

Dying to Live



To my amazing mummy Katy
1973 - 2024 ♡

*Grief is not something that you get over,
it is something that you learn to live with.*

*When my mum passed away, I felt lost,
the silence was overwhelming.
I searched for ways to move forward.*

*This book is my way of honouring her.
It is a guide to navigating grief,
offering support and reflection.*

*Whether you are grieving or helping
someone who is, I hope these pages remind
you that you are not alone.*

Love does not end, connection remains.

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Kathryn Jane Butt

‘Katy’

9th August 1973 - 19th June 2024



Living with Grief

My personal story with grief

In June 2024, my mum Katy passed away from bowel cancer. She had been fighting the disease for 4 years and was the bravest person that I know. My mum first became ill when I was 16, so I have been faced with my mum being ill for most of my life. It took a long time for her to be finally diagnosed with cancer, and that revelation was devastating.

Over the years, my mum has had lots of different treatments, from chemotherapy to going on clinical trials, surgeries, etc. Her progress went back and forth with her tumours shrinking and growing to inevitably spreading to different parts of her body.

She went through so much, and thinking back to this time in my life, it is shocking how normal it became for me and my family. Going through all of this gave me a new appreciation for my life and health, I will never take that for granted. I am now a lot more empathetic to others, as you have no idea what someone is going through, so be kind to people.

Grief can feel so overwhelming, and as a young person, you would not assume that I am going through it. This can make my grief overwhelming and difficult to process, especially when dealing with everyday life.

Grief is a universal experience, and I want to open up the conversation around death. Young people struggle significantly as there is not as much support for them. I was too old for the child support groups and too young for the adult bereavement groups. This left a gap where I lacked ongoing support for the future. I found myself relying heavily on my friends for support.

I have made this book to honour my mum and make something in memory of her and her bravery. By opening up honestly and putting myself in a vulnerable space, I hope to make grief more accessible and normalised. I want this conversation to allow people to relate and feel more normal about their grief.

Katy's Life

An overview of Katy's life from her eulogy

Katy was born at home on the 9th of August 1973, in Woking, Surrey. Katy's journey began in the warmth of a loving home. She grew up with her parents, John and Gill, and her brother, Andrew. She attended Knaphill Lower School and Knaphill Middle School, where she was cherished by her teachers for her bright spirit and kind heart.

Katy's educational journey continued at Winston Churchill School, where she grew into a young adult full of dreams and aspirations. Her level-headed nature shone through as she worked at a Herb Farm after school and at weekends, earning a staggering £1 an hour, balancing the responsibilities of school and work with ease, wondering what to spend that hard-earned cash on.

Upon leaving school, Katy embarked on a professional path that led her to Buck and Willis Healthcare in Reading and later to SPS in Surbiton. As a health insurance administrator, she demonstrated her dedication and care for others, ensuring they received the support they needed.

It was in 1996, at Volts Nightclub in Kingston, that Katy's life took a really unexpected turn when she met Tork. Their friendship blossomed into love, and they solidified their bond in July 2000. They celebrated their union of marriage at St. James's Church in Rowledge, followed by a reception at Frensham Ponds Hotel and a dreamy honeymoon in the Maldives.

Katy's capacity for love knew no bounds, as evidenced by the arrival of her beautiful children, Saffron, Tristan, and Rhianna, all born 15 months apart. Each child brought immense joy and fulfilment to Katy's life, and she embraced motherhood with the same passion and commitment she applied to every aspect of her life.

Her legacy lives on in the hearts of those she touched, and while we mourn her passing, we also celebrate the extraordinary life she led. Katy's memory will forever be a beacon of love, resilience, and the enduring power of family. While raising her children, she managed to find time for part-time work, always prioritizing her family's needs and cherishing every moment spent with her children and our two beloved dogs, Monty and Rusty Butt.

In August 2020, Katy faced her greatest challenge when she was diagnosed with Stage 4 bowel cancer. This devastating news shook the very foundation of our family's world. Yet, in the face of adversity, Katy's strength and resilience shone brighter than ever.

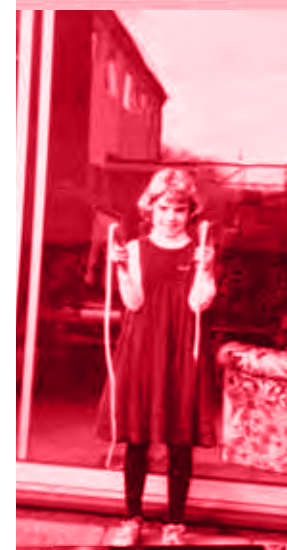
Throughout four years of continuous treatment, she remained incredibly strong, courageous, brave, and positive. Katy rarely complained about her situation, instead, she focused on the well-being of others. Her good nature, sense of humour, and positivity made her incredibly popular.

Katy's hope and belief never wavered. She embraced every treatment option with the hope of recovery or the chance to spend a few more precious months with her friends and family. During this time, her support circle was her rock. As a family, we were fortunate to experience truly memorable holidays and most recently, Menorca, where we celebrated Katy's 50th birthday. Upon returning from holiday, Katy gave a very emotional and wonderful speech at her birthday party.

After her brother Andrew's engagement to Natalie, Katy's main goal was to make it to their wedding, especially when asked to be one of their bridesmaids. Even though she was in hospital the night before, Katy's strength and belief enabled her to attend their wedding. She looked absolutely radiant and shared an amazing time with Andrew & Natalie on their special day.

Tragically on the 19th June, Katy finally lost her battle and sadly passed away peacefully at her home whilst comforted by her family.

Katy's journey was one of love, laughter, and a determined spirit that inspired us all. Her legacy is not just in the memories we hold dear but in the love she spread so generously. Katy will forever be loved and remembered, not just for the battles she fought but for the life she lived so fully and the love she gave so freely.



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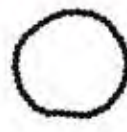
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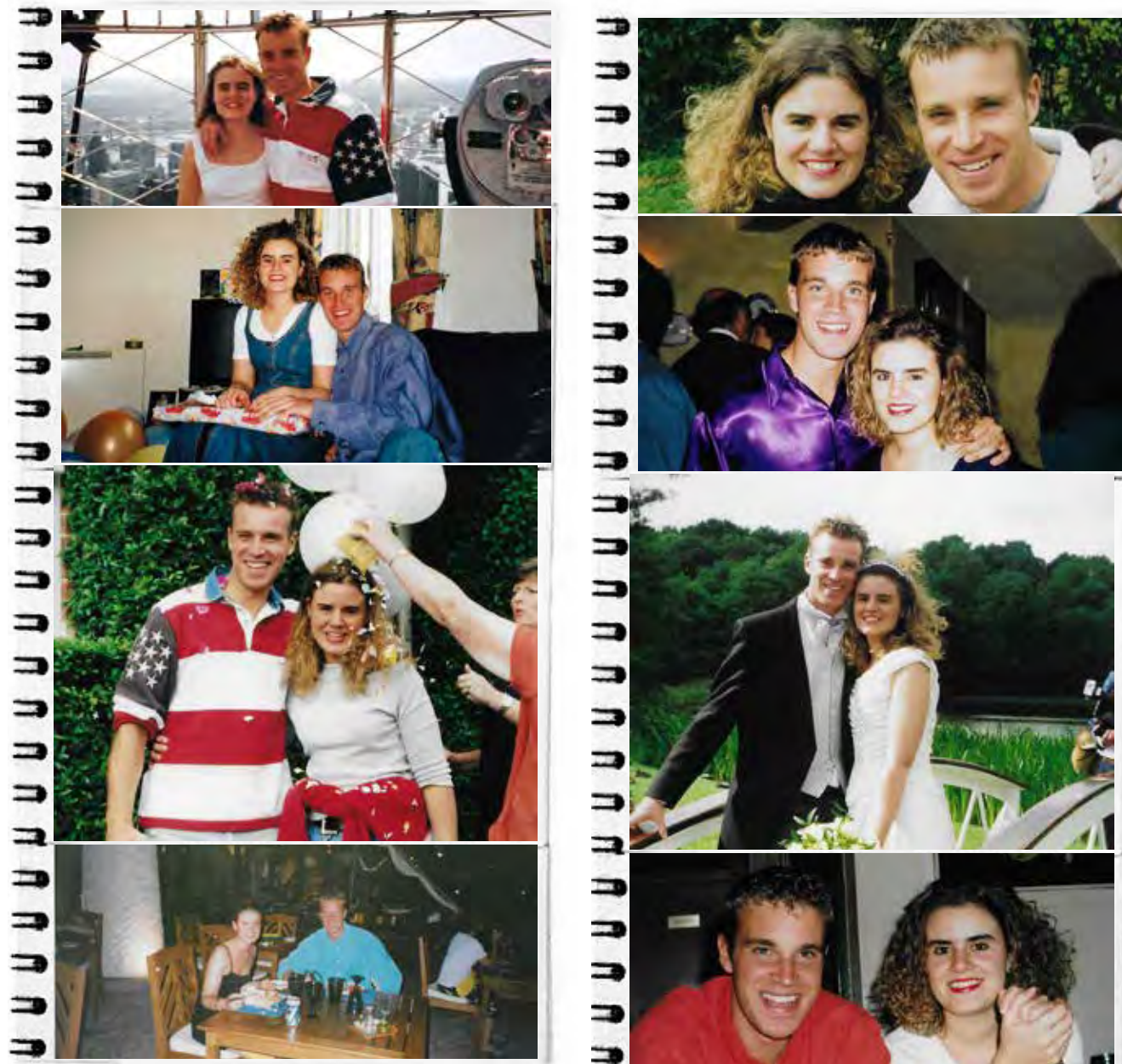
Katy's childhood





Mr & Mrs Butt

Enter the archive



Katy & Tork at Andrew & Natalie's wedding



Grief is a shapeshifter.

It's the weight of conversations no one else can hear, the silent pain in familiar surroundings.

It's memories that cling to the present, love that has nowhere to go.

It's something I move with rather than away from, like a shadow that occasionally gets softer and sharper.

Grief is how I honour, remember, and gradually reassemble myself around an absence that will always be significant.

It is the bond that connects pain to love, and love to who I am becoming.



Da Saffs
Lots of Love
Mummy
xxx

Physical Effects of Grief

The practical load after a death

Grief affects the body and the mind. In the first months, I felt exhausted, would grind my teeth, and when I would try to relax, my jaw would be so tight. My nervous system was deregulated. I was in survival mode and a constant state of fear. Waiting for the next bad thing to happen. I would panic when the phone would ring or if I had a symptom of cancer.

I was really paranoid about small things. It was mentally exhausting, the unknown and having no control stopped me from doing a lot of things. I am a perfectionist, so not having control over my emotions or what I was doing daily was really difficult. I realised that I needed to listen to my body and do what it wanted. I couldn't keep going on like I was.

There are lots of practical stresses after a death. Planning the funeral, picking up the death certificate, closing all the accounts, and not knowing all the passwords. Even up until my mum's last week, she was still pushing for survival. She was hoping for surgery and was waiting for a call from the hospital. A few days after she passed away, she got a call to say that she was all booked in. It was so hard, all of these constant reminders at the start.

This was the time when I got a lot closer to my dad. We both took time off from work at this point to sort out all of the practical load. There is so much that you wouldn't even think you need to sort out,

like cancelling subscriptions, stopping recordings of TV shows, etc. It was so helpful receiving help from friends and family at this stage, as simple tasks felt so difficult and draining; your brain cannot process properly.

Just as we felt like we were on top of everything, things kept going wrong. Our freezer broke, and my bed broke days after her death, and they just amplified our pain. Every emotion is linked to grief and making it more difficult. My dad and I heavily relied on each other for support and really started to open up to each other about how we were coping. This was what helped the most.

My siblings did not speak to us about their grief, but they were both in relationships, so they didn't rely on family as much. I think I needed my siblings more at that time, but I just didn't know how to ask. It is important to be honest about how you are feeling and speak to those around you.

I have only recently begun to open up to them more, and it's almost been a year. It takes time to process your thoughts to be able to be honest. I think I was just worried about upsetting them by bringing up the conversation all the time. They were probably thinking the same and waiting for me to speak about it first. Do not wait for someone else, do it for yourself and start the conversation.



Facing the Fear of Death

Having the difficult conversations

Most of us try to avoid thinking about death. It is avoided a lot in conversation, especially among young people. Avoiding death conversations makes grief harder for me, as I don't often get to express my feelings. People think that because my grief is not recent, it does not affect me as much. In reality, it has not even been 1 year yet, so it is constantly on my mind.

