

The next step: Sarah Cowper

Beep ... beep ... beep went the heart monitor. Beep ... beep ... beep echoed throughout the hospital room. No one spoke. And then deathly silence.

The sounds of inconsolable sobbing quickly took over from the absence of the sounds of the heart monitor.

It has been nearly 18 months since my best friends passed away, three months apart. Grief has taken over the ordinary functions of daily life since their deaths.

It was eight years ago that I committed to caring for, my still very vibrant and healthy, parents, so they could remain in their home surrounded by their belongings and beloved garden. It was my choice; it wasn't a chore; it was an honour. After all, they had given me a safe, loving, and happy upbringing, and what better way to be able to repay and help them than with this opportunity.

People used to tell me that it will get better, that the pain subsides. It was as though they didn't want me to really feel their loss, to experience the pain that was needed to honour their lives and honour my loss. Yes, I am sure they meant well. I am sure they felt uncomfortable talking about their deaths. There is no rule book when it comes to coping with grief and helping those navigate it. But one thing I have found during the grieving process is that you never stop grieving, you just get better at it.

Finding a purpose in life and resuming my career became elusive. I found it difficult to concentrate on tasks long term. I shirked any responsibility or commitment to anything that presented itself. I had had enough of that for a while. Going from various jobs/situations though, kept me grounded. There was doggy day care with the unconditional love of the dogs, and casual work through friends. These kept me busy and filled in the hours, but it didn't stop the loneliness or the ache.

Gradually I have realised that this is now about me. Life is now different and will be forever changing. There is now an awareness that new opportunities are emerging. The motivation and purpose to start again is slowly returning. A

different career opportunity has arisen, an inner peace is being felt, and life is slowly getting back on track.

I still ache for their presence, but I know they would want me to get on with my life without them.