get round to grieving, don't get me wrong, but I know people that are locked in legal disputes, because there's contention potentially between siblings, or between, you know, new wives and ex wives, and it can get so so messy. And sometimes we bring that-, we're not bringing it upon ourselves, because

we're not there, we're bringing it upon our family. So, you know, it's almost like a-, it would be a, a gift of love, if you like, to be able to say. And also, whilst you're still here, like, if I had all of this organised, and don't get me wrong, I think I'm a large percentage of the way there, but if I felt really confident that if I die tomorrow, that everything was literally in place for the kids to be able to pick it up, and you know, not just the kids wouldn't do it with it if it happened tomorrow, but for my family to be able to pick the situation up and say, 'Alright, we know exactly what he wanted, we know where everything is, we know how this is all going to pan out because he's taken care of it.'

For the rest of my life, from that day onwards, I'm pretty sure that I would feel slightly lighter, as a result of taking care of that very important and selfless act. So, I don't think we should underestimate the importance and the power of being able to get things organised. I know the reason why people don't do it, and it's because, 'Oh, it won't happen to me tomorrow', and of course, you know, we hope that we're right, and we hope that we've got 40-odd years left, but the truth is is that we can never really be certain, but there-, as I say, there is a huge benefit not just to our families after the event, but also to ourselves, and our sense of responsibility, I think, and accountability, on behalf of our family, if we were to get these things done and organised.

Andrea Fox: Yeah, like you say, a gift of love is a great way of thinking about it, and John, I know obviously your loss is still so recent, but if you-, have you been able to maybe advise anyone else you know in your life, or maybe your loved ones within the family, on something, a little bit of advice to make things a little bit easier?

John Stapleton: I haven't just yet, but fortunately I've not had a, a friend who's had a loss recently, but what I would say, this, is perhaps slightly controversially, I would say, you know, don't drown yourself in a well of misery. You know, just think about what your loved one would have wanted, and I know what Lynn would have wanted. Lynn would have wanted me to carry on as best I can, and have as good a time as possible. She, she used to have a phrase, I've, I've heard this once, and I must have heard it hundreds of times, and forgive the language, but she had this phrase. 'Shit happens, it's what you do next that counts.' And that is so true, and boy did she have (talking over each other 34.12) of that, you know, three illnesses, two cancers, and this horrible thing, antiphospholipid syndrome. And always that was her attitude. Her attitude always was, we will overcome this, it's a setback, but we'll overcome this, and that I think is something that's going to guide me through the rest of my life too, because you cannot, you know, yes it's awful, it's terrible, I miss her terribly, but you know, I've got to carry on with the help and support of my family and friends, and they've been absolutely terrific, but I've got to carry on, and I've got to make the most of what's left, and that's what she would have wanted, and she would not have wanted me walking round with a face as long as a fiddle, crying into my tea every night. I mean, it simply-,

she, she'd actually give me a right roasting if I did that. She'd say, 'Come on, get yourself together, you big Jessie.' You know, so-, or words to that effect. Scottish, Scottish equivalent to that northern phrase. Yeah, she would-, so, I think that's important, and all the advice Jeff just said is absolutely spot on, you know, I, I eluded to it a little bit earlier. Prepare as best you can for, for, for the worst happening, but don't forget yourself, you know? Don't forget that you've got a life to live as well, and they would very much have wanted you to live that to the full, I'm sure.

Andrea Fox: Yeah, and I think if you are sad forever, then you'll never remember the good times, and obviously there were so many good times, weren't there? So yeah, that's a really really good bit of advice. Konnie, anything that you have maybe shared with friends who've gone through loss, or something you could share with everyone watching today?

Konnie Huq: I think there's a real thing of, people don't know how to react. So, I found, and I don't know whether the others found this, some people would just almost give you a wide berth, or they sort of drop off the radar, or don't message, because-, and it's really easy to just be, sort of, judging people, and judging whether they say, I don't know, a cliché like the, I don't know, 'Time is a great healer', or whatever, but everyone is different, and everyone's trying to do the right thing, and they can't second guess, and you know, you can't second guess what they're feeling when they sent that message as well. And there is this real thing, to sort of, I don't know, be annoyed with people over how they react, like, 'Oh, blah blah didn't text me', or you know-, or-, and conversely, you know, 'So and so won't leave me alone', or whatever, but people are just trying to do what they think is right, because, because we don't have these conversations, people aren't sure, and don't waste your anger or your grief on them, and maybe it is just you sort of using that outlet to direct it at other people, because like I said before, there's no rights and no wrongs, and people, you do need to talk, and you know, there will be people that want to talk, and you can pick and choose who you talk with as well, and you know, you shouldn't-, neither side of the equation should sort of feel guilty or bad, because it's really hard to second guess, and everyone deals with it differently.

