



## Royal London presents Lost for Words

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.

When Desreen died, it was a massive shock, you know, she wasn't ill. We went out to see some friends, one Saturday, and she was struck by car on our way home to the train station, and she was pretty much instantly killed. And she and I were 33 and our son was two. And we were one of those families where things like that didn't happen. And to be honest, nobody knew what to do.

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, cos I was that adamant that I was never going to speak to him again. After he'd passed away, I think after I'd gone to the funeral, 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 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. But, I guess, a bond between father and son, even though we didn't have a tight relationship, is always there.

Back in 2003, Dad had lung cancer. I remember dashing home, after finding out that he had got diagnosed with this, to find him not there. So I said to my mum, "Where is he?" She said, "He's just gone up to the shop to get some beers." And Dad just come in the door, whistling, and with a big smile on his face. And I said, "Well, why aren't you upset?" He said, "Cos I'm not gonna let it beat me." And he didn't. But I think having that happen in my life brought me closer to him, made me respect the time with him and how valuable time is with people. I looked at the lung cancer as a burden, as something that shouldn't have happened to Dad, because of how it changes quality of life. But, now Dad's not here, I actually look at it as a blessing, cos it brought us closer.



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The taboo around death comes from that people deal with it so differently. Lots of people will give you a wide berth, cos 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. People will tiptoe around you and everyone else starts having a bit of a sense of humour bypass, cos they're worried about you and whether it will be offensive if they still have a sense of humour. But humour is a really good coping mechanism and you don't want to be mourning the whole time.

Everyone approaches you nervously, as I would and I have done, I know I've done in the past. It's bit like, you know, don't mention the war, for God's sake, don't say anything, because it might upset him and I understand that. But I think we, as a society, have to confront death rather more squarely than we have done in the past, perhaps.

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, cos you don't know what to say, then you're going to regret that one day, because there's so much you can do."

Look, I fully believe that a lot of this is self-protection. It's a miscued belief, that by not talking about it, you can prevent the hurt from coming in. Whereas, anybody that's done anything in their life knows that you reach the hard bit, you push through the hard bit, and on the other side's the good stuff. That goes for athletes, artists, builders. I feel like I didn't know how to deal with it at all, because I wasn't meant to feel grief. It was like I didn't feel entitled to it. I took an awful long time trying to understand why did I think there were



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loads of rules to grief. I think some of it is masculinity and machismo, showing weakness, even in the more evolved idea of what we have of masculinity now.

As women, we're allowed to be emotional, like, we're given permission to be emotional from a young age, we have friendship groups where we talk about our emotions. I think women are better at talking to women than men are talking men. Men tend to harbour a lot of stuff. You know, you don't go to the pub and say, "I'm having a really hard time, because I lost my mother last week." You don't really do that; you talk about football or politics or whatever. But women do open up and talk to each other and that is a great part of healing as well.

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?

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. And, the fact of the matter is, we can't avoid death, it's not an option. You can't say, "Oh, death, I'll give that a miss, if you don't mind." We've all got to face it. And so, we might as well embrace it, I think really.

I personally embrace planning for my death. 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 relief in that, because I know that they're prepared. I know, it's one less stress for them.



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You know, your life was, hopefully, a piece of art, if you like, and 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.

I've had so many people say to me, "What have you done with his ashes?" and I say, "Oh, all sorts." And they often look horrified when I sort of say, "We've taken some here, we've thrown them off of there." We've been putting his ashes all over the place. There's some in Amsterdam, there's some in Greece, there's some in Dubai. We knew Billy better than anyone else and all the things we've done, I know, would put a smile on his face.

There's very few people who go through life and don't experience grief. But, yet, it's something that we never ever speak about, or something that we don't know how to deal with. People don't know what to say. If you can take away your family having to make that decision for you, then it would make their grief...less difficult to deal with, cos then they can deal with their emotions, as opposed to guilt that they got it wrong. 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. And I 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.

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.

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.



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Culturally, we avoid things that are difficult for us. We tend to just stick to what we can cope with and what's comfortable. The danger of that is not all of life is comfortable. In fact, if we're going to be honest and talk about our personal experiences, it's the discomfort that we learn from. That's where we grow.

You should try to have as much help and support as you can. I was only 16 at the time. I thought that I dealt with it really well. I thought that I was dealing with it well. It's only now, as an adult life, that you look back and there's parts of my life I can't remember, that I've blacked out, I've decided I don't want to remember. There are certain behaviours I had as a child that I now look back and go, "Oh, that's classic behaviour "of someone that doesn't want to form relationships with people "because I don't know when they're not going to be there no more."

This woman said, "Until the day you die, there will be moments when you want to sit in a darkened room and look at photographs of Caron, and how beautiful she was, and weep." "But," she said, "you've got to remember that if you weep until the very second you die, you're not going to change anything, you're not going to bring her back. And so, therefore, you'd be better to go off and do something really positive instead of sitting in this darkened room."

The way that I look at losing my mum and my sister now is that it's my life. 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.

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



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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. I look at life completely differently. 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.

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.