

# HEARTBREAK, HOPE

and a

## *Call for Change*



The overlooked stories  
of road crash victims



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The overlooked stories  
of road crash victims

by the  
RoadPeace West Midlands  
Support Group

with a foreword by Baroness Helen Newlove

Dedicated to all those who have had their lives taken in road crashes, especially those who are remembered in this anthology. They will never be forgotten and they will always be loved.

Sponsored by CFG

Edited by Jane Evans and Lucy Harrison

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# Dear Reader,

If you are here because, like us, you have lost a loved one in a road traffic collision, may we offer you our most sincere thoughts. This will be a time of great difficulty; your world may have changed beyond recognition and you may experience moments of terrible loneliness. It is our hope that this anthology will help you as you grieve, and that there will be comfort and support to be found in the words of others who have suffered similarly.

Perhaps you are here because you are supporting someone who has been bereaved through a road crash. Road deaths are sudden and devastating. It can be difficult to know what the 'right' thing to say or do is. Our advice is simply to listen, not judge, and allow the person you are supporting to talk of and remember their loved one.

Maybe you are here because you want to join the call for change. Carnage takes place on our roads each day – and it must not be allowed to continue. Your help is needed. Many changes are required, but a first and simple step, would be for all in society to stop describing road crashes as accidents. Many of those bereaved or seriously injured, find the word 'accident' offensive, as it trivialises what has happened and fails to recognise any culpability.

This project was born out of a desire to give a voice to road crash victims, who are often overlooked, by a society that has wrongly accepted road crashes as both accidental and inevitable. Each individual story reflects the terrible impact that road death has, with so many people affected in so many different ways.

We would like to say a heartfelt thank you to all who have taken part in this anthology – for many, sharing their loss has been deeply emotional and taken great bravery. All contributors, and in particular the members of the West Midlands Support Group, deserve great recognition for their wish to help others, even while enduring their own pain.

Finally, a huge thank you is owed to CFG, especially Steve Maloret and Emma Dugdale. CFG have not only sponsored this project, they have invested time, resources, creativity, and profound care. Without their encouragement and commitment, this anthology would have remained an idea only.

This is something we wish we had never had the need to undertake – however, being trusted with each person's contribution, has been an immense privilege.

*Jane*

Jane Evans

RoadPeace West Midlands Member

*Lucy*

Lucy Harrison

RoadPeace West Midlands Coordinator



# A note from CFG

We've worked with RoadPeace as a charity for a number of years supporting those bereaved or injured as a result of road traffic collisions, and specifically as a supporter of the West Midlands Support Group since 2020.

During that time, it's been made clear how important it is for bereaved family members to remember their loved ones through the regular group meetings and remembrance services.

When Jane and Lucy approached us about the idea for this anthology, it made perfect sense, even if we weren't quite sure at the time what that might look or feel like. As the poems, pictures, and articles came in, each with a personal story to tell, the true importance of the project began to hit home and it was impossible not to take a moment with each submission and reflect on the life of a loved one.

It's been an honour to work with Jane and Lucy and all the members at RoadPeace West Midlands in pulling this together and we hope it has as much of an impact on you reading it, as it did for us in producing it.



**Lucy Harrison, Emma Dugdale,  
Steve Maloret and Jane Evans**





# 'Introduction'



from Baroness Helen Newlove

In my previous role as Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales, I had the opportunity of meeting with RoadPeace, to hear about their work in supporting bereaved families who had lost loved ones in road traffic collisions.

I know the pain of losing a loved one suddenly and needlessly. In 2007, my late husband, Garry Newlove, was brutally and needlessly kicked to death by a gang of youths on drugs and alcohol. My world stood still the moment I turned his life support machine off – silent.

Losing a loved one suddenly is so traumatic, and when their lives are cruelly taken so devastatingly through road traffic collisions your world stands still - silent.

So, how wonderful to have been asked by Lucy and Jane to add my words to such a wonderful piece of work to remember all those loved ones. The words, the photographs, the memories - so sensitively written and placed by the families. Such a truly moving anthology.