Death encourages you to reflect on your feelings toward mortality, it forces us to imagine death and to confront it. Life is the cruel reality of death, we must accept that death can feel unfair and wasteful. Grieving is a natural and necessary process; it brings us back to life, and it is not just a sad feeling.

Death was always something that scared me as a child, giving me nightmares, however, I now have a completely new understanding of it. Death gives us a purpose in life. Without death, there would be no appreciation for life. People would not take risks or do adventurous things without the looming universality of death.

I was really worried about my mum's funeral, I thought that it was going to be a depressing day. It happened on the hottest day of the year, on a Friday afternoon. It was a beautiful day. As hard as it was, it was so lovely to see how many people loved and cared for my mum. She wanted people to celebrate her life and for everyone to come together.

I would advise people to go into all the different stages with no expectations. You have no idea how you are going to feel. Initially, you will be in a state of shock, and it may take a while for your emotions to kick in. Your body will cry properly when it has relaxed and feels safe to do so.

Do not listen to people who say that it will get better with time. Honestly, so far I have found my grief to get more difficult as it is longer without my mum. However, I have become better at controlling my emotions and knowing how to soothe myself.

'I THINK THAT TO DREAM
OFTEN MEANS THAT YOU DARE
TO PUT YOURSELF FIRST'

We do. It's also that after my father died and then my mother died, everything changed for me. I changed. I have felt this awareness of how fleeting life is, and suddenly this deep longing for meaning. That's all tied up with the idea of faith.'

"My God, this is about Mummy".

more intricate, more nuanced. And while it can be is often more about a feeling.

With that in mind, the questions I often find myself asking

close this gap.

In
good

'There's a lot of regret. I think of all the ways I could have done better and been better with my mother, for my mother,' she says. 'I'm in this sort of crazy place where I just cry stupidly for no reason.'

Her story is reflective, driven by 'the desire to be truly known'

that parallel between fiction and faith.

It can make you lose your ability to create. The body and the creative impulse have a very interesting relationship.'

faith.



The Unspoken Parts of Grief

Expectations from the outside

Grief offers a lot of invisible expectations (e.g. “move on quickly” or “be strong”). Grief is feeling all the emotions in one: anger, sadness, and confusion. Modern society leaves us unprepared for loss. It is so tempting to fill every moment with busywork to avoid confronting grief, however, it is important to allow yourself time and space to think, feel and slowly accept what has happened.

Effort alone is not enough; forcing yourself to understand can be exhausting. Instead, use a natural style of processing that feels right to you. I took lots of walks, lying quietly in the sun and going to the gym to keep my body moving. Going to the gym changed my life after my grief. I was an active person before my mum got ill, and then it stopped becoming a priority for me.

My best friend trained me in our local gym, and it gave me a new purpose. I had a new routine which fit into my new and strange life. That structure forced me to get on with my day and stopped me from sitting in sadness.

People will always set expectations for you, especially when it comes to grieving. They expect you to always be sad and not want to speak about the person you lost.

2 weeks after my mum passed, my family and I completed a Cancer Research mud run. That evening, I went to a pool party with friends. People were shocked that I went, especially after such an emotional day. Unintentionally, people made me feel guilty for trying to enjoy myself.

Do what feels comfortable to you; there is no time limit or set way to cope with grief. If you can have fun and be happy, then appreciate and make the most out of those moments. Do not let other people who have not experienced what you have dictate how you should act and feel.



Suppressed Grief

Unexpected relationship changes

Accepting the reality of loss, facing the truth about what has happened and how it changes your world are the main steps in grief. You must accept the need to go on, choosing to live, even when it feels meaningless. My family has become so much closer ever since my mum's first diagnosis, and especially since her death. I grieve not only the loss of my mum but also the everyday moments.

My mum was my biggest support system, and I would speak to her about everything. It has been so difficult to navigate every day without her. As she was ill for such a long time, I spent the years before her death prematurely grieving her to protect myself. You spend so long thinking about when death is going to happen, it is exhausting.

My coping mechanisms are now different. I rely on my friends so much more than I used to for emotional support. I am so grateful to them for how much they have looked after me. One thing that shocked me the most was the lack of support from my family. Everyone grieves differently however, it becomes really difficult when grief becomes a competition.

I have learnt the hard way that when people are suffering, they do not know how to act and therefore, say things without thinking about how they will impact you. The biggest thing that I have taken away from my grief is that not everything is personal. I am very emotionally sensitive, especially when things come from people I am close to.

It seems very common to lose people you were close to after grief. I have fallen out with a lot of family and friends throughout this process, however, it is necessary to put yourself and your feelings first. This is one of the biggest things you will go through in your life, so you need to protect yourself.

Friends whom you once saw as family may become distant and awkward; they may fear speaking to you about everyday conversations, fearing they will upset you. Sometimes friendships only last when sharing common ground. Therefore, when going through something traumatic like grief, it can be hard for people to relate and be supportive.

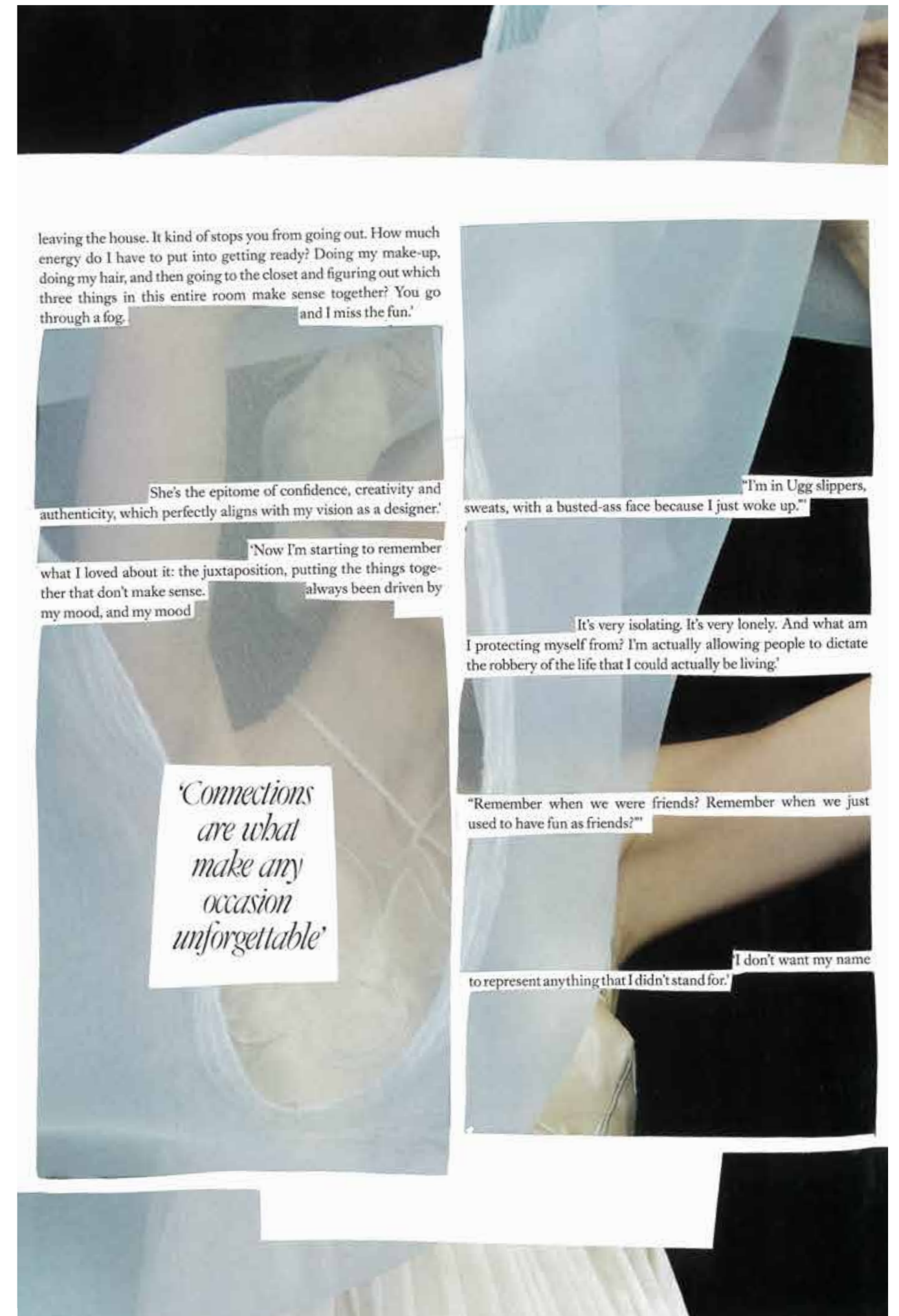
You must accept that the relationship has changed and move on without resentment. People struggle to speak to those and show up for those who are grieving. Until you go through grief, you will not be able to comprehend the process of it. You do not need to fix people, just be there for them and listen to them.

Losing a parent is particularly difficult as this relationship is one of unconditional love. You lose love, guidance, support and an unknown future. My mum's absence has left a huge void in my life; she is all that I have known my entire life, and now I am expected to carry on without her.

We have a shared history of memories, and I have now lost a significant part of that shared history, which has heavily impacted my identity and self-perception. A parent's death marks a huge shift in family dynamics where power structures change, often leading to disputes over responsibilities. As the eldest sibling, I have naturally taken over the role of the parent in terms of my responsibilities around the house.

I have a new profound respect for my mum for everything that she used to do. Balancing my new life, grief, university work, part-time work and doing jobs at home has been a very stressful part of my life. I have really struggled with my mental health and not being in a constant state of stress.

From the outside, I looked like I was fine, carrying on with day-to-day life. Check up on people who are grieving because you never know how they are doing behind closed doors.



Adjusting to Daily Life

Grief transforms into nostalgia

I went through a stage of disconnection. Going back to university after the summer felt so strange. My peers had enjoyed their summer, had time to relax and were ready to get back into the new school year. I was the complete opposite. I was worn out, stressed and trying to adapt to my new life.

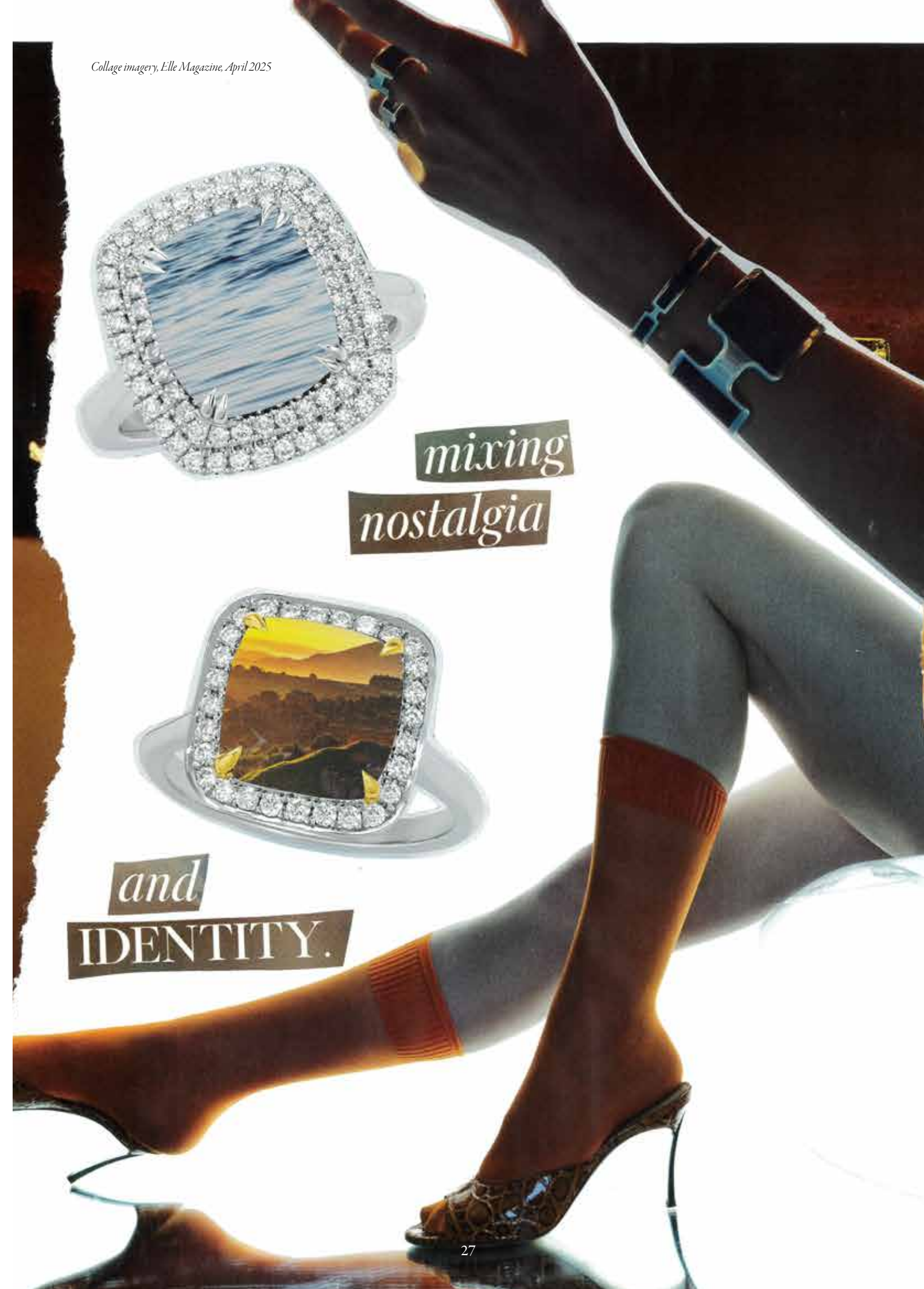
Grief is weird because most things stay the same, yet everything feels different. Having those three months off in the summer to grieve gave me so much time to unwind and process my emotions. Returning to uni for my final year was a massive shock to the system. It was a different kind of stress from grief stress. I had gotten out of my routine so much and was completely overwhelmed. I wish that I hadn't put so much pressure on myself to get straight back into things. I always have to remind myself to slow down and do things at my own pace. Not everything is a race.

