

*Trigger Warning. This piece discusses suicide and suicidal ideation which some people might find disturbing. If you or anyone you know requires immediate assistance, please call Lifeline on 131114.*

## **They were right.**

*Written by Jenny, 55*

They say you will always remember where you were and what you were doing when your life changed.

I was sitting in my car outside work, about to start my day. The phone rang. I looked down; it was my sister, Cass. I had been speaking to her, on multiple phone calls, on my drive to work, as we were worried about my daughter, Sariah. She was coming out of a major depression and no-one had heard from Sariah since the previous day, despite multiple people trying to contact her.

I answered the phone and my heart sank. I heard my sister's panicky voice, crying, struggling to get the words out. As I listened to Cass speak, I knew life would never be the same. My daughter had ended her life.

As I drove to Sariah's place, my mind raced. Reliving events and conversations past, thoughts of what was to come, and whether I had failed Sariah again. Two days after her 15<sup>th</sup> birthday, Sariah first attempted to take her life. I remember visiting Sariah in hospital after her first attempt, day after day, week after week, sitting in silence. I had no idea what to say or how to comfort her. It must have been at least two weeks before Sariah spoke.

"I lay there waiting for you to come," she said.

I could not help but think, was she waiting for me last night? Had I let her down?

What was once a joyous celebration, Sariah's birthday, became a date tinged with sadness, anxiety and trepidation each year as her birthday approached. It would be many years before we celebrated again. I dealt with PTSD after finding my daughter following her first attempted suicide, and my daughter struggled with her own mental health. We often fell out around the time of her birthday and would go weeks without talking. For years, the rest of the family stood on the sidelines, watching us both struggle to communicate what we had been – and were still – going through.

On Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> January 2023, Sariah and I met for dinner at her favourite restaurant. I had not seen Sariah since October: we had not spoken in months following a heated argument in the lead up to her birthday. Sariah ordered her usual seafood pasta, and we shared some salt and pepper squid, and in true Sariah fashion, she let me pay the bill. On the way out, Sariah said she was sorry for the things she had said and that she loved me. I hugged her,

kissed her forehead, as I always did, and wrapped one of her curls around my finger. If only I'd known that would be the last time I would see her, I would have held on a little bit longer.

Sariah and I had arranged to catch up with Cass for cake on Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> January. We never said we were meeting for a coffee because none of us drank it. We called it as it was – we all just wanted cake. I spoke to Sariah on Saturday morning and cake turned into curry at my place. I was going to make Biryani, and Sariah was making roti. It was unusual for Sariah to make the effort to come to my place as she did not drive, however we were both excited to be in the kitchen together again – something we'd always loved to do together. Sariah was her usual bubbly self, and ended the phone call with her usual 'Byeeee'.

About half an hour later, whilst I was heading out to buy supplies, Sariah called – her friend Mitch had taken his life the day before. My heart fell into the pit of my stomach. Sariah had never been more at risk of suicide than right now. She was just coming out of a depression that had lasted months. On the phone, Sariah sounded cold and distant and didn't want to come for dinner. I offered to drive out and see her, but she wanted to be alone, so I hung up, promising to call her in a few hours.

I spoke to Sariah later that afternoon, making the mistake of asking if she was okay. Sariah hated being asked if she was okay, especially by me.

On this Saturday, I was clearly not the first person to ask if she was okay. Sariah said she was sick of people asking. As I spoke to Sariah, I felt I had lost my daughter. She didn't want me to visit, and said she wanted to be left alone. This was the last time I spoke to her.

Over the years I had to get creative if I wanted her to reply so that I knew she was okay. I'd send her a stupid photo of my dog to elicit a response. I would find the trashiest reality show on TV and ask if she had seen it. I would message and say I was heading to Freetown to see Cass (which wasn't true) and asked if I could pick her up a Bacon and Egg McMuffin, minus egg... add bacon and BBQ sauce. I would let her know I was bringing the dog to the beach and asked if she wanted to come, even though both the dog and I hated the beach! I even resorted to trolling news sites to find some social injustice story, as that would certainly get her going. That Saturday and Sunday were no different to many other days, with text messages about the latest rubbish TV I had stumbled across, the weather and talk of the beach. My messages elicited one-word responses, until they finally went unanswered.

I woke with a start at 1.01am, 30 January 2023 and sent off another text.

*"It is not like you to not be online for so long. Are you ok? It's hot, I can't sleep. I love you."*

To this day, the message remains unread.

I remember driving to work on the morning of the 30<sup>th</sup> January. My happy playlist was interrupted by numerous calls from my sister. Cass lived a couple of streets away from

Sariah and she was going to go around and check on her. I made her promise me that she wouldn't go in, scared of what she may find. I also told her if we didn't hear from Sariah by 10am, I would have the police do a welfare check, still having hope that Sariah was just sleeping. It was during one of these calls, Cass quickly hung up as one of Sariah's friends sped past on his scooter, heading for Sariah's place. Sariah's lack of social media presence had been felt across the country with messages going back and forth. Finally, a key to her apartment was located. As Sariah's friend entered her place, he called out and got no response. Like the rest of us, he assumed, prayed, she was just sleeping. As he made his way upstairs to her bedroom, he caught sight of her on the floor in the kitchen.