If I may add some words to remember:

*Grief is courage to keep stepping through a life that feels like it has ended.*

*For others must recognise that courage does not always roar.*

*Courage is the quiet voice that within you says "your struggle today will develop into the strength you need for tomorrow."*

To everyone - your loved one's **voice** will never be silenced until the powers that be hear yours **loud and clear**.

*Baroness Helen Newlove.*



**Baroness Helen Newlove**









# 'Need for a proper response by the justice system'



by Amy Aeron-Thomas

*Amy was the Advocacy and Justice Manager for RoadPeace and now works for Action Vision Zero. Amy has been a friend and inspiration to many in the West Midlands Support Group.*

RoadPeace was founded out of shock and outrage at society's complacency towards road death. It was to help those bereaved and injured in crashes, and it was based on the belief that support meant more than sympathy. It included campaigning for there to be fewer victims and for better treatment of those victims not prevented. This means a proper post-crash response by our justice system, with thorough investigations, appropriate prosecution and sentencing for offenders, and victims receiving information and support as well as fair and timely compensation.

As RoadPeace's Advocacy and Justice Manager, I had the responsibility of responding to queries from families, including those in the West Midlands Local Group. I came to RoadPeace through my work at TRL (Transport Research Laboratory) on a study funded by the Department for International Development, comparing community participation with traffic law enforcement in several countries. The widespread consensus that Britain had the "best" road safety record in the world left me unprepared for the numerous failings of the system – failings that RoadPeace was seeking to address through its actions and campaigns. So, I stayed.

I also stayed for my mother. When my younger brother was killed in a crash in 1966, there was no support available for her. I wanted to help ensure other families had help with surviving the loss of a loved one, especially one made so much harder by knowing how easily preventable it was.

Questions from families often focus on the investigation, including what had been done and what could be shared with the family. Even with a Family Liaison Officer assigned, it can be useful for families to have another source to ask. Police services and coroners are independent, therefore investigations and how families are treated can vary. There are RoadPeace members who were bereaved by crashes that happened away from their local area, or by drivers who left the scene. There are many factors that can complicate the investigation, prosecution and sentencing. Questions about sentencing are common. The government funded literature gives the minimum and maximum sentences for prison and driving bans, but this is not



enough. At RoadPeace, I produced a sentencing guide for bereaved families which provided the latest statistics on sentences given for each of the causing death by driving criminal charges.

My work could be frustrating at times, as progress is slow. Justice is not just about how the government punishes offenders; it is also about how victims are treated, including with being kept informed and supported.

While it was my responsibility to answer queries about the justice system, it was also an honour. Families seek answers and honesty and deserve both. They are often committed to addressing the failings of the system that they themselves have experienced; and, in this, RoadPeace needs to be there to help.

RoadPeace's West Midlands Local Group was started during the time I was there, so I was able to witness how much they achieved: from providing individual families with information and support, including at such critical times as the night before a trial, to achieving national change on the handling of post-mortems.

No family should ever have to endure the tragedy of a loved one being killed in a crash. But until this risk ceases, we should all be grateful for the work, support and community provided by such as the RoadPeace West Midlands Local Group.



**Amy Aeron-Thomas**



**Marc David Sterling**



# 'The Thoughts in My Head'



by Nicola Albutt

*Nicola is a paramedic with the West Midlands Ambulance Service University NHS Foundation Trust. Nicola represents the Ambulance Service each year, at the RoadPeace West Midlands Service of Remembrance.*

It's the end of another long shift,  
they say being a paramedic is a gift.  
As the kit goes away and I start driving home,  
I'm alone and left with the thoughts in my head.

I know I will be going home to my family,  
and I know I can cuddle them too.  
But the thoughts in my head of the events of my shift  
are still very much there in my head.

That thought, I hear you ask...

Well, you see they say superheroes wear green;  
but there are times when we are unable to fix, mend and heal.  
Our superpowers are just not strong enough, as we attend, focus and deal  
with the dreadful collision that is in front of us and is oh so very real.

Those faces stay with us forever.  
The wedding band they wear,  
or the small shoes on their feet,  
the family we know they are a part of.

The horrific devastation that will be caused, stays with us forever.

The thoughts in my head, mean they  
will stay with me forever too.