I felt so disconnected at this time from everyone around me, I was not used to this fast-paced environment anymore. I found it very frustrating when people would complain about insignificant things like reality TV or small, mundane first-world problems. I had to remind myself that everyone has their reality and perceives things differently. People can only react to what they know. It took me a lot of time to adjust back in.

I feel more grounded now, but it's a new me. Sometimes I grieve the person I could have been. I feel behind with my life now, seeing people around me knowing exactly what they want to do for a career. I have been starting to think about my future, but it's so scary. Legally, I am an adult, but emotionally, I still feel like a big child.

Thinking about my future now is so different. I did not expect my mum to die and be absent from my imagined future. It is really hard for me to navigate my life now, as I feel like everything is so unpredictable. As humans, we don't like change, and my life has changed so much recently, I don't feel ready for more.

As a student, I was told all about how amazing my years at university would be. All the lifelong friends and the youthful mistakes I'll make. I feel like that has taken away from me. Everyone around me seemed to be having so much fun being carefree, while I felt aged beyond my years. It is so hard for me to navigate my life and future; it just feels too unpredictable.



Learning how to Grieve

A spiritual outlook to life and my grief triggers

It is okay not to know what to do or say. Grief is messy, personal and not something you can fix. There will be times when you face old grief that was hidden because it didn't feel safe before. I want to break the myth that grief is just constant sadness; you can still laugh, have love and feel joy. Reflecting on who you were, who you are now, and who you want to become.

I have tried to find a new purpose in my life since I started grieving. I have read a number of books which provide knowledge on the afterlife, referencing souls, past lives and reincarnation. I highly recommend reading *Journey of Souls*, Michael Newton and *Many Lives, Many Masters*, Dr Brian Weiss. These books focus on two different psychiatrists and how they have hypnotised people into spiritual regression, meaning they can recall their past lives and experiences in the spirit world.

These stories give our lives purpose and meaning. The authors claim that we are souls living in human bodies to experience human life. Souls cannot experience physical or emotional pain, so they come to experience life as humans to learn. We live multiple lives through reincarnation, reincarnating with our soul families. You are part of a group of souls which stick together through each life to help and guide each other. We are brought to earth to learn and live through different lives through different experiences.

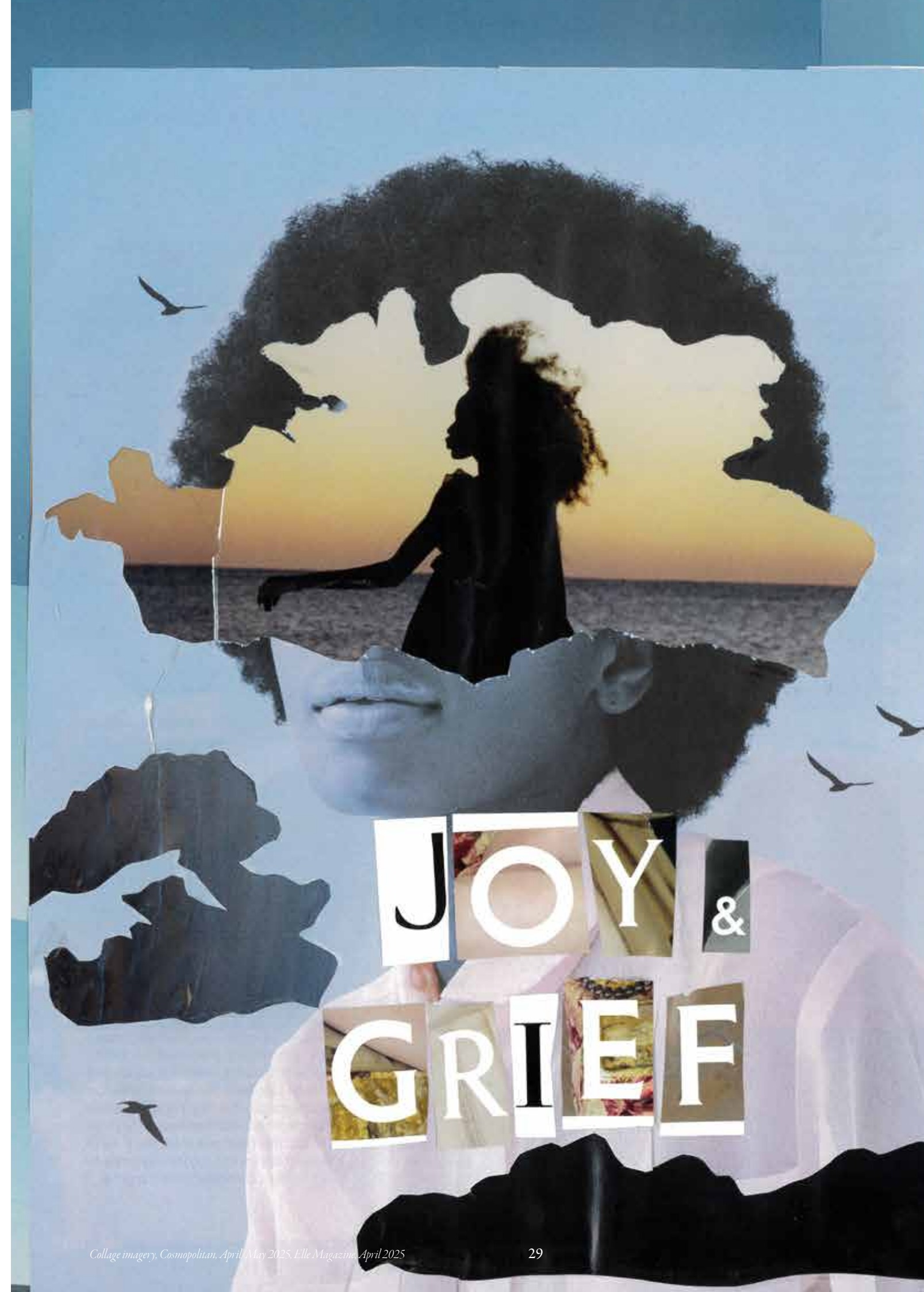
They claim that karma is real and that we choose our bodies, families and life paths. This gives me a lot of peace with knowing what happened to my mum. It almost gives her struggles and pain purpose; she supposedly chose this life to understand how hard it is to go through what she did.

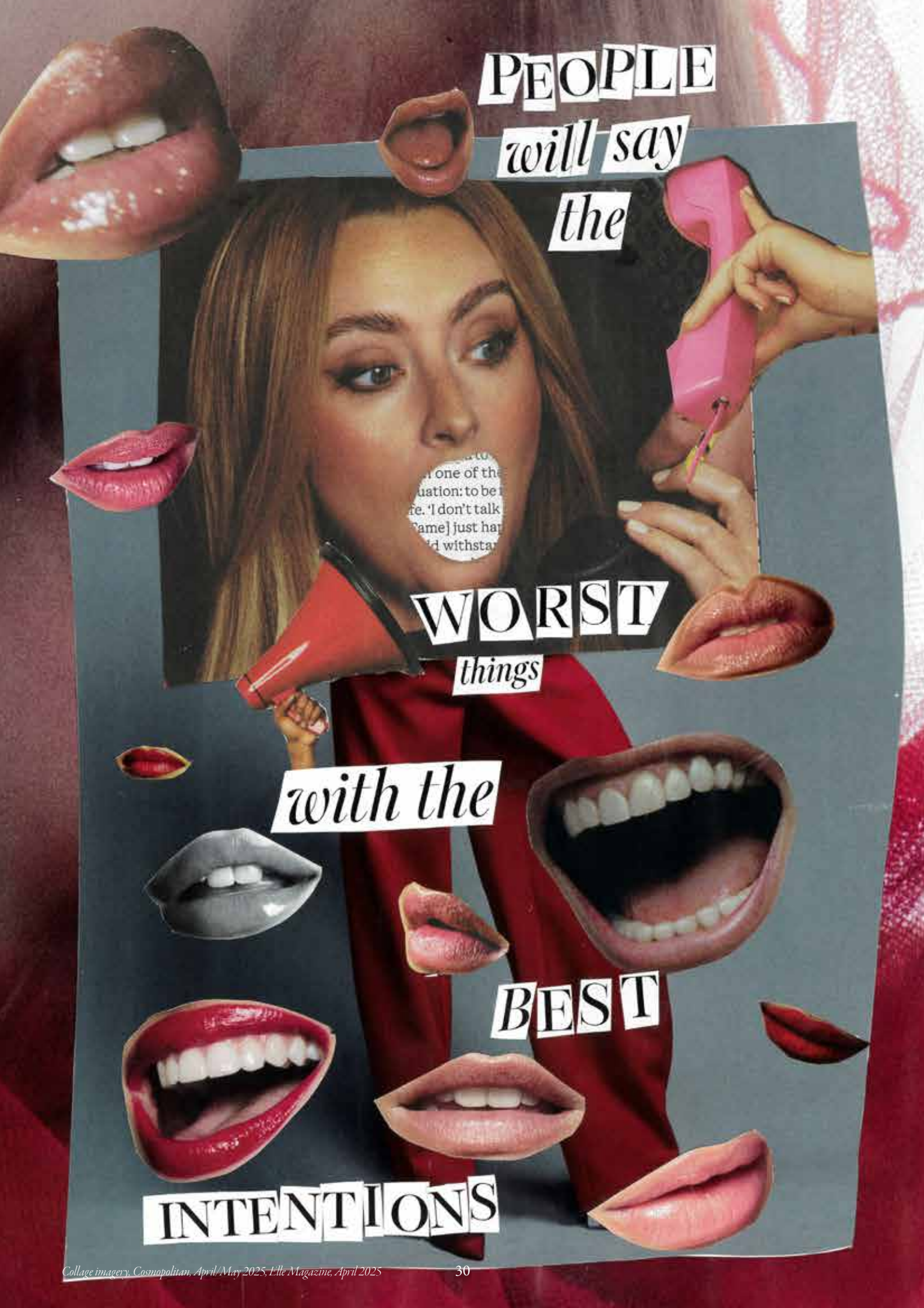
It also gives me great comfort that she is no longer in pain and is waiting to reincarnate with my family. It is nice to think that I chose this life and my family. It gives me motivation to keep going and appreciate all the emotions that come in life because I am here to learn. I am now so grateful when I feel happy.

Searching for my purpose is something that I am now doing on a daily basis. Looking out for signs from my mum. I now know that she is looking out for me. I just miss her being here with me instead. When you love someone and spend a lot of time with them, your brain builds pathways around them, which help you remember and build a connection with them. When that person dies, your brain knows that they are gone, but it has not caught up to it right away, as the pathways are still there. You might expect to see them at home or hear their voice, or text them. Over time, this goes away, but it can be really triggering.