Andrea Fox: Yeah, completely. A friend of mine who works for a mental health charity said, 'You don't owe anyone your grief.' So, you know, you'll have those moments of joy, you don't, like you say, you don't have to talk to everyone about your grief, so thank you so much for those. I'm now gonna go to your questions at home, so thank you very much if you've already sent one in. First up, I think, how would you describe grief to someone who hasn't experienced it? See, when you have children as well, I think this is quite a difficult one, because maybe they don't necessarily-, they haven't experienced it yet, so how do you, sort of, explain it to

them?

Konnie Huq: I guess grief is the abject opposite of utter happiness, and utter euphoria. You know, many people talk of the sinking feeling, you know, that void, when you wake up in the morning you can feel that void in your stomach, that sort of void of despair, and if you haven't experienced, you know, that, and there are people that haven't experienced it yet out there, it is the utter utter opposite of when you're just so elated, and euphoric, and happy, and it's such a complicated emotion. It, it, it really is, and it doesn't all come in one go, as, as I said before. But it's not easy to describe either.

Andrea Fox: It's not, is it? I wonder if anyone else has any thoughts on this, cause I, I did have a friend who had a teenager, they hadn't been through a loss yet, or hadn't lost anyone, this lady's parents were still alive, and she was trying to explain it as, you won't be able to contact them on TikTok, you won't be able to see them at school, you won't be able to write them a letter, and, and this teenage girl was just like, 'I just can't imagine that.' Because it is, it's such a hard thing to explain to someone who hasn't been through grief, has it-, isn't it?

Jeff Brazier: I'd say speaking, speaking of grief specifically, I, I work with imagery a lot, and I find it quite powerful at times, and grief for me ended up being a middle-aged gentleman who still lived with his mum, he was very pristine, always on time, but you know, lacks social skills. His job, and he was very good at it, he'd worked at the Inland Revenue before, and then he, he got a promotion into the Grief Department, and what he does, what his job is, is to tap you on the shoulder every now and again, just to remind you that someone that you love is no longer here. He can never understand really the reason why people were so-, there was such animosity towards him, and people used to run from him, so much so that he actually joined a, a running club, and he's now, you know, his stamina is excellent, he enjoys running, it's one of his pastimes, as well as trainspotting and aeroplane spotting, and things like that. You know, he's not a particularly fun character, however he's very dedicated to his job, and I just, you know, this sort of has developed over the last few years of really speaking about the subject, but it helps us to realise that grief is an umbrella term really, isn't the enemy, the enemy is the loss, the actual event of what's happened, and that actually grief as a mechanism, as the individual that I've described, has always got that, sort of, tie is pulled up, you know, his shoes are perfectly shined, he's meticulous in his-, in his habits. What you end up doing is, you end up accepting him, you end up accepting his presence, you end up actually being grateful for his tap on the shoulder, and you actually sometimes end up saying thank you to him, and when you get to that point, things get a little bit easier, but at first a lot of us just try and deny his, his, his, his presence, and we try and-, we try and avoid him, and we realise at a point that he's too good, he's too fast, he's too nosy, he's probably got all the spy gadgetry, and he

always knows exactly where to get us, but actually it's for our benefit. So, it's an interesting take on what grief is, for me I think.

Andrea Fox: Yeah, and a great way, I think, to explain it to, to children as well. John, what about you? How do you, sort of, explain loss to someone who hasn't experienced it?

John Stapleton: I think explaining it to children is very very difficult indeed. I remember actually when Lynn's father died, our son was only about, well, was only a child, basically, and I sort of, put him on my knee one day, and said, you know, 'Some bad news, I'm afraid your grandpa, grandpa Jim has died', and he said, 'Oh really?' You know, because kids just can't, can't take it in.

Andrea Fox: They can't compute, yeah.

John Stapleton: (inaudible 41.39) and I tried to explain to him that he wouldn't see him again. It's, it's extremely difficult. I suppose you'd explain it by saying, you know, you're going to experience a great sense of loss, a sense of isolation. I also find it sometimes a little bit delusional. I sometimes, you know, I, occasionally wake up in the sort of, first ten seconds of, of my consciousness thinking Lynn is still around, you know, and I'm thinking, when will Lynn be back? Oh, of course she won't be back. She's not here anymore. That is, I mean, trying to explain those kind of experiences to youngsters, I'd say is well nigh impossible, until you've actually had-, experienced it for yourself. It's, it's really really, really really difficult. I suppose one way of doing it would be to talk about all the-, all the good things, all the good memories of the person who's died, all the positives, and the benefits they brought to your family, and, and to life generally, but I, it's, it's not something I would-, I would contemplate, I would look forward to with any, any kind of relish at all, I can tell you, and thankfully, apart from that one incident, I've never really had to do it, because by the time my parents died, our son was, was older, and able to sort of, deal with it much more, I wouldn't say confidently, but with a greater ease, put it that way.