**Nicola Albutt**





# 'The Day Our World Crumbled'



by Charlotte Arnold

*Charlotte has recently joined the RoadPeace West Midlands Support Group. Charlotte's son, George Economou, was run over on 29th July 2020, and sadly died from his injuries on 8th August 2020. George was seven years old.*

On the day that I thought was just like any other, my gorgeous bubbly boy George, who had only just turned seven years old, had been to summer club for the morning. Little did I know that it would be the last time I took him there or the last time I would wait at the gates to pick him up. We had a lovely walk chatting the whole way home - George was very intellectual, you could talk to him as though you were talking to an adult. He was a loving, motivated child who loved his monster trucks, dinosaurs and lego. He preferred to go out and play with his friends rather than be indoors, and was always knocking on the kids' doors, asking them to come out and simply play with him. Once home, all George was interested in was having some lunch, so that he could go out and play with his friends that live around the green next to our house, and the kids from our grove.

Lunch was done and George was off. We had close friends of ours over for dinner that evening, so I was cooking, while George's twin brothers played in the living room. Our friends were spending some time with the twins, while I finished cooking. George came bouncing in the house singing his favourite *Old Town Road* song, and I had a good moan at him about staying away from the oven as it was hot. He asked if he could go back out to play some more and none the wiser, I said yes - unknowingly hearing his voice tell me that he loved me as he slammed the back gate behind him, for the very last time.

It was not that much later, at 6.52pm, when the neighbourhood kids banged on my window shouting that George had been run over. My initial thoughts were that at worst there was going to be hours spent in A&E with a broken leg. My partner ran out of the house and down the alley, me right on his tail, our friends right behind me. I ran to the road and saw loads of people, but no George. Then my eyes dropped lower, all I could see was my neighbour's car with my son crushed and trapped beneath it. Instantly, I felt I could not breathe. I just screamed, not knowing what I could do to save him and help him. I just wanted George out, I wanted him to be okay. I stood helplessly staring at his little arm, that was stretched out from beneath the car.



Paramedics told us not to lift the car until they got there, and as they drove closer a group of my male neighbours and my partner, lifted the car to release George. The driver, who was my neighbour, stood there, texting on her phone, without a care in the world. When I saw the condition that George was in when he was removed from under the car, I honestly believed I had already lost him. The paramedics threw George into the ambulance with no stretcher, as there was not time. They were working on him as I sat behind the ambulance doors praying that he would live to tell me once more that he loves me. The ambulance drove off and I ran after it; realising I could not run the whole way, I jumped into a neighbour's car and we chased the ambulance. On the way, we found the ambulance pulled over - I jumped out to see what was happening and the paramedics told me that George was in cardiac arrest and told me to meet them at the hospital.



**George Economou**

At the hospital, it felt like I was in a living nightmare. I could not understand why or how. After a few hours, I was allowed into resus to see George before he was taken to intensive care. There was a big police presence there – this, and Covid-19, meant I was quite restricted as to what I could do. I was informed from the very beginning that my George had minimal chances of survival. Although the hospital did everything they could, George had far too many internal injuries and significant brain injury - this made it impossible to keep our boy with us.

I was given information and had to make decisions on various treatments - I like to believe that I chose the best way I could, in the circumstances. On day six in the hospital, when they removed the bolt in the brain that was meant to be releasing the pressure, I knew our time was drawing to an end. I had not left the hospital once, I stayed by George's side constantly, but I still felt I needed more - so I would climb into bed with him and play him all the songs he loved. To hold him, smell him, and touch his skin - I could not tell you what I would give to simply be able to do that, today. On the tenth day we were told that there was nothing more they could do, and I had no choice but to agree a time to turn the machines off - as I felt he would be going to sleep forever, I chose 8pm.

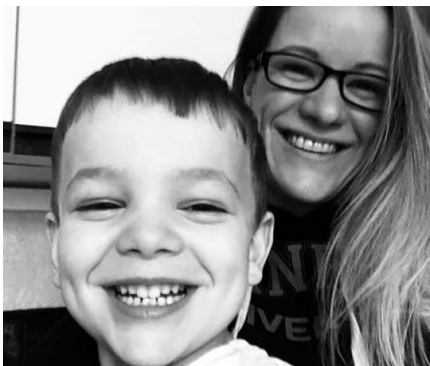
George left us at 8.35pm that evening. I cannot begin to explain what it felt like, to knowingly be letting your child go - as I lay there with him in my arms, listening to his final heartbeat, wishing it was me instead.