It took me at least 3 months before this started to settle in for me. The realisation that you are not going to see them again brings a crushing feeling of loneliness. You will cry like you have never cried before. But you can overcome these feelings, they will slowly become less frequent. You will build confidence in your strength with the capacity to endure and live with the loss.

Triggers are everywhere. This morning, I saw a hearse on my way to university, which brought back all of my emotions. Triggers don't have to be very obvious. I was round a friend's house one day and their mum had cooked a roast chicken. She left a wishbone on the side of the kitchen, which set me off. My mum used to always do this, and we would both pull it, and whoever won would make a wish. I would always wish that she would get better, and sadly, that wish never came true. I hadn't thought about a wishbone in so long, and that small moment brought me right back. Healing is not the diminishing of grief, but an improvement in handling its recurrent and frequent waves.





Struggles Along the Way

How I have navigated grief

As humans, we are resistant to change. There is a fight between how others see us and how we know ourselves after a loss. Grief can shift relationships with family, friends, and even yourself. Letting yourself move forward without 'betraying' the person you've lost can be difficult to navigate. You must ignore other people's opinions, expectations are not unique to those who are grieving; they're a general part of life.

However, when someone close to you dies, these problems can intensify dramatically. People will always say the worst things to you. A week before my mum passed, one of her friends pulled me to the side to tell me that "everything is going to get so much more difficult and that I need to prepare myself". This was very unhelpful advice, and only made me feel worse. A family member said to me that their grief "was a lot worse than mine because my mum died in the natural order, you are not meant to lose your daughter".

Grief is never a competition, and you should never compare yours to others. Feel what you need to feel and prioritise yourself. I had to remind myself that everyone grieves differently, and you should never bring others down for how they are feeling. The human experience is to feel so that you can appreciate the happy moments.

I am the oldest daughter, so I have always found myself in a motherly role, especially towards my two younger siblings. We are

all close in age, each 15 months apart. However, in the family, I have always naturally been given more responsibility and pressure to perform well and be a good example to my siblings. In my first year of college, my mum was diagnosed with bowel cancer. Therefore, I tried to spend more time with her and decided to go to a university that was near home.

When my mum became really ill, I was studying at university whilst my siblings were both working full time, along with my dad. Therefore, I took on the role of looking after my mum through her illness. It was so hard seeing her get better and then get worse again in this cruel, never-ending cycle. This went on for roughly four years, the hardest years of my family's life, being given false hope, false promises and false test results. Always confused about what was happening to my mum. I think we all adapted, and this just became our normality, trying to stay positive for my mum. She was the most positive out of all of us, being so brave for so long. I will always have so much respect for her for how long she fought, taking on every treatment given to her.

Because she was ill for such a long time, when it came to her finally passing away, it took so long for me to accept it. My body went into survival mode, and I pushed away my emotions to try and look after my family. This meant taking on daily tasks such as housework, making dinner, etc. My mum passed away at the beginning of my summer holidays from university. This gave

me the time I needed to process my grief. Because it was the summer, it almost didn't feel real. When you think of death, you think of rain and dark skies.

However, it was the opposite for me. It was sunny for months, with my mum's funeral being the hottest day of the year. It felt like a sign from her to try and enjoy life and appreciate the good moments. I can't explain how it feels to lose a parent, especially at such a young age, but my life will never be the same again.

Grief left me extremely vulnerable without even noticing it. In the months after my mum's death, I wrote a series of journal entries about how I was feeling, which was an opportunity for me to get out all my emotions. As horrible as it sounds, I didn't want to forget what happened, even though they are difficult to read back.

When her death came, it felt like a relief. She had been struggling for so long, and I was grateful that she was no longer in any pain. This mixed emotion caused me a lot of guilt and confusion. In the journal entries, I wrote about the day my mum died, how shocked I was, and the signs that I have received from her since. They remind me of how far I have come with my grief.



Spiritual Connections

Signs I have received

I never got to say goodbye to my mum, I had spent all of my time with her leading up to her death, having the difficult conversations with her and trying to enjoy our last moments together. We were only planning her funeral a week before her death, which even felt too soon. In that last week, she deteriorated a lot. She was found a bed in a hospice where she would spend her last days peacefully, as she did not want to pass in the house.

When the ambulance arrived to take her to the hospice, I left the house to take our dog on a walk. In the time that I was gone, she took her last breath. I couldn't believe that the one time I left her side, she passed away. I have now come to peace with this, it was not meant to be. I spent ages trying to think about our last conversation together. I think it had been a few days before. In the evening, I was rubbing cream on her legs, a new nightly routine for us. I said goodnight to her, and she tried to smile and say thank you to me. It's so hard thinking back to that time, it feels like a different life.

That has been the weirdest part about grief to me. One day, you just wake up and you are in a new life. It's weird because almost everything is the same, but the loss makes your life completely different. I see the world so differently now; my perspective on life has changed drastically. I am constantly trying to find purpose and understanding.

My mum and I always joked that we were both psychic with each other, always knowing what the other was thinking and always picking up the phone because we knew that the other was just about to call. I have never been much of a religious person; however, throughout my life, I have had some unexplainable situations.

When my great-grandmother passed away, I remember us parking outside her house and seeing her floating on the ceiling. I wasn't scared, I was just aware of her presence. When I told my mum about this when I got older, she told me that I used to always see women on the ceiling, and I would tell her about it daily.

I have always had extremely vivid dreams, ones where family who had passed would come to me and tell me things about my existing family, which turned out to be true. I have always felt this spiritual connection, receiving signs and feeling like there is more to life than just death. These feelings became even more apparent after my mum passed away.

Here are a series of events that occurred, which are deeply personal to me and that make me believe in an afterlife.



“It felt like a sign from her to say that she was okay”.

I had so many conversations with my mum before she passed, speaking about what she thought happened after you die. She believed in an afterlife and reincarnation. She had a friend who was a medium who explained to my mum about past lives and souls. My mum told me that she was going to come back as a little bird so that she could check on us. She was very close to her auntie and uncle and always looked for robins to see if they were coming to visit.

A few hours after she died, my dad and I were sitting in our garden. A baby blackbird was sitting on the acer plant, watching us. We were making phone calls to everyone, breaking the news. It came right up to us, and immediately we felt like it was my mum.

An hour or so later, the rest of my family came round, we were all sitting in the garden, speaking about happy memories with my mum. The bird came back and moved across the grass. Our back door was open ajar, and the bird flew straight into the house. It did a loop round the dining room, flew into the door and then flew straight back out again.

On doing further research, I found out that blackbirds specifically are a sign of death and rebirth; they are considered guides between the worlds of the living and the dead. My dad and I were always in the garden and had never seen this bird before, but now we see it all the time. It is so comforting for my family.



A tree peony planted with Katy's ashes



“I wish I could be a fly on the wall”.

When it came to visiting my mum in the chapel of rest, I was undecided about whether I wanted to see her like that or not. I saw her body right after she passed, and it was such a strange and horrible experience. Seeing her with her eyes open was shocking; it was confusing to see her body there, but it was clear that she had left her body. I never thought that I would get that image out of my mind, so I was hesitant to see her on my own or at all.

I ended up visiting her with my brother. We both went in not knowing what to expect. It felt wrong to hold her hand or touch her in any way, almost like we were invading her personal space. Her body was so cold, and it was very unsettling. However, I do not regret going to see her like this. My brother and I tried to lighten the mood by speaking to my mum as if she were still here, which helped to calm us down and stop us crying.

We sat, cried and laughed whilst sharing funny conversation. At one point, I looked down to see a fly sitting on my glass. I had some water, which I had taken in. I was initially disgusted by the sight of it. I jokingly said to my brother, “I wonder if it’s mummy, if it flies onto my hand, then it

means it’s her”. We moved on to a different conversation and then left. As we walked out of the room, my brother tapped me on the arm. Shockingly, the fly had flown onto his hand. He drove us home, and it just sat there. It ended up moving onto his sun visor.

When we got home, we said to the fly, “We’re okay now, mummy, we’re home”, and it flew out of the car. When telling my dad, I suddenly remembered another conversation I’d had with my mum. When discussing her funeral, she had given me the responsibility to choose her outfit. I was not happy as it was something which I didn’t want to think about.

She jokingly said to me, “You better put me in something nice, I wish I could be a fly on the wall to see what you put me in”. I know it probably sounds silly to anyone reading this, but all of these little coincidences really make me think that there is a connection beyond death and that my mum has been communicating with us. I ended up choosing her dress that she wore on her 50th birthday. Her last birthday with us. It felt sentimental and she looked so beautiful in it.

Connections to Nature

Repeating signs from my mum

As my mum passed in the summer, I went on a lot of dog walks to clear my head. I went to a wood that was very nostalgic to me. It was where my nan and grandad used to live, so I spent a lot of my childhood there. I always felt really connected to these woods, and it brought me so much peace just walking in there alone with my dog. It gave me time to think and process my emotions.

I have never cried so much in my life, and this space gave me freedom to relax and be myself with no judgment. I went to these woods a couple of days before my mum passed, and the energy was so different to the time after her passing. I felt so at peace going there after, whereas before it felt so eerie and cold. I visited the wood the day after her passing, and I was greeted by a deer. It came out onto the path and walked up to my dog and me. I couldn't believe it.

My dog, Rusty, was completely calm, and it felt like a sign from my mum that she was looking over me. I spoke to my nan, who spent most of her life in those woods, and she told me that she had never seen a deer there, even though she would walk there every day. I couldn't believe it.

The next time I went there, the same thing happened: a deer came out to see me. Each time I felt so comforted. The final time I saw a deer was in a local wood near my house. It was the middle of the day, and I quickly went into the bit of wood to use the bin. Suddenly, this deer came out and walked up to me. This shocked me the most because I was next to a main road.

I don't understand why these deer felt so comfortable coming up to me. It shocked me, especially since it had happened so frequently in such a short space of time. I had never seen so much nature, I saw butterflies, dragonflies, etc, everywhere.

Spiritually, a deer may approach you when you want to give or receive unconditional love. Deer represent gentleness and heart intelligence, and may present themselves if your heart needs tending to. This is such a sweet thought, and looking back, I really appreciate these small moments.







couldn't feel your spirit.
You had already left and
gone somewhere else. I
instantly broke into hysterics,
not knowing where to look.
Your eyes were open so I
tried to close them but it
didn't work. I was in so
much shock. I have never
cried so hard / fast in my
life. I had never felt so
much pain before in my life.
Pippa hugged me to try and
calm me down but nothing
worked. I just sat there,
staring and crying at you in
disbelief. How could you
have gone that quickly.
I almost didn't want to
look at you because I
didn't want to remember
you that way. A grandad
came into the ambulance soon
after, we hugged and then



“
in
THE THICK OF IT ,
she discovers
new routines ,
Tough love .
In the BLINK of an EYE,
she adjusts to LIFE ,
and of all the
CONTROVERSIES ,
there is
NO PLACE
LIKE HOME ”

The Purpose of Grief

Grief throughout life

Grief is a journey towards healing, not just pain. I found purpose again after my mum's death by being creative and active. Going to the gym, going on dog walks and making jewellery were all ways that helped me cope. I made so many beaded necklaces and bracelets, which let me creatively have fun and also gave me time to sit and think about my feelings.

Grieving helps us heal and rediscover purpose; it is not an act of completion. One way to help your grief is to find ways to honour the person's life and your shared connection after their passing. Like how I am doing with this book. Reconnecting with what has happened to me is a way to accept what has happened and still keep a connection to my mum.

Grief is a lifelong process that unfolds at different stages of life, with each stage bringing new challenges. Significant milestones like birthdays or weddings can trigger re-grieving, as you revisit loss with a new level of understanding. My first birthday without my mum was hard, but I had great friends who looked after me and made sure that I had the best day.

On the other hand, I found my first Christmas without my mum really difficult. I had lots of people messaging me to say that they were thinking of me and that “today is going to be a really difficult day”. As much as I appreciated people reaching out to show their support, the negative connotations and expectations made it a lot harder for me and my family. When receiving negative messages on milestone days, it is hard to switch out of a negative mindset.

Reach out to people who are grieving, as it means so much to know you are not being forgotten. However, please do not say that it is going to be difficult or hard because you have no idea how their day is going to go. Try to be positive and upbeat, you can still show you care without being negative.