Andrea Fox: Yeah, with the adult emotions, and everything that comes with, with being more grown up, completely. Thank you for those thoughts, there were some lovely ones. Just having a look at another question here, what are the biggest questions you wish you could have asked your loved ones? Do you struggle with not knowing in your grief? Are there any questions that you wish you'd put to your loved ones before you lost them?

John Stapleton: I, well, I don't-, if you're coming to me, Andrea, I don't think so. I mean, bear in mind we were married for 43 years, and we sort of pretended to be married for six years before that, so if we hadn't talked about most things you need to talk

about in 49 years, we're in trouble. I don't think there were any questions I never, I never put to her-, to be absolutely honest, honest with you, or I wish I'd asked. We, one of the great attributes of our marriage was, we-, I think we were fairly frank, and, and straightforward with each other, and we worked together quite a bit, so we, we, at one stage, when we were doing the Watchdog programme together, you know, we were living and working together, in each other's pockets all the time. So, there was no shortage of conversation, put it that way. So, no, I don't-, I don't think, I'm sorry to let you down on that one, but I just don't think there was anything I wish I had asked, and didn't ask.

Andrea Fox: I think that's lovely though, you know, and, and it must be quite difficult, I suppose, for people, if they do have something that they wish they hadn't asked, and I wonder what, what Konnie and Jeff, what you think maybe would be a way to, to sort of ease that, and to put that to bed, because you're not really going to get any answers now, are you?

Konnie Huq: It's, it is a tricky one. I mean, whereas John sort of felt like, you know, obviously his, his loss was his partner, mine was my parents, so I did, you know, obviously grow up with them, and had many years with them, but what I find interesting is that now I can't ask them about, with my children growing up, I can't ask them, like, 'Oh, when I was a toddler, you know, did I do this?' Or 'How did you do this with me?' That sort of thing, imparting their sort of-, as opposed to, sort of, questions, just imparting pearls of wisdom that they had, that have become, sort of, more relevant to me now. So, I never really, you know, they were never really able to be proper grandparents to my children in that way, and I'll never know, sort of, just things about, 'Oh, did I use to have that habit?' Or so on, and also a really-, another thing that really comes to mind is the fact that there was sort of, my mum loved cooking, and there's so many dishes that were her, sort of, special dishes, that she'd conjure up from her head, and a lot of those, I would love to have those recipes, and they're gone now. So, you know, because they weren't written down anywhere, and that really makes me really sad. You know, because you know, will they ever be made again? Anywhere? You know, who knows? So, things like that, I think, you don't-, because you don't foresee what's ahead, you don't think of things like that, whereas questions as in, sort of questions about them, or you know, sort of maybe the questions that whoever emailed in asked, I don't have any of those, as such, because obviously I had a great, you know, I, like with John, I had many years for all of that stuff, but it, it is still kind of an important detail to me, things like those recipes, or just things with-, to do with, you know, bringing us up as kids, now that I'm a mum, it feels more relevant really.

Andrea Fox: Yeah, definitely. Jeff, what about yourself?