I had no choice but to continue living next to the woman that killed my child. Police investigations show that George was hit at just ten miles an hour, the investigation found her not guilty of his death and announced it to be a ‘tragic accident’. I disagree.

As a family, we will continue to do everything we can to make sure George’s memory lives on in all of us and that he is never forgotten; and we will do all we can to prevent any future collisions.

I would like to say a sincere thank you to all of the nurses who looked after George, especially Danielle Hunt. They gave their time, love, and dedication, and they ensured George was looked after in the best way possible.



**George Economou and  
Charlotte Arnold**



# 'Belgrave Middleway Tragedy'



by Stephanie Balloo

*Stephanie is a senior journalist for Birmingham Live, and has covered stories on many road crashes in the West Midlands area. Here, she reflects upon the impact that meeting and talking to road crash victims has had upon her.*

It was just a normal Sunday shift working from the newsroom, checking in with sources, on social media, and with the emergency services to see what had unfolded overnight. That fateful day, 17th December 2017, was to become one of the most tragic days I had seen in my career - and the first sleepless night I would have from doing my job.

We were bombarded with graphic crash images via our Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and emails, from the outset. Everyone was sending the same horrific aftermath photos. You grow desensitised to seeing certain sights as a journalist - but not this. We knew from witnesses and from these disturbing photos that there had been multiple deaths, but we had no idea it would turn out to be the worst crash the city had seen in two decades.

I was sent straight out to the scene, an arterial route through Birmingham City Centre. A huge blue and white police cordon stretched across the major route and the underpass - where tragedy had struck just hours earlier. The taxi which had carried the driver and his two passengers lay on its side, a blue tent erected beside it.

My job for the next few hours would be to try and better understand the circumstances behind this horrific crash, speak to witnesses and find out who the tragic victims were. As soon as we received information from police that six had died, I was tasked with relaying the awful information to our readers via a Facebook Live from the scene. I now know our Editor-in-Chief launched a crowdfunding appeal to raise money for the victims' funerals and for the families left behind.

Later that day, colleagues discovered the home address of one of the victims; the driver of the taxi who had died alongside his two passengers. He was a thirty-three-year-old and father of six children, including one who was turning four the next day. As I approached the house, the door was already open as I suspect extended family had been coming and going to pay their respects and share prayers all morning. The victim's little girl was in the doorway, barefoot,



wide-eyed, and none the wiser to the grief and anguish that was rippling through her family. It was the first ‘death door knock’, or so they call it in the industry, I had ever done. I was incredibly nervous about even approaching people who had suffered so much. I wanted to ask them if there was anything I could do, if we could in any way pay tribute to their loved one or have the privilege of hearing their stories about him. I had expected a door in my face at this stage, but instead I was invited in, offered a drink, offered the use of their toilet and food.

Stunned at such astonishing kindness in the midst of the worst possible circumstances, I politely declined and headed inside. It broke my heart to see the victim’s little girl - knowing what I knew and having seen what I had seen that morning. She reminded me of my own niece of that exact age, and I could not even bear to imagine the pain their whole family were in. A brother showed me a smiling photo of his loved one with his children, as he explained how he was due to see him that same night - but now would “never see him again.” They somehow refrained from bursting into tears as they shared personal details about him, telling me how he was a true legend and their family had lost someone “so good.” I wrote up their heart-wrenching tributes and shared the photo they had sent me as a story. I can only hope this brought with it more donations, and more kindness and support for the family.

That night, I had plans with my own family, but I just felt empty and my thoughts were clearly elsewhere as I was wandering around the city’s magic lantern display with my sister and niece. Looking at my niece reminded me of what that family had lost just hours before. It was not until I headed to bed that the sheer devastation caused by this crash really dawned on me - and I felt a deep sadness for those affected. The victims themselves, the victims’ families, friends, colleagues, the amazing emergency services who worked hard to save their lives, even as it became clear nothing could be done.