Even though Christmas and Mother's Day were hard, my family and I came together to try and enjoy those moments and remember my mum in a positive light. They are the times to appreciate what you have and try to have fun.



It's okay if you can't believe that they're gone.

It's okay if you can't find the words for what you feel.

Or if what you feel changes every 5 minutes.

It's okay if you hate the world just keep going.

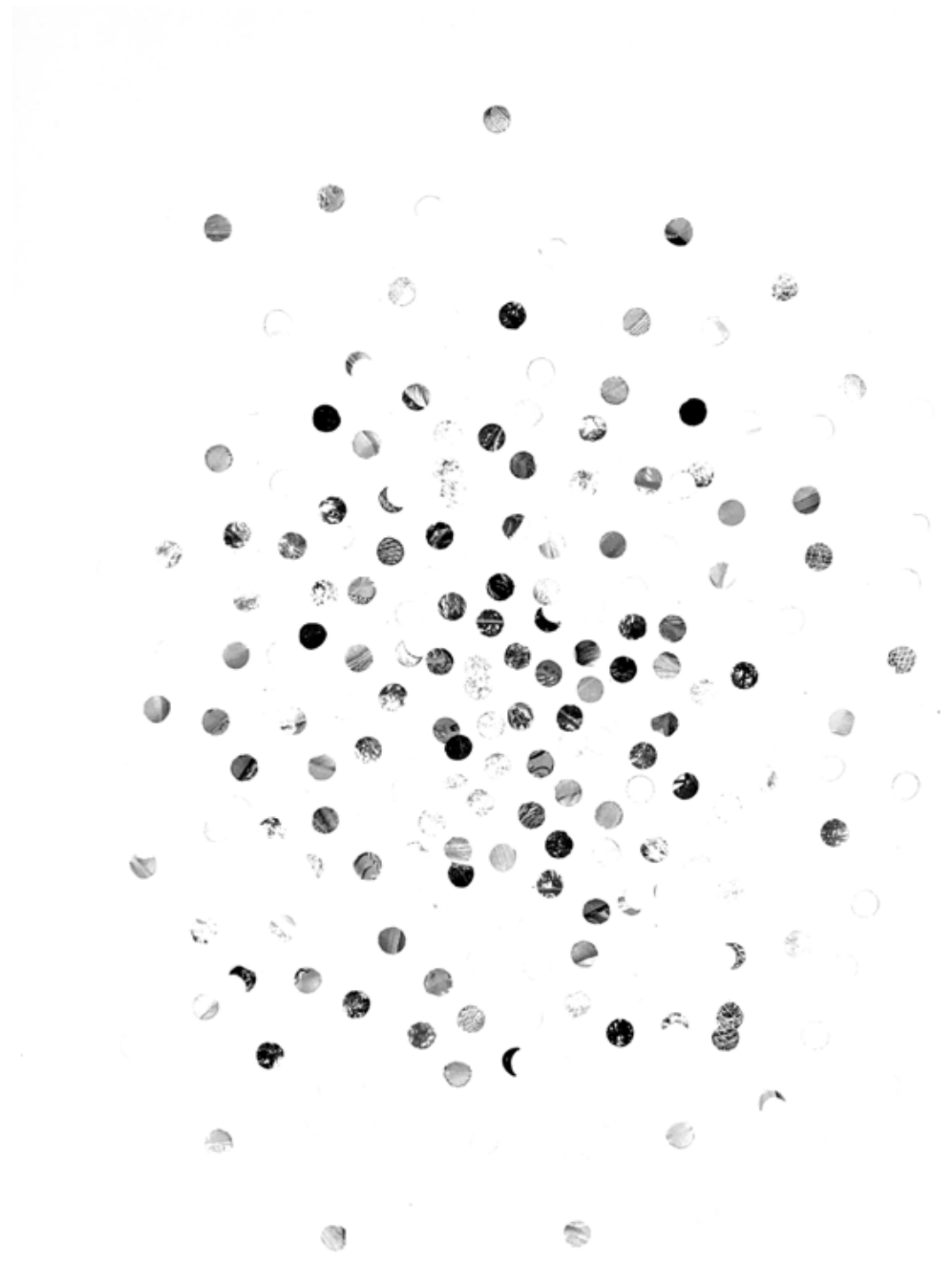
It's okay if you feel angry. At the world. At yourself.

It's okay if you don't want to "move on".

You just want to carry it better.

It's okay if you don't know who you are without them.

It's okay if you still cry when no one is watching.



Your absence becomes more noticeable. You left a gap too large to fill. I've been trying to put everything back together, but nothing seems to fit as it once did.

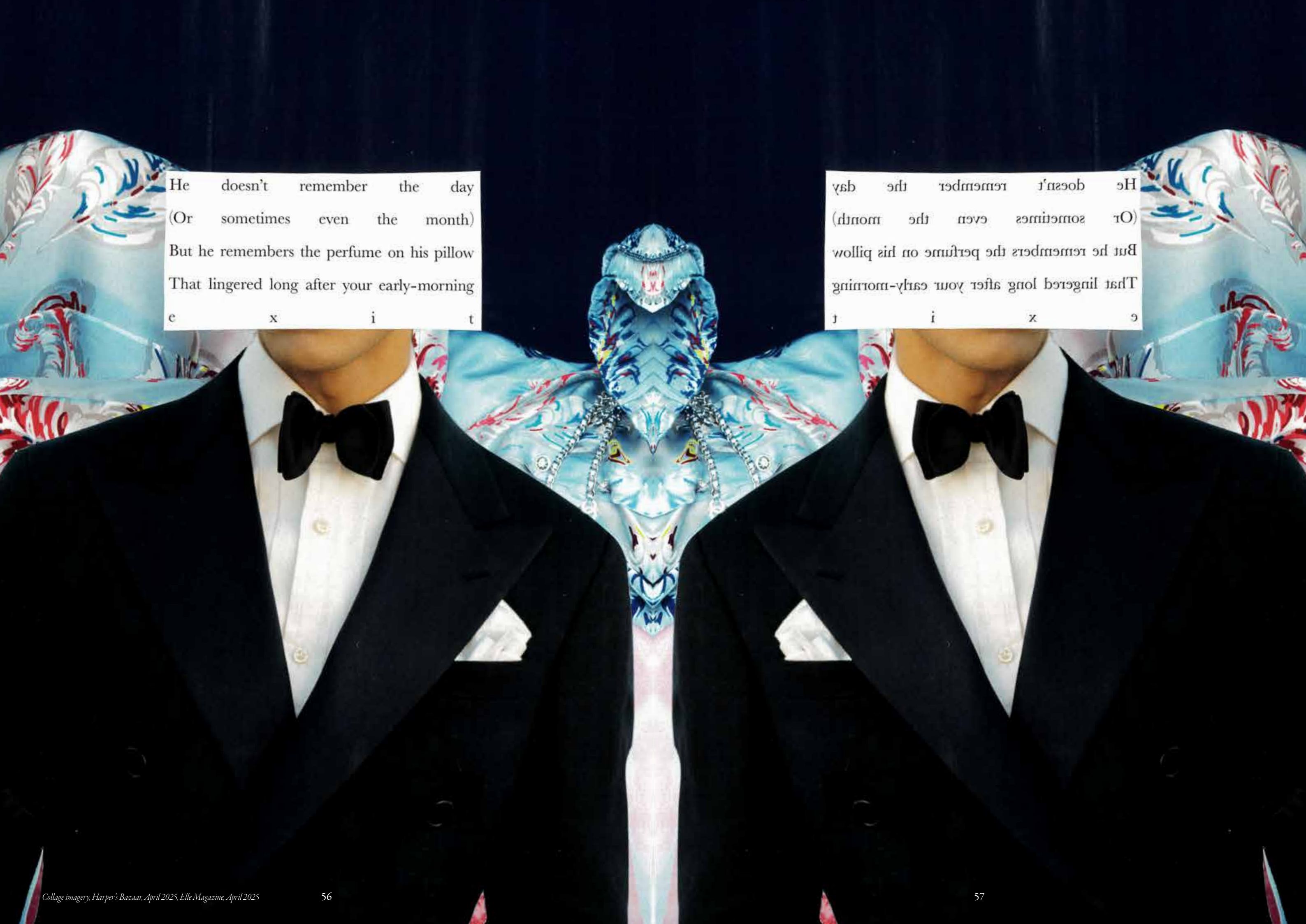


Why am I not crying? What is wrong with me?
This is one of the most misunderstood parts of grief.
Grief does not always look like tears.
Sometimes it shows up as brain fog or tightness in your chest.
Sometimes it looks like anger or overworking.
Sometimes it is just nothing, feeling numb, flat, disconnected.
None of this is wrong. Your nervous system is trying to protect you.
When your body is ready, it will come in waves.



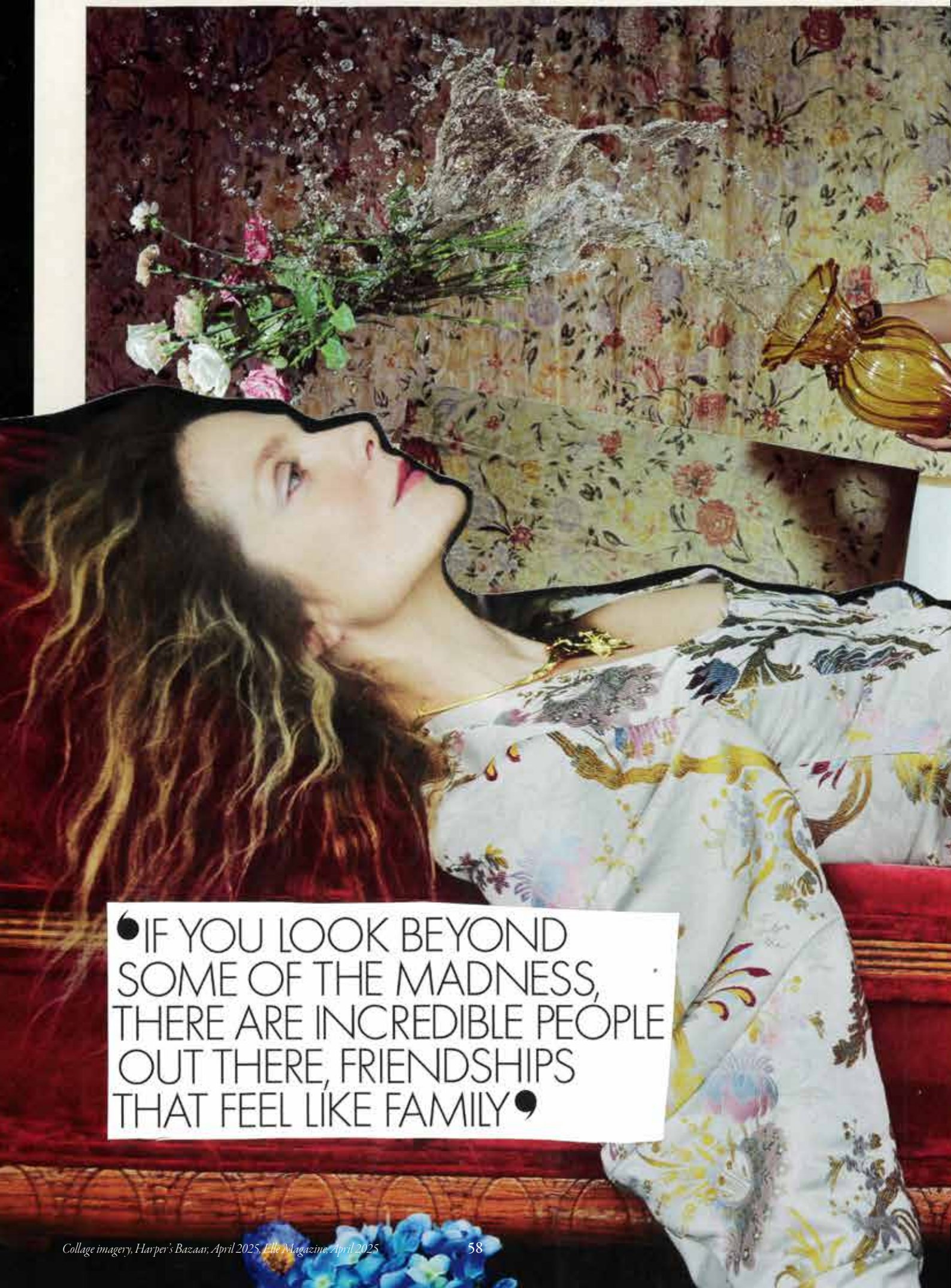
The scents your memories are made of

Grief will show up in the most unexpected moments like hearing a song in a store or smelling their shampoo.