I am so thankful that my sister was not the one who found Sariah, but I also feel guilty that it was one of her friends. It took me months before I got a chance to sit down with Sariah's friend. I was nervous as I had so many questions, however I was also very mindful as to the trauma he had gone through. He was very open and said I could ask anything I wanted, so I did. Whilst I choose to keep a lot of the conversation private, what I will share is the overwhelming relief when he confirmed that my sister did not see Sariah that morning, and that he kept her from entering the unit. For that I will be eternally grateful.

As I drove to Fremantle that morning, knowing Sariah had ended her life, I wondered, had she lay there waiting for me again? I made a flurry of calls in the car – to Sariah's brother, to let him know what had happened, to work to let them know I wouldn't be in today, and multiple calls back and forth to my sister.

I pulled into the street to be greeted by police cars and paramedics. As I walked towards Sariah's unit, panic set in and I couldn't breathe. I realised the paramedics were also there for me in case I went into shock. We were not allowed into Sariah's unit, however her neighbour had made their place available to us for as long as we needed. Over the next few hours, a stream of Sariah's friends came around, as word had spread. Sariah's brother came and made the phone calls I was unable to bring myself to make – calls to her grandparents, her half-brother and father. I remember the police coming in and out throughout the morning, keeping us updated. I was handed a flyer on 'what to do when someone suddenly dies'. I was asked when I last spoke to my daughter, and I was asked if I wanted to keep the clothes she was wearing.

Then came the paperwork, the first of many forms to be filled in - 'death admin' as we called it. I signed a form confirming the deceased was my daughter, giving the police her full name and date of birth, even though I hadn't yet seen her: the police thought it would be too traumatic to do so once we had viewed her body.

I look back and wonder what the police must have thought as they came in and out of the room giving us updates. One minute we were in tears as reality hit. The second, we were in fits of laughter at the absurdity of the brochure I had just been given.

I don't know how long we were there for, but it seemed like an eternity before the police advised us that the coroner was there to take Sariah away. They asked if we wanted some time with her. We were led outside to find Sariah on a stretcher. She was cold. As I did the last time I saw her, I told her I loved her, I kissed her forehead, and ran my fingers through her curls. This time, I did hold on longer, knowing that I would never see her again.

As the police left, they handed me the keys to Sariah's place. I let us all in, and was immediately overcome by the beautiful smell of Sariah. Sariah blended her own oils and her unit smelt just like her.

I was stunned by the chaos of the scene that greeted us. Sariah had just had jarrah floorboards installed upstairs so all her bedroom furniture, clothes and treasured possessions were cramped into the downstairs living area. Sariah was very house proud and had spent considerable time and money renovating: painting, installing new fixtures, replacing the floors and organising a custom railing to be installed. The floors had been completed a few days before Sariah passed, and whilst they looked amazing to all of us, Sariah, being the perfectionist, was not happy. My sister had helped her reach out to the installer and they promised to send someone around to fix the areas she was not happy with. This was never done.

I wonder if the chaos of her apartment, the stress of the floors also contributed to her state of mind that night. Perhaps everything was just so overwhelming. Within a couple of days following Sariah's death, my incredible niece Olivia and her partner Will had moved everything back upstairs, emptied the fridge of consumables and returned Sariah's place to how we all remembered. I will be eternally grateful for this.

The police advised they had taken Sariah's laptop and phone as part of their investigation and had left Sariah's jewelry on the table. I put on her necklace and have not taken it off since. I sat at her desk, in shock, looking for a note, anything. I gathered up her handbag, keys, some papers, her diary, and envelopes of cash that were sitting on her desk and then headed for home.

I asked my sister not to post anything on social media until I got home. I needed time to myself to process what had just happened as I knew once people found out what had happened it would make it real. The phone would ring. The questions would start. People would treat me differently. All the things I couldn't handle as I faced a long drive back to my

house. About 15 minutes into my drive, Cass rang to say that people were reaching out to her asking if it was true, word was already being spread via social media. By the time I got home, Cass had posted for all the world to see...

*A devastating post. This morning we lost our darling Sariah. I am struggling to find the words to express the grief that I and her family are feeling at this time, and I know her loss will be felt by many. Jenny Saibu and Zakhir Saibu - I send you all my love and strength. A shout out to the beautiful Sariah friends who have already reached out to me and Sariah's family - your words, and the deep love you clearly have for Sariah, provided comfort - I send my love back to you as you all make sense of this tragedy.*



*Sariah on a trip down south with friends*

They say they'll remember where you were and what you were doing when your life changed. They were right. I was sitting in my car outside work, about to start my day when the phone rang, and my life changed forever. It was 7am Monday 30<sup>th</sup> January 2023.

Life would never be the same. I would never be the same.



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