

## What World Mental Health Day means to me...

Today, Tuesday October 10, 2017 is World Mental Health Day. This is a cause that is very close to my heart and, I am sure, the hearts of many.

My intention is to highlight the emotional and mental health issues which present themselves after baby loss. And, to highlight issues during a pregnancy after loss. These issues are varied and complex, but there is little or no understanding or support. This needs to change.

So, I have been there. I am not worried about saying that – not any more. After my son was stillborn a few years ago I descended into darkness. I became a recluse, shut away from anyone and everyone. My family live on the other side of the world and, really, it was easy to lock myself away from them. A cloud of gloom and sadness hung over my life. Sometimes I tried to get out from under the cloud, but it always returned.

I had been a positive person before Patrick died, but I became negative and pessimistic. I was never able to see the hope through the grief. What was the point? Why was I even bothering? Life was shrouded in sadness and there was no way to get over that.

Earlier this year, I thought that I had surfaced. But, in hindsight, I had not. I was stumbling and reaching desperately for light. I was tired of being so sad and down. I was tired of looking at my children, at my husband, at the outside world and feeling... well, feeling nothing. I told myself that I no longer knew what it felt to be excited, or happy, or to look forward to something.

And, in a way, this feeling had become comfortable for me. I felt comfortable in the misery and grief that I knew. I had been down for so long that I did not know what being *up* felt like anymore. It was just easier to stay down. And, you know what, I think sometimes it is easier for people to pretend that there is nothing wrong also, than to actually reach out and have that conversation, “are you okay”? I think people got tired of me being down, being tearful, always bringing up Patrick’s death, how sad I was about it, and how fearful I was that people would forget him.

I could not move on. Actually, I did not want to because then maybe I would forget the significance of what had happened. Maybe everyone would think that I was, ‘back to normal’, and therefore, would not feel the need to mention my son. Maybe they would not consider Patrick’s death to be the awful, life-changing event that it was.

You see, my mental health downturn stems from my son being stillborn. The worst situation, the most traumatic event that a person can go through, I went through it. And, I went through it when it never should have happened. How was I supposed to get up and smile at the world when everything had gone so wrong? How was I supposed to be happy and optimistic when my son was buried in a field due to a system that does not work?

And, that very system was the only place that I could go to for help. The only place to go for some form of support and understanding. But, I never got those things. Conventional medicine does not support the mental and emotional turmoil which people experience after trauma. Pills and prescriptions are not the solution, but they are the only thing available through the traditional medical system. And this needs to change.

I remember going to different doctors and they would ask me if I was depressed, or if I wanted anti-depressants. Now, if you do take anti-depressants, then that is fine. That is your story. But, it was not mine. I was not depressed, I was grieving. I was sad, I was bereft. And, you know what, I *will* be

for the rest of my life. I did not need antidepressants, I needed support and comfort and understanding...

A few months ago I reached rock bottom. I was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. I was advised to seek cognitive behavioural therapy. I went to my local GP who again wanted to give me anti-depressants, "just a small dose to get you through". But, get me through what? Was my situation ever going to change? Was the fact that my son was dead, ever going to be any different? No. So, why mask my emotions? Why give me something that does not provide any relief?

I took all the necessary steps to avail of the therapy. I was referred and received a letter saying that an appointment was available. I called the number and was told that I was going on a waiting list and, only when an appointment came up, would I see someone. I got off that phone call and cried. How hopeless it was. What did somebody have to do to get some help and support?

So, at that point, something clicked. I realised that I needed to get support and help for myself – **I needed to do it**. I had to be proactive. I had to find the answers. I had to figure out what worked for me. I also knew that the conventional medical system was not the answer. You know, it is not all that it is hopped up to be. This is evident in the people screaming for help, the charities inundated with pleas for help, and the alternative therapies which are available, are helpful, but are not 'prescribed' through traditional medicine. And, why not?

There is no, one-fit-all, relief for people with mental health issues. So, why is the mainstream 'solution' prescription drugs? No wonder people do not talk about their issues when the only answer available is a prescription. People are pigeon-holed. People are not advised that there are other alternatives; other safer, kinder, more understanding routes that one can take.

I sought alternative therapies. And thank God, I did. I am so truly thankful that I sought other means to help support my mental and emotional health. Toxic and synthetic means would not have helped me. I am not generalising – I am talking about myself. They are too harsh, too strong. I needed warmth and comfort and understanding.

I credit alternative therapies with easing the mental health issues that I have. Notice, that I said have. My issues will always be there, after all, the grief will never leave me, but now I can manage them. And, manage them I do. Very well in fact.

I credit essential oils with getting me out of my funk. They did. Smell and emotions are closely linked. Emotions and mental state is closely linked also. What better way for me to lift my mood, calm my mind, comfort my tears and sadness, and, ultimately, improve my life, than something that is healthy and pure and safe? They have allowed me to open up, to be more positive, and to see the light through the darkness. They also support me in the deeper stuff as well, the stuff that I have repressed for the past few years, the stuff that used to keep me up at night, the stuff that had taken over my life.

I run an organisation called Hope After Grief, and I often wonder if essential oils are my hope for others, or if they *provide* me with hope. Either way, they have changed my life. Without them, I would still be lost. I do not regret anything that I have said or written in the past few years, but I do wish that I had found oils, their comfort, and the sense of looking-forward which they provide sooner. Those days since April 2015 would not have been so dark and gloomy.

Life after loss will always be my life – a life after a loss. And a loss of a lot of things. This can never change, but what I do from now on can be changed. I choose to be proactive, to spread the

alternatives, and to offer everyone who needs emotional and mental health support a different way  
- there is a different way.

If anything resonates, please reach out. Sometimes the reaching out is the hardest thing to do. But, in reality, the hardest is already behind you. You are a beautiful person sitting here today. Tomorrow will be brighter.

I wish you love, and light.