He doesn't remember the day
(Or sometimes even the month)
But he remembers the perfume on his pillow
That lingered long after your early-morning
e x i t

He doesn't remember the day
(Or sometimes even the month)
But he remembers the perfume on his pillow
That lingered long after your early-morning
e x i t



● IF YOU LOOK BEYOND
SOME OF THE MADNESS,
THERE ARE INCREDIBLE PEOPLE
OUT THERE, FRIENDSHIPS
THAT FEEL LIKE FAMILY ●

And then you have the friends who stayed.

Through the heavy, heartache of grief.

They don't know the perfect words to say.

Or how to take away the pain.

They are simply there. They show up.

They listen. They feel. They let you feel too.

*It feels good to know that, although
surrounded by grief, love still exists.*

You don't have to face this on your own.



summer

SEASON

it's

reason to breathe

to PLAY

and LOVE

*Anything that triggers you,
is teaching you what needs healing.*

*Anything that angers you,
is teaching you compassion.*

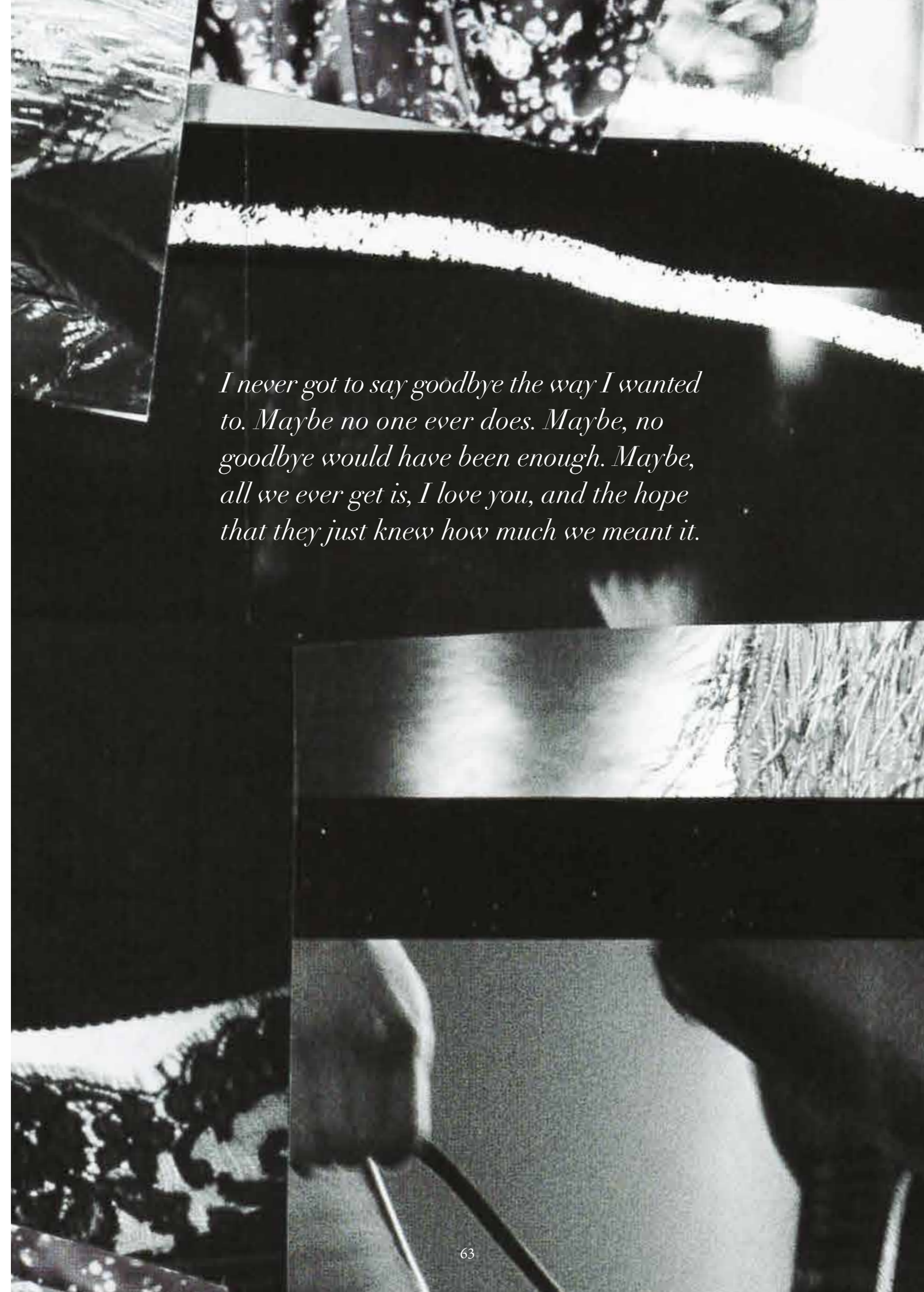
*Anything that causes you resentment,
is teaching you to move on.*

*Anything that challenges you,
is teaching you resilience.*

*Train your mind to see the good in
everything because the happiness of your
life depends on the quality of your thoughts.*

*It is so hard to be positive when navigating
grief, however, the main thing that helped
me was trying to see the positives in every
situation no matter how hard.*

*You have already experienced the hardest
thing you could ever go through so make the
most of the other moments in your life and
look for the good.*



Grief Playlist



Songs that resonate with me

Kiss Me	Sixpence None The Richer
Black Friday	Tom Odell
That Home	The Cinematic Orchestra
Je te laisserais des mots	Patrick Watson
Where's My Love Acoustic	SYML
Repeat Until Death	Novo Amor
The Gold	Phoebe Bridgers
Medicine	Daughter
I Found	Amber Run
Missionary Feelings	Hazlett
(No One Knows Me)	Sampha
Know That You Are Loved	Cleo Sol
I'm Not Them	Them & I
We Hug Now	Sydney Rose
Hate to be lame	Lizzy McAlpine, FINNEAS
Lungs	Ruti
Oblivion	Bastille
House Song	Searows
Wasting My Young Years	London Grammar
Need You Now	Lady A
Everybody's Changing	Keane
Nuvole Bianche	Ludovico Einaudi
Cherish the Day	Sade



You Are Not Alone

How grief keeps us connected

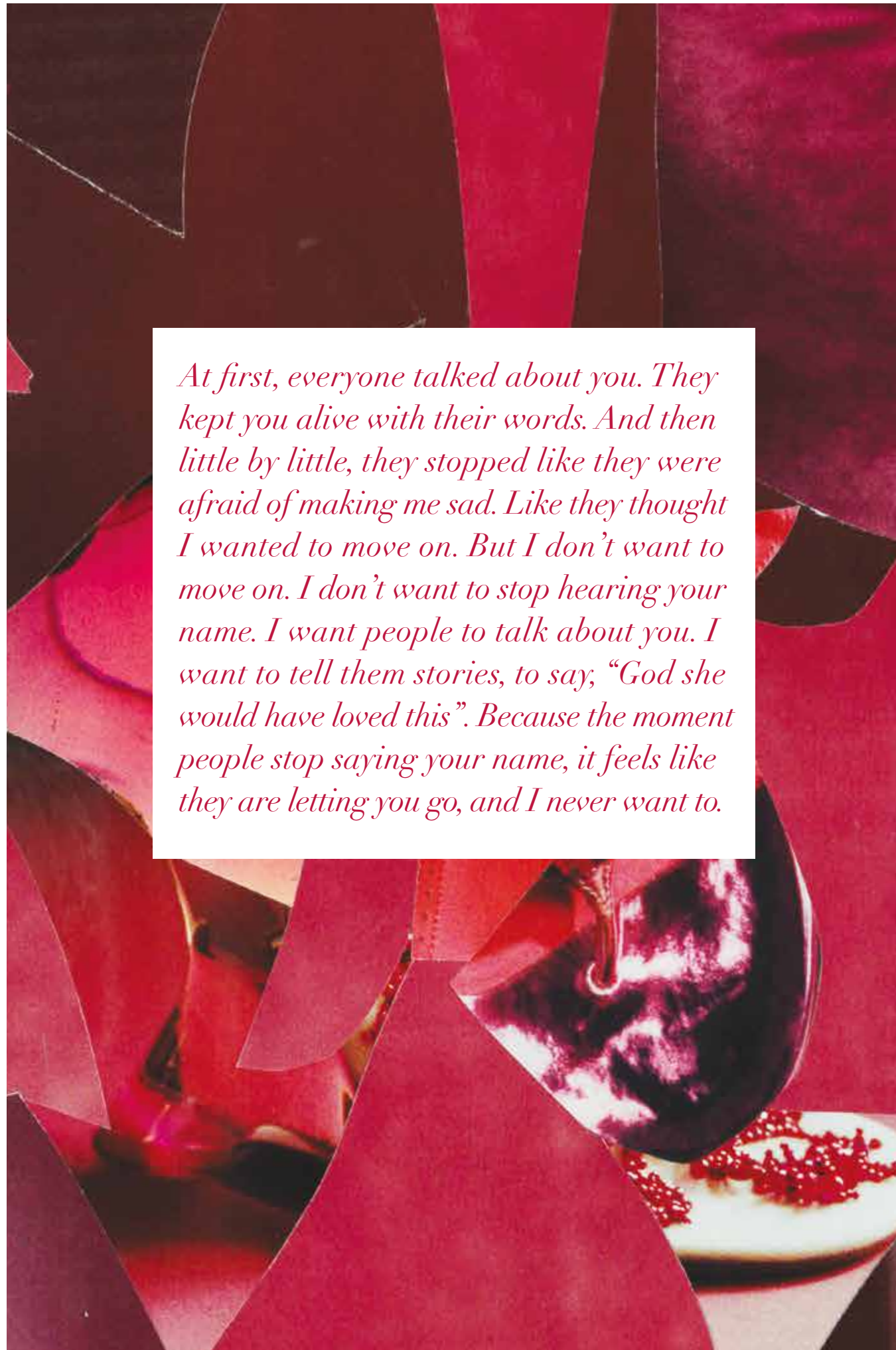
Grief connects us all, and we will all be affected by it at some stage in our lives. I want to take this opportunity to say thank you to my best friends who supported and who continue to support me through it all. Grief will show you who truly cares about you and will take the people out of your life who bring you no benefit.

Not long before my mum's death, my best friend lost her niece. We both supported each other, and it was comforting to know that I was not the only person navigating grief at the time. Around 9 months after my mum's death, one of my friends lost their dad to cancer. Death is so common, and seeing people around me, people that I was close to, grieve, it reminded me that I was not alone.

Since doing research for this book, I have seen so much content created by young people online sharing their grief. Seeing people open up about their experiences is so brave and refreshing. I wanted to open up about my experiences, as speaking to my friends is what has helped me the most.

I can appreciate that not everyone will have the same experience as I and will not feel comfortable opening up. If someone is opening up to you about their grief, listen to them and acknowledge their feelings. You do not need to relate to them; just be a shoulder to cry on. It is common to try and fix the situation and work through the emotions, but grief is not something that can be fixed. Be patient and listen; it is amazing if someone feels comfortable enough to open up to you.

It is so important to accept the need for help, it's okay to seek support, and break myths about being strong. Sometimes, grieving individuals withdraw because they feel misunderstood or because others project their own difficulties onto them. Staying connected with others, even imperfectly, is essential to maintaining emotional and mental health.



At first, everyone talked about you. They kept you alive with their words. And then little by little, they stopped like they were afraid of making me sad. Like they thought I wanted to move on. But I don't want to move on. I don't want to stop hearing your name. I want people to talk about you. I want to tell them stories, to say, "God she would have loved this". Because the moment people stop saying your name, it feels like they are letting you go, and I never want to.

Receiving Help from People

Show up for yourself

People show up in the beginning and help, but shortly after, people forget. It is understandable, your life is not going to be on their mind 24/7; everyone has their struggles. I have always struggled to ask for help, I never want to be a burden to anyone, however, I would advise anyone grieving to speak up and ask for help.

I waited too long and became so burnt out from stress. I have learnt to be kinder to myself and not give myself so much pressure to succeed and carry on like normal. It is so easy to get caught up in the daily routine and not let yourself feel. I would build up all my emotions and let them all out in one go, which was so emotionally draining. I would cry for hours and have to sleep for hours the next day to recover. This was an unhealthy cycle.

