

Then my world fell apart.

It started a week before when I came downstairs early morning as normal with Dion and Sam, I flicked the telly on so that Dion could watch the normal morning kids cartoons, which most of the time was Teletubbies at this hour. And I went into the kitchen to make a bottle for Sam.

I came back into the living room and Dion was playing with toys and oddly not paying attention to the TV which was unusual, There on the TV was a picture of princess Diana on a black back ground, that's odd I thought. They normally only do something like that when someone has died. It was 31st August 1997 and of course as the world was to learn later that day princess Diana had in fact died in the Paris car crash overnight.

While Diana's death did not have a direct effect on my life, her funeral procession was to become the backdrop to my own personal tragedy which was about to strike. A week later was the official funeral service with all the pomp and circumstance that only the British State can do. Emma had gone to her mums with the kids as usual for a Saturday, this of course was normally when I would indulge in my little hobby. Not this week, as I had a job to do. We were going to remove the wall between the living room and kitchen to make it more open plan, and in order to do this I had to remove the radiator from that wall and reposition it.

So I had the service on in the background as I drained and vented the heating system. I was about half way through when I got a phone call. So I clambered off the floor and grabbed the phone, it was unusual for someone to phone, I wondered if it was Emma phoning to say she'd forgotten something or inviting me up to her mums for something. No, it was Win.

"T*****"

"Yes"

"It's your mum... she's gone"

The Hollywood cliché at this point would have had the phone crashing to the floor and me standing there motionless, but it wasn't the phone crashing to the floor it was me, I just collapsed on the ground, and sobbed uncontrollably. I had known mum was ill, I knew it was cancer and I knew that it had spread from where it had originated in her breast. Due to the way that Emma had effectively isolated me from my family I just wasn't aware of how bad it was. Nobody had told me that she was dying. Now she was gone, and I had not

had time to say goodbye. Little did I know at the time this moment was going to be the catalyst for a massive change in my life that wasn't even on the radar at this point. I somehow managed to finish the conversation with Win over details, and everything, then I just collapsed on the sofa and lit a cigarette with shaking hands.

I was lost. It was like something had just opened up and sucked everything in. The one person in the world that had always been there, the one person that had always been in my life, when everyone else had come and gone, was now no longer there. I don't know how long I just sat there smoking one cigarette after another. Watching the funeral, it came to the part where Elton played the rewritten version of his famous tribute to Marilyn Monroe. For months afterwards and even on odd occasions to this date that song will set me off thinking about mum.

At this time I was living in the St James part of Northampton and just five minutes walk up the road was the roundabout that the hearse carrying princess Diana would go round as it turned up to the road to Althorp park which was the home of her brother Earl Spencer and where she was to be buried. I hadn't intended to watch the procession as it went past but given what I had just experienced I thought I had to. So late afternoon I set off and walked up the road.

The pavement was already three or four people deep when I got there, lots of people had flags. I felt oddly detached from the group, consumed within my own grief, I now found this national outpouring a little grating. I stood there in contemplative silence, then I became aware of a slight increase in the general noise of the crowd and then looked to my left to see the motorcade coming down the ring road. It passed by, turned at the roundabout and disappeared up the road towards Althorp. I turned back home and waited for Emma to come back from her mums.

She arrived back around 7 as normal, and as she came in I said.

"It's my mum, she's dead."

"So what, what's that cow ever done for us." Came back the reply. I couldn't believe what I had just heard, how could she be that callous and uncaring. I wish I could have really let fly at her for that remark but, as was usual I just internalised it, but this was a pivotal moment, with those words echoing around in my head later that night as I lay in bed next to her I realised

that our relationship was finally over. I didn't know how I was going to be able to achieve it yet, but I knew I had to get out from there before it dragged me down. Going back to Win would not be an option there was defiantly no way I could go back and live under that roof again. I had almost began to despise this woman, I didn't know it at the time but I now know that she was seeing someone else at the time and may have been for some time.

