**NHS Education for Scotland**

**Transcript of ‘The value of listening: a life shared’ Film**

I've learned to expect the unexpected in the last three or four years. When I was coming over here -- there are reminders everywhere, so up came a song that Jim, my husband, sang, and I can hear that song, I've heard that song many, many times. Any other time, I can hear it, I can sing along with it, and I can feel happy hearing it. And today, I suppose knowing I was coming here to talk about Jim's death and living with grief, it really struck me, and it made me cry. And that’s, I suppose that's something to share about living with grief and bereavement, and that is that there are reminders everywhere, and that's not necessarily a bad thing, in fact sometimes it's a lovely thing, I love hearing his voice. I'm conscious I'm very lucky, in a way, that he was a singer, and his voice is recorded, and I can hear him.

When someone you love dies, what a lot of people will focus on is the date, the anniversary of the date that that person died. And that date back in February 2020, for me, of course I'm never going to forget that date, but it's actually all the other days, all the other dates, all the other anniversaries, special, ordinary moments that are reminders for me of Jim. And a case in point was the other day I was reminded that it was four years to the day since we received the diagnosis that Jim had Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia.

And I remember that, of course I do, because it turned Jim's life upside down, my life, and our life together. And when he died, of course I lost the person that I love, but I also lost my sense of identity as his wife, as someone who was happily married, and I lost our life together. And I think that's something that dawned on me, gradually, when I was learning to live with grief, which is that we focus on the grief for the loss, the death of the person, but it's actually everything, it's all of that, and it's everything that I had together with Jim.

And in sharing my experiences of grief and bereavement, I'm not claiming any expertise, it's really just what I have learned through experiences. And the thing that has helped me the most and continues to help me the most, is being listened to, and being heard. Being able to talk really openly and naturally, about Jim, and about our life together. And when I do that, I'm not looking for any solutions or advice, or fixing, or pity. Actually, what helps more than anything is for somebody to sit alongside me and simply listen. And the thing is, I know full well, because I have been one of those people, I know how awkward it can feel, to talk to somebody, to listen to somebody who is experiencing grief. And what I've come to think is, that actually I'd rather somebody was just really able to feel crass and clumsy and awkward in what they said, even if they say, "I don't really know what to say", rather than say nothing at all.

The hardest thing over these last three or four years, is if somebody just doesn't mention Jim at all, because actually, for me the most natural thing in the world is to be able to talk about him, to remember him. To laugh in a moment when I remember a silly word or a phrase, or an expression that he would have said, and to be able to have someone listen to that is, is one of the kindest things.

I'm a coach, that's what I do for a living, so you could say I know all about listening, but I learned so much about listening from Jim. When he was going through his treatment at the hospital he had this calm, I don't know where the calmness came from, but calm acceptance of what was happening to him. And what I really observed was how much he regarded the conversations, the listening to, to the doctors and nurses, as a two-way thing. So he listened as much to them as they listened to him. And the most profound example of that is when his consultant had to break the news to him, just before Christmas 2019, that the chemotherapy hadn't worked and, and that the diagnosis was a terminal one. He could see how moved, how upset the consultant was, and after a few minutes actually paused and said to her, "I'm so sorry, this must be really hard for you to have to give me this news”. And the reason I'm sharing that is because it really underlines for me how the more we can talk to each other, the more we can interact with each other as human beings first, not thinking that we've got to say the right thing, or that there is a wrong thing to say, that we can be natural with each other, we can be in that moment, relational with each other. And Jim really exemplified that, as did his consultant, actually.

So, I suppose in then reflecting on my experiences of, of bereavement, of living with grief, as I say, the most helpful thing is when someone can put aside their feelings of discomfort or awkwardness and actually just sit and listen, or be alongside, or not feel awkward if I'm crying or laughing, or whatever it is. Because the most helpful thing, as I say, is to be able to talk about, to remember this amazing person that was such a big part of my life.

The film was produced in October 2023 and can be found at [www.sad.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.sad.scot.nhs.uk/) or <https://vimeo.com/906400389>

For more information visit [www.sad.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.sad.scot.nhs.uk/) or contact supportarounddeath@nes.scot.nhs.uk

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