The crash was on my route to work, and even now, three years later, there is not a single day I have passed without thinking of the victims and that dreadful crash. At first, it had been lined with a sea of flowers attached to the metal railings above; those soon died and were replaced by new ones. Eventually, the empty cellophane from the bouquets was all that clung to what became a well-known bridge.



**Stephanie Balloo**





# 'My Story'



by Lesley Bates

*Lesley is a member of the RoadPeace West Midlands Support Group. Lesley delivered the below speech at a service to mark World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims on 17th November 2019.*

## **Tuesday 16th May 2017**

The phone rang at about 10.30, I knew who it was before I answered. Tony and his friend John were away for a few days, something they had done for many years – they were both historians and they enjoyed visiting old buildings and churches. This year it was the Cotswolds and Tony was calling to give me his daily news. We did not speak for long; we did not need to.

“We’re in Burton-on-the-Water, on our way to Snowhill Manor. What are you doing today? Will call about the same time tomorrow and let you know roughly what time I will be home.”

“Ok, that’s good, have a great day, keep safe and look forward to seeing you tomorrow evening.”

A few hours later I watched two police officers turn into my drive and I waited for the knock at the door. I knew instantly that something was amiss, but could have never imagined what was coming.

Tomorrow’s expected phone call did not come. Tony did not come home, and he never will. For those of you who have experienced a similar knock on the door, I do not need to explain the horror and torment that devastating news brought - because you will already know. In the confusion and disbelief of those first minutes I realised I had to call my two daughters and tell them, “Dad has been killed in a car crash.”



**Lesley and Tony Bates**

Where does the strength come from to deliver such devastating news? I really do not know - but despite the police officer’s



suggestion that he should make the calls for me, I knew it was something only I could do.

Tony had been driving along the A40 just a short distance from the start of a dual carriageway, which would have brought safety. In the opposite direction a van driver left the dual carriageway. The van driver was not speeding, he was driving at the legal limit of sixty miles per hour. The van driver had not used any intoxicating substance, he had not been using his phone and he had not gone to sleep at the wheel; yet, he still managed to cross double white lines and smash head on into Tony's oncoming car.

Tony was killed almost instantly. Tony's friend was badly injured but thankfully went on to fully recover - at least physically (who knows what emotional scars remain). The man responsible for the crash stepped out from his crumpled van, uninjured.

Family and friends have been invaluable to me over the last two and a half years and will continue to be so. However, I have a strong Christian faith and for me it is that faith that has brought me through many of my darkest moments. The long endless nights when I just wanted to go to sleep and not wake up; the dark dismal days, when, despite the sun shining brightly, I felt I could not face another moment of such deep pain and grief. The crippling torture that felt as if life itself was being crushed out of my whole body. The feeling of intense loneliness, even when surrounded by others. An awareness that life was going on around me, sweeping me along with it, and yet I felt no part of it because of a numbing paralysis that distanced me from everything.

And what of justice? The van driver was given a sixteen-month jail sentence which was suspended for two years, one hundred and fifty hours of unpaid community work, a five hundred pound fine and a two-year driving ban. This was the minimum ban for the charge of *Causing Death by Dangerous Driving*. Is that justice - when my family are left with a life sentence? I do not know.

I wanted to meet the man responsible for the crash, and I did meet him twelve months ago. This was a meeting meticulously planned over many weeks, through restorative justice. I needed to look at his face and into his eyes. I needed to seek out any sign of genuine remorse - the remorse which was so glibly spoken of at the court hearing.

I met a broken man. I had never met him before, and I will never meet him again - but there was no mistaking the pain and guilt he carried for the hurt and heartbreak he had caused. I felt no pleasure in witnessing the anguish in this man's face but

instead a deep, deep feeling of sadness. A moment of irresponsibility on this man's part had killed my husband, seriously injured my husband's friend and changed many lives forever.

There have been many dark, dreadful days in the last two and a half years, but somehow from somewhere, I have found a strength I was not aware of previously. That strength has kept pushing me through each painful barrier and slowly, life has begun to change again. That sense of immense loss and grief will never leave me, but it is now mostly contained. The hopes, the plans and the dreams that Tony and I shared have been destroyed and are gone forever. However, by pushing through each painful day and maintaining a sense of hope for the future, a different life has begun to emerge.