A few days later I travelled over to Rushden to say my goodbyes to Mum, as I walked into the chapel where mum was, I realised that I had been in this room before, just under 20 years previously. This was the room where Peter had also been laid to rest and all those memories came flooding back, which just made the experience all that much harder to deal with. Due to things with Emma, I hadn't been over to see mum in a while. I hadn't seen her go thorough the pain and suffering that I know she must have endured, but also I hadn't been able to tell her how I felt, how much I loved her and how I know that she loved me. But now it was too late.

I remember looking down at mum laid there and thinking, she's got too much makeup on. Mum was never one for makeup and dressing up, though when she did she shone like a diamond. But mums normal dress code was trousers and a jumper, Now here she was in a frilly blouse. It still kind of hadn't sunken in till this point, and now here I was. I tried to tell her how sorry I was that I had missed her at the hospital a few weeks ago. I had rushed down to the hospital from work at lunchtime to discover that I was too late and she had gone home. But some how the words didn't seem adequate to cover how much I regretted the last few years and how I allowed myself to be isolated from my family and in fact from everyone.

On the bus back to Northampton, thoughts began to emerge about leaving Emma, this was going to be extremely hard to do, We had no savings as such and with all the debt and everything I couldn't see anyway forward. As I sat on the bus as if wound it's was through Wellingborough and along the old road towards Northampton, I thought back to all the times I would take this bus. First it would take me too and from college, which then of course became work. Then it would take me home to my family, when I first got the flat I would take each weekend a black bin bag of washing with me to put through the machine, then drag it home again to hang up in the large room at home that had the boiler in which was always toasty warm.

In this wave of nostalgia, I longed to be back in a place where I could exist, I didn't feel like I had a life at this point, it had been gnawing at me for several months now. I felt like I was just living my life on autopilot. I would get up in the morning, sometimes extremely tired if I had been up with the kids during the night. Go to work, and then come home again, tired and just slump in front of the TV or sit in the basement on the computer working on University assignments. I didn't go out, didn't even have a hobby or anything. Heck at this point in time my feminine alter ego Theresa was having a better time than I was, and she only existed online and for a few hours on a Saturday.

As I slowly trudged from the bus station back to home, I realised I was dreading getting home, if I could have disappeared there and then I would have done. Then I felt it, the feeling that has been there most of my life, the little nagging voice inside

"Go on then" it said. "They'll be better off without you"

It was back, the thoughts of suicide, the feeling that the world would be a much better place if only I wasn't in it, the feeling I had let my mum down, and she had gone to her grave feeling that I didn't care enough to come and visit her when she was dying. I stumbled on almost unable to see as the tears began to well in my eyes, I was just passing a park at the time so I walked into the park sat down on a bench and started sobbing. I don't know how long it was I sat there, with all sorts of things going through my head. I think possibly the only reason that my life didn't end that night was the kids, Dion and Sam. I knew that leaving Emma would hurt them, but I think if I had done something I think it would have been worse for them.

Eventually I crawled home, and was met with

"What time do you call this?"

I just made up some excuse about buses which she just snorted at, as if to intimate that she didn't believe me and that was that.

The following week was mum's funeral, she was going to be buried in the village cemetery and the service was going to be at St Katherines church, So again I took the bus back to Irchester, I got to the house and people were either at Win's or across the road in Marie's bungalow. All my aunts and uncles, at least from Mum's side were there, cousins and mum's work colleagues. When it was time to set off for the service, Mums sisters, Win and Marie went in the front car and I went in the second with Amanda, Clifford

and Carrie-Anne.

When we got to the church it was almost full already, with rows at the front reserved for family. I don't remember much of the content of the service, the one thing I do remember is that Amanda was hugging me so tight that I was having trouble breathing.