Jeff Brazier: Yeah, it's, it's amazing how obviously conversation time with, with someone, you know, quadruples, if not, sort of, you know, I don't really know the term for it, but that, that time with them, if we could sit and have a conversation with people, it becomes priceless, doesn't it? Whereas when we've actually got them, you know, we, we, we don't really see the relevance and importance of being able to just say to someone firstly, 'I love you', secondly, you know, 'What do you want-, What do you want from the rest of your life? What do you want in the event that you're not here?' And that's what is excruciatingly difficult. It's another layer of pain for people that didn't get to say goodbye, because their partner walked out one day, and didn't come back, because something happened to them. You know, I hear-, have heard stories of people walking out on an argument and not coming back, and how again, it's just another complication, that someone grieving the loss of a partner or somebody that they love would have to-, would have to go through. I think, you know, if anything, when we focus on the subject of grief, it always just really brings home to me the value of life. I think if we ever want to do our kids a favour, we make sure that we have lived the most fulfilling life that we can possibly have, and that we achieve things that are important to us. They don't have to be big things, but just, you know, that we live the life that we can be proud of, and that was one that was satisfactory to ourselves, because again, it's really difficult for people to know that their-, the person that they've lost didn't necessarily get to the places that they might like to have got to. Grief can be really unfair I think, in a number of ways, and regardless of whatever loss we're talking about, there are always ways you can say, 'Well, you know, they didn't get to do this, and they didn't get to do that.' So, if we're-, if we've got our ears open, and we're sort of hearing the message that, that I think continuously is fed through the subject, it's, live your life so that people that, that you leave behind can say, 'I know that they wouldn't have had any regrets, and I know that they would have done as much as they could possibly have done to have been happy', and therefore for that reason, this makes this slightly less difficult to not accept. We get to acceptance at different times in our losses, and I know that the ones where acceptance seems a million miles away, you know, I've seen people go through those situations, and then there's, you know, maybe ones where I can say, you know, if I was going to share something personal, my grandad took his own life because he, he had throat cancer.

This was actually, sort of, like, six months after Jade died, so I was in Australia with my children, getting them away from the absolute circus that, that, that sort of ensued there, and I knew my grandad had cancer, I didn't foresee what he was about to do, but he kind of took it upon himself, because he got to a certain point, it was terminal, he'd seen his dad die, that was the problem, he'd seen his dad go through horrendous pain where he literally had said, they'd cut away, sort of, a large percentage of his-, of his face and his throat, and ultimately he, he wanted to spare himself that, and, and funnily enough, I can-, I arrived to acceptance quite quickly with my grandad, because I almost, and people will be divided, some people will see this differently, but I guess all that matters is the way that I see it, and that, that was that he had the, the courage to

end his life at the point where he chose to, as opposed to enduring the pain that was inevitably about to follow. So, and it's, it's odd, whereas there are other deaths that I've experienced, that, that, that I found it very difficult to accept, because it was too early, and there was-, there was, you know, more for our relationship to, to achieve, in terms of what I needed to get from those people, and maybe what those people needed to get from me, bearing in mind that they had such a, a strong part of my childhood. You know, I wanted them to see me, I guess flourish, and grow in adult life, and be able to sort of free myself from the difficulties of childhood. You know, look at what that person becomes, and be proud of that, because you had a big part in it. You gave me the foundations to be able to, to, to, to use that strength and resilience that I'd gained, in order to, to go off and do other things, and they didn't get the chance, as Jade didn't, with the kids, to be able to, to have the benefits, the deserved benefits of seeing the fruits of their labour, you know? That's, that's another thing. I'm, I'm probably speaking for everyone who's listening to this when I say that that's difficult, that's a big, difficult thing about grief, isn't it?

Andrea Fox: Yeah, completely. One of the other questions, a few are along this similar line, but I think this is an important one to get to. What do you do on the days when you're overwhelmed, and you can't get the emotional thoughts out of your mind, because I think often sometimes when you're grieving, you think, if I start crying, I'll never stop, but there are days obviously where you maybe don't want to get out of bed. I know in the exhibition, Gloria Hunniford had said that exact phrase, so what are your, sort of, thoughts around that?

John Stapleton: Are you talking to me, love?

Andrea Fox: Yeah, John, would you like to go first for us?

John Stapleton: Okay, well I, I've discovered, I mean, Lynn spent 40 years of her life trying to get me to walk, and I spent 40 years resisting all efforts on her part to, to make me exercise, and funnily enough, since she-, since she died, one of the things that my son and his lovely wife decided I should do is get a watch which records my heartbeat, and records how many steps I do each day, and actually rings them if I fall over, because I'm at a certain age where I've got to think about these things, you know? I was sort of, a bit sneering about this at first, but actually I've come to love this watch, because it incentivises me to walk, and that's one of the things I do, you know. Whenever I'm feeling down, I haven't been feeling that down that often, but you know, I try and fill my day as much as I can. It's hard, during COVID, very hard indeed, but I organise. I think you've got to set yourself an agenda, and I try and set myself an agenda at the start of each week, say 'Right, well that date, I'm going to go for a walk with such a body, that date I'm going to go for a walk with such a body, that day I'll do the shopping, this day I can do a bit of work doing this, that and the other. So, trying to

keep yourself, mentally at least, busy, if not-, even if you aren't physically busy, you'll have something to think about in that you are actually doing it, and I think that's very important. I mean, I'm lucky in that regard, in that I'm still, you know, I still have enough faculties to cope with all that, and some people don't, but I think, I think that's, that's important, and I've been, again, usually fortunate in, family and friends have been calling me and saying, 'Yes, come here, come there, do this, let's go for a walk here, let's go for a walk there', but you know, that wears off after a while, particularly after you, you know, your loved one has been gone for some, some time. So, you've got to drive it yourself, and just push yourself, basically.

