

It's Time

You will have seen them. Flowers still in their wrappings on the side of the road or tied to railings near accident hotspots, and on the news piled up against the garden fence of a burnt-out house, or outside a shop door where a fatal stabbing has happened. The flowers fade in the sun. The heartfelt misspelt messages of condolence dissolve in the rain.

Cellophane cenotaphs to the too-soon dead. Poignant but pointless I always felt.

And then came that wintery January night when you were knocked off your bike. A freak accident they said. You would normally expect bruising, a broken wrist maybe, but your head hit the edge of the curb just so. You never regained consciousness.

After your funeral we scattered your ashes at the water's edge on the local beach where you had built sandcastles, learnt to swim, danced at teenage barbecues, camped with your college friends. It seemed fitting at the time to commemorate a place associated with so much of your life. But I needed something more tangible – a physical focus for my grief. I suddenly understood the reason for those road-side shrines, and so a bollard on a small island in the middle of an unassuming road became your memorial.

I laminated and framed a photograph of your darling face and fastened it firmly with wire. I had a place to talk to you and it helped me get through all those first times that you weren't there, those times when an extra shard of grief pierced my heart.

I left little tokens: a candle for the first birthday that you didn't turn up for cake; a cream egg on that first Easter Sunday when the roast lamb went untouched; tinsel, that first terrible Christmas; lilies on the first anniversary of your death; a flower from the wedding bouquet of your first friend to be married; a teddy bear on the birth of your first niece, the

L-plates when years later she passed her driving test the first time, the silver key from her twenty first birthday cake.

I replaced your photograph many times. You stayed young and beautiful while I turned into an old lady. Your Dad has joined you now, wherever you are, and you are no longer alone. I will grieve for him of course, but a peaceful death in old age is not so bad. Tomorrow I will visit you for the last time. I will sprinkle some of his ashes on your photograph and then rest for a while on the nearby bench to catch my breath and wait for my heart to settle. The memories will ripple at my feet. And then I will bring you home. It's time.