Then it came. The moment that I almost burst out in fits of laughter at my own mothers funeral, If it hadn't been for Mandy's sobbing and squeeze I might well have done. You see because mum had known for a while that she was dying, she had had time to plan the service and choose the music. Now you have to understand that mum's taste in music was country, and you could judge the mood by what was playing. Fairly upbeat meant Kenny Rodgers, slightly down Tammy Wynette, Dolly Parton, Skeeter Davis. You knew things had got really bad when the Jim Reeves came out.

So anyway, what could trigger the possibility of hysterical laughter at the funeral, well in some kind of last stand of defiance. My mum in here infinite wisdom has chosen to have the coffin carried from the church to the sounds of "lets go down in a blaze of glory" by the previously mentioned Kenny Rodgers, and of course in my head I just thought.

"Oh thank god this isn't a cremation".

In the cemetery, mum was laid to rest in the plot that she had brought years before, She and Win had brought adjacent plots when Peter died. Again this was one of the things that I never questioned growing up but now looking back is another clear indication of the depth in their relationship, that they made plans even back then to be close to each other after death. Mum's plot is a couple of rows in front of Peters and just a little to the left.

After the service we went back to the house. Drank coffee and made small talk. Nothing earth shattering or interesting, because basically my family are pretty boring and conventional. At some point in the afternoon, Win pulled me to one side to talk to me about mums will and my inheritance, apparently mum had been very clear that it should go for me and not squandered away by Emma. So I told Win that it would be best if all correspondence about it should be sent to me at work as that was the one place that I could guarantee that mail could not be intercepted. She told me I would be getting a thousand pounds the same as everyone else.

Soon it was time for me to get the bus back to Northampton, little did I

know that this would be the last time I would see any of my family for a considerable number of years. This time unlike the last I had a plan, I would use the money that I would get from mum to find myself a place and then tell Emma I was leaving. Having somewhere to go would enable me to know that if at the point I told her I was going she flipped and kicked me out there and then I would have somewhere to go.

You know that famous line, best laid plans of mice and men. Well yes, things didn't exactly go to plan. In fact it all went completely wrong. I received the cheque in the post at the university where I was working and made sure it was put in my savings account that only I had access to. I was intending to start looking in the next week or so for a reasonable flat that I could afford.

But later that week it all went horribly wrong, the cat was let out of the bag. One evening my sister phoned me at home, So I took the phone and went upstairs to take the call. My sister asked if I had got the money, I told her I had and then spoke about my plans regarding the flat and leaving Emma. Little did I know that Emma was been listening in on another extension, after I hung up from talking to Sarah she went ballistic. she was screaming at me so much that it was upsetting the kids, I was genuinely scared what she might do, so I barricaded myself in the kids bedroom.

After a while her Dad came down and I agreed that I would come out and talk. I tried to talk to Emma about how I felt and how I wasn't sure not only what I wanted any more, but also who I was. This may have been the first time that I had spoken to her about what I was beginning to feel at the time. Although I didn't mention at the time that the who I was also referred to what sex I was, at this point in time I just considered it as cross dressing and that was it. I had no intention at that time to go any further. So I tried to explain the feelings I had of non existence, of just going through the motions of life without really feeling anything, however this just fell on deaf ears, I was outnumbered and out gunned and basically I was delivered an ultimatum, if I was going to go, I had to go by the weekend. The next few days were understandably tense as I tried desperately to find a place by the weekend, in the end I did manage to find something, and so that weekend I packed what was "My" stuff into a transit van, and drove to the other side of Northampton and moved into a small one room bedsit on the ground floor of a converted

industrial unit.

This little flat was to be my sanctuary for a while, little did I know at the time but great changes were on the cards, and that my stay there would be brief, but so pivotal in where my life would go. So here I was, I had lost my mother, I had lost my girlfriend and kids, the house that I had helped to make into a home. I had no money. I had lost it all, the only thing left was work, and that too would be threatened soon. I had fallen so hard and I was at rock bottom, the only way to go was upwards.

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