Andrea Fox: Yeah, and I, I have to say, my mum is a big proponent of going for a walk to clear your head, for sure. Konnie, what sort of things do you find are helpful when you're maybe feeling slightly overwhelmed with feelings of loss?

Konnie Huq: Yeah, you know, getting out, and getting fresh air, so the walk, I guess encompasses that, but I do really think, you know, and you really feel like, 'I just don't want to, I just want to just curl up in a ball, be in the dark, just stay in here, I just don't want to', but you know, I've always found that you have to just push through, power through, and it really helps, and then like we said before, talking. And lots of people don't want to, but for me, it's such a cathartic release, and it makes me just feel better, and you can choose who you want to talk to. You know, you know, obviously some people might not make you feel better, you know who those people are, you know, and it really-, you know, you're only going to feel worse, in my experience, if you just stay curled up in that ball in the dark, because those thoughts aren't going away. They're just mashing around in your head, and there's no outlet, there's no release, it's just all whirling around in here, and the whole point is you need to sort of defuse that, or make sense of it, so you need some external help to do that.

Andrea Fox: Yeah, whatever that may be for you, because I suppose it is quite individual, like you say, and Jeff, any sort of advice for that person who's dealing with a bit of overwhelm?

Jeff Brazier: Yeah, just a visual representation, Konnie said, obviously sharing is, is what I'm absolutely gonna recommend. It's like, if we imagine a gas cylinder, and when we are bereft, that gas cylinder will fill with emotion. What we always need to be mindful of is what level we have, sort of within that, that, you know. Where is the pressure at, and you know, the word overwhelmed sort of, you know, suggests to me that it is sort of right up to there at a dangerous level, and you can imagine, if you don't, sort of, let some out, you know, via various forms, whether it's by talking to a friend, or listening to some music that that person liked, or just being able to sit within your own grief, but you know, embrace it and accept it. Then it's gonna get up to there, and you know, it'll be different for any individual, but what happens when it

does? Lots of people describe that, and I, I think collectively, as a-, as a society of bereaved individuals, we will feel like this, probably starting from now, heading towards Christmas, because special occasions will always induce a lot more of that, sort of that level of pressure, because it's-, Christmas is that day of the year when it's probably most obvious that that person isn't, isn't there with you. I know there are lots of variables this year, and it's a unique year, a unique Christmas, but obviously not without going into that, it will probably this year be more grief-inducing than any other, to be honest. I found with my children, if I didn't take them to, to their mum's special place first thing Christmas morning, then the whole day was a write-off, effectively, because I knew that all we were doing was pretending to be okay when, when it wasn't. So, to recognise, and this would be my advice, to recognise your loss, and to recognise that individual, or just let enough pressure out to be able to actually, dare I say, enjoy the rest of the day, because you've earned the right. You almost give yourself permission to, to enjoy the rest of the day, knowing that you have paid your respects, and you have recognised your, your loss. You'll feel better for doing so, but yeah. Special occasions are-, you can say they're, you know, they become a real pain, but actually they're, they're a good thing, because if you're in the habit of denying, marginalising your grief, and sticking it right over there, you know, their, their reasons for it to come straight back in front of you in your vision, and you have to, you're kind of forced to deal with it a little bit, but as I say, if you're overwhelmed, and that's the word that you're using, from a linguistic point of view, then, then, then can you-, can you share it more, so that you keep that pressure at a reasonable point? We're never going to be devoid of any of it, are we? But you know, we need to be able to regulate that ourselves.

Andrea Fox: Yeah, that's a really lovely way of thinking about it, and I hope that's been helpful to you, whoever sent that question in, and thank you so much for all of your questions today. Thank you so much to my guests, John Stapleton, Konnie Huq, and Jeff Brazier, thank you so much for sharing all of your experience, your wisdom, I really appreciate you speaking to me today, so thank you so much. Thank you everyone as well for tuning in, we really appreciate you joining us for your lunch break today. I hope that that experience has been useful to you, maybe you've been inspired today, hearing what John, and Konnie, and Jeff have said, to maybe have some conversations within your own family, with your own loved ones. If you want to listen to any more stories, hear some practical tips as well on how to deal with loss, then do make sure you visit the Lost for Words exhibition, which is of course lostforwords.royallondon.com. Thank you so much for tuning in today, and take care.