It is not the life I had expected to live, but I have been determined to try new things and meet new people. I have been determined not to be consumed or destroyed by life's heartbreaking experiences. Family will always be my priority and old friends remain faithful. However, new friends and relationships will be a part of my future.

The intensity of grief affects us all in different ways. I have very briefly told my story - whatever your story might be and however painful it feels at this moment – my wish is that you do not let it destroy you.

### **Postscript - 2020**

*Lesley wrote the below paragraph as an addition to her original speech; in it, she reflects on a future which is different from that which she had always envisaged.*

Three years on, which is probably too soon for many, I have reached a point where my life is moving forward – though not in the direction I had expected. I can face each day with renewed confidence, new experiences and a new relationship. The pain and hurt of such a tragic and unnecessary loss of life is still with me. I still grieve for the life my husband should have lived, a life that was so cruelly taken from him. Letting go of a loved one no longer with us is difficult. Slowly, I have been able to release some of those strong bonds that bound us together. Gradually, other ties will be loosened, but memories will always remain. Tony will live on in my heart until we are together again.



**Anthony 'Tony' Bates**





# 'Three Grandkids and a Grandad'



by Tracy Curran

*Tracy's dad, Anthony 'Tony' Bates, was killed in a road crash in May 2017. In this poem, Tracy reflects on the impact the loss of Tony is having on his grandchildren.*

I had my grandad until I was six.  
I remember his call, I remember his kicks  
of a football – he loved it! But he doesn't know  
that I also play football...I could take a photo...  
but he can't see that either...

and that is the sorrow.

I had my grandad until I was four.  
I sat on his knee, but I can't anymore.  
He sang a fun song called the 'Animal Fair',  
with a whoosh and a whizz, I was thrown in the air.  
He can't do it today, not even tomorrow.  
There's only an echo...

and that is the sorrow.

I had my grandad until I was one.  
I'd just started to talk when they said he was gone.  
I can't hear his voice and I don't know his call.  
In fact, I can't picture my grandad at all.  
Time won't turn backwards  
so memories I'll borrow.  
Not sure where he went  
but I know I can't follow...

*and  
that  
is  
the  
sorrow.*



**Anthony 'Tony' Bates' grandchildren**



**Anthony 'Tony' Bates and Tracy Curran**





# 'Anthony Was My Brother'



by Roger Bates

*Roger Bates and his wife, Jean, are long-standing members of the West Midlands Support Group. Roger's brother was killed in a crash in 2017. Roger wanted to share the words he spoke at his brother's funeral, along with a short postscript.*



**Anthony and Roger Bates (1952)**

Anthony, known to many as Tony, was my brother. When I first saw Anthony, he was only a few hours old, I am told I said to my mother, "Take him back, I don't want him!" I am so glad she did not; he became my friend and companion for life.

Anthony was tragically killed in a road crash in May 2017 on the A40 near Cheltenham; it devastated his family and friends. He was a person who enjoyed life and loved animals, especially dogs. He would always listen to people's problems and was always willing to help in any way.

My brother, Anthony, was that man. The kindest, truest man that anyone could have as a friend and companion. Fate took him away from me, from all of us, so cruelly and suddenly; but we will all remember him with love and gratitude in our hearts.

## Postscript – 2021

At the time we were given the sad news of Anthony's death, our world caved in and we were absorbed with our own loss. However, after joining RoadPeace and hearing the tragic stories of other people's loss, we realised that we are not on our own. We gain comfort and strength by talking with other people, who have also lost loved ones in tragic road traffic collisions.



**Roger and Anthony Bates (Anthony's wedding)**





# 'I Miss You'



by Dee Beesley

*Dee is a member of the RoadPeace West Midlands Support Group. Dee's son, Reece, was 19 years old when he died in a road traffic collision on 2nd April 2019.*

I miss your smile, your laugh, you driving me mad and making me so angry.

I miss your thoughtfulness and your selfishness.

I miss listening to you laughing in your bedroom, when you were online with your friends until stupid o'clock.

I miss your raucous laughter, your singing, your smell; I even miss doing your washing for you.

I miss how close you were to the dogs and the rabbits, your affinity with them all.

I miss you and Callum ganging up against me, to get your own way.