I recommend setting out at least one hour a week to sit in your grief and think about how it is affecting you that week. I was lucky enough to receive free counselling for 12 weeks. This forced me to come to

terms with my reality, and having that focused time was so beneficial. It allowed me to speak about how I was feeling, how I coping and how I could help myself. As humans in modern society, we are so used to moving quickly. Take your time and slow down.

I felt like I was in a constant state of rush, even folding my washing, I would try to do it as quickly as possible. Instead, consciously think about slowing down. I have learnt what triggers my nervous system and now how to calm it down. Just sitting outside for 5 minutes and shutting your eyes can make a massive difference.

Helping Others

Ways to help someone grieving

When my mum died, my family heavily relied on help from friends. My mum didn't like to chuck things away, and she had lots of items around the house that reminded us of her illness. With the help of friends and family, we cleared out the house and garage of all the things we didn't need anymore.

This gave us an opportunity to go through all of her clothes and personal belongings, too. For my dad, going to bed every night and seeing all of my mum's things was very triggering for him; therefore, he gave a lot of her items away. We kept a lot for sentimental value, however, if I could go back, I would have made him wait a little bit longer to really think about what he wanted to keep. Here are some easy ways to show up for someone who is grieving.

Be there in the months following. Grief is not linear, but after the funerals and initial aftermath, many people forget to check in. Being there for months and years later can make such a difference.

Acknowledge that it is hard. You don't need answers, there are no solutions, but acknowledging that it's hard and that you may not fully understand can help the person feel seen and understood.

Help with admin. The admin time can be confusing, especially in the days and weeks following a bereavement. Being there to help them make sense of it all is helpful. Take food. Grief can make everyday tasks hard, and doing things like cooking a healthy meal can feel exhausting. Showing up with food can be helpful because they'll likely need it, but may not ask for it.

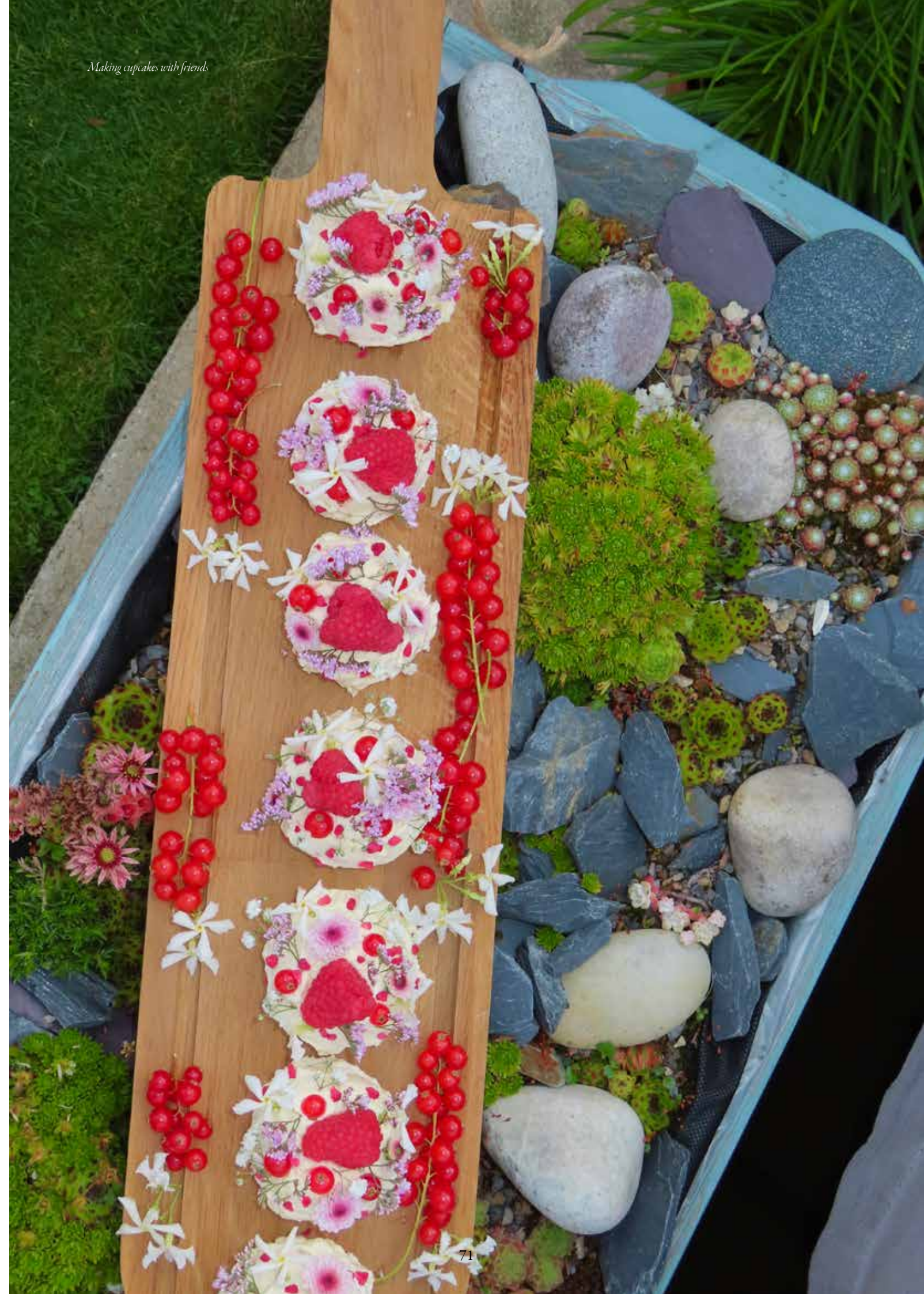
Help with the practical load. This could be things like taking the dogs for a walk, cleaning, cooking or helping with family where you can.

Talk about their person. Sharing a memory or openly talking about their person can be refreshing as many people avoid them or feel awkward.

Take notes of important dates, birthdays or important anniversaries. This will help you to know when they're coming up in the future so you can be there and support.

Sleepover. Nights can be difficult, so if you and your friend are close, a nice idea could be to have a sleepover or offer it to them if you know they're struggling.

Making cupcakes with friends



Meeting New People

Opening up about your loss

Meeting new people, dating, and making new friends can be difficult when you're grieving. You rely heavily on friends at this time, and it can put a lot of pressure on people, especially if you have recently met. It is hard to decide when to bring up the conversation about your loss.

I have had so many uncomfortable encounters with people when telling them that my mum has died. You have the typical response where people will be sympathetic and offer their condolences. Some people don't really react, and that can be quite hurtful. It's like they just try to brush it off in the conversation to not make it awkward.

Any way that you do it will be slightly uncomfortable, as it is not a typical topic of conversation. Especially coming from a young person. There is no right way to bring it up and no right or wrong thing to say. I think at first I tried to speak about it casually when I brought it up because I didn't want to make the other person uncomfortable.

However, now I embrace my mum's loss a lot more. It is a huge part of my life, and it is important that I share it.

The more normalised we make grief and conversations around it, the more comfortable people will be to open up. If someone opens up to you about it when meeting them, acknowledge what they have said, be sympathetic towards them, and if they're comfortable, ask them about their person. It keeps their memory alive and is a nice way to connect.

When people ask me about my mum, it makes me so happy. I love to speak about her; it reminds me of happy memories, and I love sharing them with people. It takes the pain away from the conversation and reminds me that my grief is a place to hold my love for her. Here are some ways to explain grief to your friends.

"I need you to know that I will never get over my grief, it's not something that will ever go away".

"Sometimes when you are talking about your mum, I feel awkward. But I'd still love for you to ask about my mum, it keeps her memory alive".

"It's not always the special dates that are hard to deal with, often the day to day is much worse".

"Even if I don't always want to talk, it's still nice to have you around".

"I will feel 'normal' on some days and be knocked down on others. They're both okay".

"I might cancel plans or go quiet, it's not about you, sometimes life is just overwhelming".



Katy's Husband

My dad reflects on the past year

Saffron: How has grief surprised you?

Tork: I did not expect grief to come in waves, I thought that it would be more constant. My impression was that it would be worse at the start and then slowly get better. It does not work like that, some days are really good, and others are really bad.

S: Have you found any positives since?

T: The cancer research mud run that we did was amazing. We raised so much money for charity and as it was only 2 weeks after her death, it meant so much more. So many people supported the family, it showed how loved your mum was.

S: What has been the hardest part for you?

T: Going to bed at night has been the most challenging. It is hard to switch off my mind and it is when I feel the loneliest.

S: Have you experienced grief in other aspects of your life?

T: I have lost my grandparents and pets however, nothing compared to losing your mum. She was my soulmate and best friend. I will love and miss her forever.

S: What activities have helped you process your grief?

T: I love going jogging, it clears my mind and lets me de-stress.

S: Is there anything you would want people to know about grief?

T: At the beginning you get lots of people contacting you and being nice, then after a few weeks you get nothing. When people consistently reach out over months it means so much more.

S: Have you got anything which reminds you of her?

T: I have recently planted a tree peony with her ashes in the garden. It is a nice way to memorialise her.

Katy's Parents

My grandparents reflecting on grief throughout their lives

John: I find it really hard to accept that she's not here anymore

Gill: I half expect her to just walk through the door, it feels like she's on holiday.

J: The days leading up to her death were the most difficult. There was too much happening at the same time to take it all in. The funeral was such a hard day, I could not face going to my friend's funeral a couple weeks ago as it brought up too many memories.

G: I get more upset than your grandad. I think of your mum every day. I cry for her every day. It upsets me so much when I hear other people talking about their children. It is so unfair for your child to be taken away from you.

J: I cannot accept her death, I think that is my way of coping.

G: It is totally different losing your child to losing one of your parents. It has been 53 years since I lost my mum, and I still miss her. She died very suddenly, whereas my



dads death after was more gradual due to illness. I had a much harder time accepting my mother's death due to the shock.

J: Losing a parent that has lived their life is not such a shock, my dad lived till he was 93. I still think about my parents but not on a daily basis.

G: You carry your child, watch them grow up, you are not meant to see them die.

J: I am so proud of your mum Saff; she was so brave and fought to live right up until she died.

G: Your mum was the glue to the family; it is not the same without her. I want to get her ashes made into a tealight so that I can speak to her every day. I have a rose from her funeral wreath which I will never get rid of.

J: My advice to anyone grieving is to just sit there, cry, and accept it. People around you may try to avoid you but if you know anyone who is grieving then the least that you owe them is a conversation. Be open to thinking about the person you have lost. Do not shut it away. Look at old photos and videos to remember the happy times. Try to keep the memories alive.





Katy's Son

Speaking to my brother about his grief

Saffron: Do you speak to your friends about your grief?

Tristan: No not at all. Well, I have spoken to my friends about it, but it is not something that I bring up all the time.

S: I know it is such an awkward thing to bring up, especially when you're meeting new people.

T: Yeah, most people get awkward and apologise, they try to change the conversation.

S: Yeah, I would rather someone just acknowledge the situation but then ask about her, not just shut down the conversation. How do you want people to react when you tell them?

T: I would rather they just make a 'your mum joke' or something hahahaha.

S: So do you commonly use humour to deal with the situation?

T: I guess so yeah, otherwise it is more uncomfortable.

S: I think people who are grieving commonly use humour to accept their grief, whereas people on the outside find using humour really insensitive.

T: No it is not insensitive at all. It makes it easier to talk about. I do not see the point in talking about it because that is not going to bring them back.

S: But do you not find that it helps you to talk about it?

T: I think about it in my own time. I do not like to talk about it to other people. I go to visit her grave once a week. I sit there and think about everything.

S: I just feel weird going there. I do not feel connected to her there. I thought that I would go there all the time, but I think I have only been three times.

T: It has become a bit of a routine for me to go there. I prefer to go on my own. It is hard to speak about it to people who have gone through something similar as they always compare their situation to yours. If I am speaking about it, then I just want to talk about how I am feeling.

S: Everyone grieves differently and has gone through different experiences. As mum was so ill for such a long time it made her actual death more shocking.

T: Those last few weeks were so awful.

S: It all happened so quickly. I was only planning her funeral with her a week before and that even seemed too soon.

T: Everything just felt done and dusted and that was it. Fair play to her though, she did everything that she could for 4 years.

S: Is there anything that could have helped you right after her death?

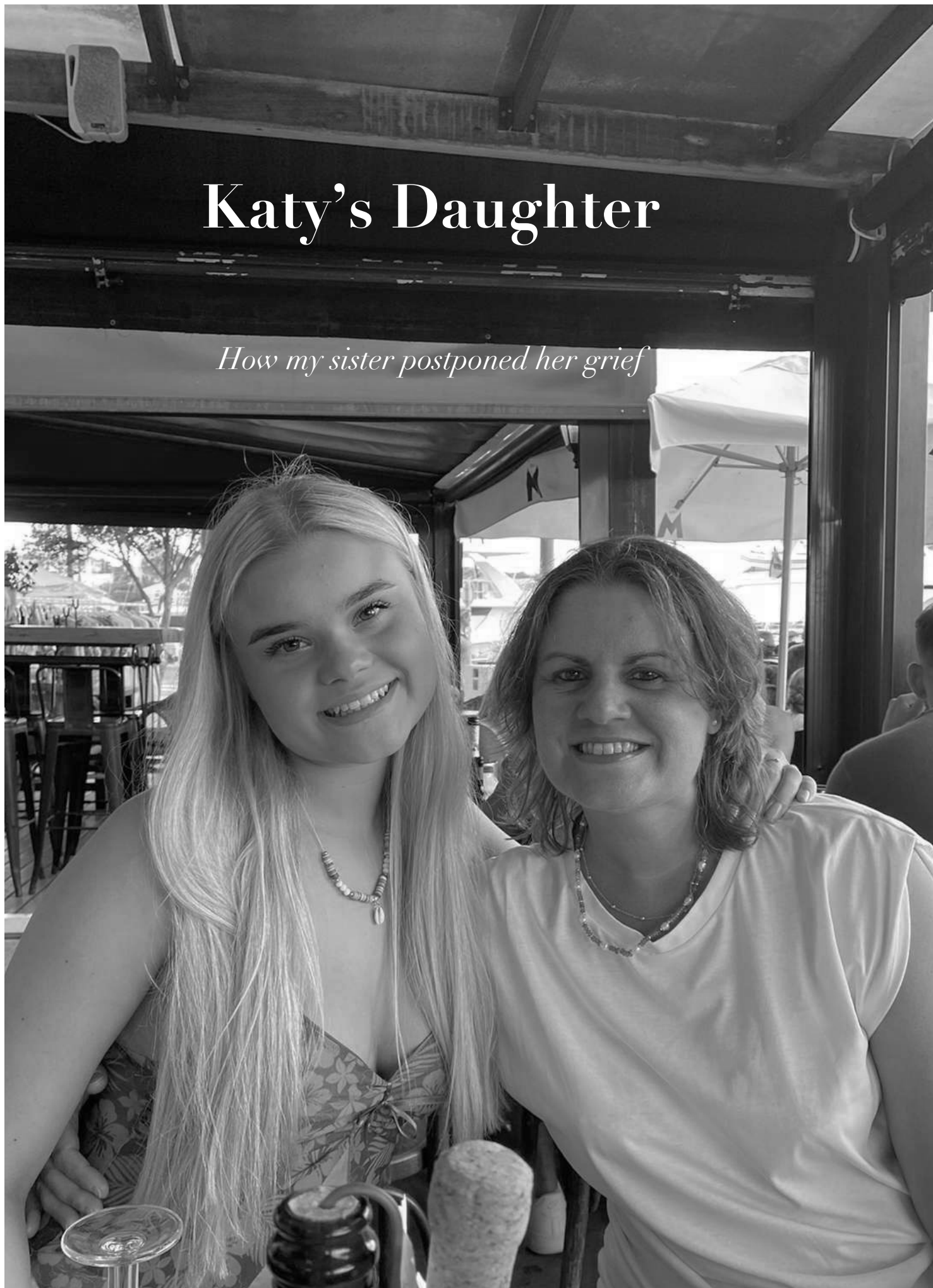
T: I am not sure what could have helped. Maybe just for someone to listen to me. Speak about it all in my own time.

S: Speaking about grief seems to be the most effective way to accept it, especially when people do not commonly speak about the topic.

T: Yeah, I think that is the best way to help people. Just ask them questions and see what they say, it may help.

Katy's Daughter

How my sister postponed her grief



Saffron: Do you speak much about mum ever since she passed?

Rhianna: I do not speak about her that much to people, more just in passing comments about my childhood, reminiscing about funny memories.

S: Tell me about how your life has changed since last year?

R: Loads of things in my life changed at the beginning...I started my new job 2 days before she died. I was very distracted learning new skills, so I had no time to process my grief. I think a lot more about the situation now.

S: Were there any misconceptions about grief which you wish you knew?

R: I thought that I would be upset all the time at the start. I found it weird when I was happy, and it made me feel guilty.

S: How have you coped with her passing over the last 9 months?

R: It was a relief when she passed, she was so ill, and I could not see her in that state anymore. In the last few weeks, I had to separate myself from the situation. My boyfriend looked after me a lot as my friends were away at university. He was close with mum, so I am glad that they had a connection too.

S: Have you had any signs from her?

R: There is always a little robin that sits by my car at work. She always said that loved ones visit as robins, so it means a lot to me. I wish I could have told her about my new job, so I see the robin as her coming to look out for me.

S: Do you have any advice for someone struggling with grief?

R: Try not to distract yourself too much so that you can feel the feelings. My job distracted me at the start, so my grief felt pushed back. It has only really hit me now...it is harder to deal with now.

Interview with Rosie

Navigating the loss of her niece

Saffron: How has grief affected your life in the past year?

Rosie: I lost my niece, Daisy last year, she was stillborn. The hardest part was watching my sister lose her child. Initially, my family felt incapable of doing anything. It was such a shock that we all would just sit there in silence processing.

S: Has the shock now worn off?

R: I think about her every day, but I am detached enough that I can carry on doing everyday things. However, I am dragged back to reality when I see my mum and sister struggling as I want to be a support for them.

S: When was the hardest part for you?

R: A week or so after was the hardest part. I did anything and everything for my sister. We all went into survival mode. Emotionally, it was really difficult. Over time, it has become easier however, it does come in waves. The waves do get less frequent though, yet I'll randomly bawl my eyes out.

S: Is there anything that triggers you?

R: I saw a black limo the other day which brought me back to her funeral. It's those small day-to-day things which rush all the memories back.

S: Have you had any signs from her?

R: I went to work in a different workshop with all new people. One of the workers forgot my name so he randomly gave me the name Daisy. I didn't tell anyone, but it really felt like a sign from her.

S: Have you got anything to remember her by?

R: My family and I all bought Daisy a teddy to lay with her whilst she was still with us. We all took our teddies home so that we could have something that she had. It has a butterfly pin in it which we were all given at her funeral. It means so much to me. I also have a tattoo in commemoration for her too. Tattoos are my way of coping.

S: Is there anything that has surprised you about grief?

R: I have had so much unexplained anger. Support for grief is catered to being soft and nurturing, so I didn't know what to do with all this anger. I had no way to let it out. There should be a rage room for people grieving. My boyfriend broke up with me a few days before, so I had to process the grief alone. He was the one person I wanted to speak to but couldn't.

Rosie's tattoo in memorial of Daisy



Interview with Katie



Navigating life after her dad's death

Saffron: How old were you when he died?

Katie: I was really young, I was 14, in year 10. He died 10 years ago but that pain will always be there no matter what.

S: Oh wow you were just starting your GCSE's did you take time off school?

K: He died on a Thursday, obviously I took off Friday, but I went back into school Monday.

S: You're joking, you went straight back to school. How did that impact you? How did others act around you?

K: I had great friends, one in particular came to the funeral...her showing up had the biggest impact. I found it weirdly refreshing when people were blunt to me about the situation.

S: Yeah, no one knows what to say when you tell them that your parent has died. They just do not anticipate it. How has your life changed since your dad's passing?

K: I consider myself an optimistic nihilist... the concept of nothingness scared me; I could not sleep. Thinking that my dad had suddenly disappeared out of existence was horrible. There is more proof of an afterlife than not. Like the concept of reincarnation or you just poof into nothingness when

you are ready. I am a lot closer with my mum, she is my best friend. It is difficult watching a parent deteriorate...I try to hold onto positive memories. When they are ill it is like they are two different people...you have to keep them separate.

S: I completely agree, you do not want them to be remembered for their illness. How do you think about your dad now?

K: I love my dad, present tense, it seems strange saying it in this tense, but it feels right to me.

S: Have you had any signs that he is still here with you?

K: On my 21st birthday there was a carnival in my local town. They played the Vengabus, I grabbed my friends, and we ran after it, I think I sobbed the whole time... I looked at my friends and said, "That must have been my dad" Over time his presence has become lesser.

S: Do you have any objects that connect you to him?

K: I keep hold of his Next, navy-blue jumper. It used to smell like him...I hold it when I cannot sleep, it is like getting a big hug from him.

S: Is there anything else that has helped you with your grief?

K: Nothing can help with grief apart from speaking to people. The target should not be for people who are grieving, it should be for everybody else...we are not taught about death, so it is very taboo.

S: Was there anything in particular that helped you with your grieving?

K: I had a really great network of friends... people were always available if I needed to go and stay the night somewhere, somewhere away from home.

S: Do you have any advice for those who are grieving?

K: Do not block out the dead...do not bury them in your head. Get out the videos, talk about them, who they were, what they loved, keep their memory alive.

How Life has Changed

Ways to stay positive

I am so grateful for my friends' support over this entire ordeal. They have diverted my attention with outings, talked endlessly at night, and created an environment where I feel comfortable sharing my feelings.

Simply being there, making time, and having fun is the best way to show someone you care. Having something scheduled or planned at all times is what I would advise. Having something to look forward to has a huge impact. This may be a walk in the park, an activity, or a weekend getaway.

Being creative with my sadness was helpful to me, so I painted a lot of pottery, made beaded jewellery, made cupcakes, and so on. Rekindle your sense of fun and engage in childhood hobbies; life doesn't have to be so serious all the time.

During this time, my family also grew closer and took holidays, which allowed us to recuperate and think. As a family, we had not travelled for two years, and we were in desperate need of it. Our sunny holiday allowed us to enjoy ourselves again. Grieving will be much assisted by removing yourself from normal life and letting yourself rest.

To strengthen our bond, we also went to Brighton for a weekend around Christmas. These outings allowed us to connect and discuss our loss in a light-hearted setting.

Since everything is a balance, talking about sadness while living day-to-day might be challenging. However, you can unwind and open yourself more when you travel somewhere else. I am so appreciative that I can spend time with my friends and family, and these travels have been a huge help.

Being more impulsive with others is crucial to avoid being stuck in a rut. I felt anxious and burned out after attempting to perfect my regimen for six months in an attempt to give myself structure.

Instead, relieve yourself of the burden and live day by day. However, schedule enjoyable activities as well; having something to look forward to will always increase positivity.



Dear future Saffron,

I hope that you have gotten your dream job, will be surrounded by beautiful friends, and will be truly happy. I hope you have come to terms with everything that has happened. I know you will have struggled so much, but you will be proud of how far you'll have come. This stage in your life will have pushed you harder than you ever thought possible. I know there will have been moments when the pain of your grief will have felt unbearable, like you couldn't breathe. When the confusion, the anger, the numbness, or even that strange sense of relief has left you feeling guilty and alone.

But look at who you'll become. You won't rush it, you'll give yourself permission to feel it all. You'll allow yourself to grieve in your own time and in your own way. Over time, you'll learn to deal with your emotions, you'll learn your triggers, and the grief will soften. You'll realise that there's no checklist for grieving, what will matter is your honesty. You'll let go of other people's expectations and trust your own process.

You'll worry less, and you'll be gentler with yourself. I hope you'll make new emotional investments without the fear of losing them.

There will be extremely hard days, ordinary days, and days when milestones arrive and you'll miss her more than ever. But you'll show up for yourself. You'll keep moving forward, even when you think you can't. You'll learn to speak about her, not just in loss, but in love. You'll honour her while accepting the truth of what has happened. You'll be living proof that healing doesn't mean forgetting. It will mean remembering with less pain, with more love, and with deep, steady passion for the person you will become.

I'll be so proud of you, not because you'll have "moved on", but because you'll have moved with it. You'll grow around your grief, stay strong, and stay open to joy.

Keep going, keep growing, keep loving.

You'll make it that far, and that will be everything.

Lots of love,

Saffron x