I miss your mess, the way you used to just throw everything on the floor, when you walked in.

I miss falling over your shoes because you left them in the doorway.

I miss you eating all the nice things I had bought for us all and you saying it was not you but Callum who had eaten them – even though he had been staying at his girlfriend's.

I miss you teasing me because I did not know something, but you knew all about it.

I miss your tenacity and determination to get on with things, even though you had Asperger's.

I miss you blaming everyone else - because it clearly was not your fault, but it was.

But, do you know what I miss most?

I MISS YOU....



My relationship with the world and everyone in it changed the day the police knocked on my door. My life has altered, but I am trying not to let this define everything. There are days when I feel I am failing; but I keep trying.



**Dee Beesley**



**Reece and Callum  
Beesley**





# 'My Story'



by Steve Booth

*This is a speech which was given by Steve, as part of the online West Midlands Service to mark World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims, on Sunday 15th November 2020.*

I am honoured to be asked to be speak to you all today, in memory of my late wife Annette Booth, and in memory of all road crash victims. On the evening of 29th September 2018, my wife and I were standing at a bus stop in the Woodgate area of Leicester at 11.07pm – which is where and when she very tragically became a victim of a hit-and-run driver. I would like to begin by telling you a little about my wife, and our story.

It was way back in September 1989, that Annette first walked into the canteen at work. I found myself immediately smitten. For me, it was definitely love at first sight – though, not quite so much for Annette! However, as the months passed, I was able to win her around, and a strong relationship grew. We loved and supported one another, and whatever life began to throw at us, we just seemed to become stronger as a couple. Annette had a five-year-old son from a previous relationship. In 1993, we had a son together and our family became complete. We built a home together, we worked hard to provide for our family and to be able to have holidays and a good life. However, it took several years before I actually found the courage to ask Annette to marry me – and we finally tied the knot in 2001.

The years passed by and we watched our boys grow and begin to make their own way in life. In about 2012, Annette began to become unwell – in part due to an injury she had received at work. After quite a few different health issues, Annette was diagnosed as having suffered a series of mini strokes.

After a rather difficult few years, our oldest son Luke came to pay us a visit in January 2018 and gave us the wonderful news that he had got engaged.

We were ecstatic and so excited for our



**Steve and Annette Booth**





son's wedding which was planned for May 2019. Then, on Easter Sunday 2018, my son visited again – bringing his mum some flowers and a card. Annette opened the card and there was a picture stuck inside – which turned out to be the scan of our first grandchild. The baby was due to arrive at the end of September 2018, and we could not have been more excited or thrilled at the prospect of becoming grandparents. We were so happy we danced around our kitchen.

As the weeks passed by further, my wife's confidence grew and she began to really enjoy life again – we started to plan to downsize our house and got the news that our expectant grandchild would be a baby girl. We began excitedly shopping for things for this little girl, who we could not wait to arrive. My wife even began to feel that she might be able to overcome her health issues enough to return to work. The difference in my wife was amazing and I remember saying to her, "Babe, you are coming back to us." It really felt like this, after her being so poorly for such a long time.

The week of September 25th 2018, I remember that Annette and I sat in the kitchen together, having lunch. We were talking about how much great stuff was happening – with the wedding, a new home and a grandchild all to look forward to. It was also approaching our 30th year of being together. My wife said to me, "Do you fancy going out this weekend?" A friend of Annette's was organising a karaoke night and we decided to go, as we had not had a night out together in such a long time. On Saturday 29th September, the day of the karaoke, we went to town and Annette decided she wanted a new top for the evening; she got one and looked lovely. We went out – it was a great atmosphere, and we had such a brilliant night, enjoying the company of each other and our friends.

We left the club at about 10.55pm and walked to a bus stop. We had been there about two minutes, when what happened next – I can only describe as feeling like the gates of hell were opened upon us. I stood four feet away from my wife, then we both heard a vehicle. We watched the vehicle being driven at speed past us and then heard a massive thump – we looked to see what had happened. We could then hear the vehicle backing up – we looked at each other and asked - "What on earth is he playing at?" The driver began swerving back up the road at a crazy speed.

At this point it sort of felt like everything became frozen. I remember trying to shout something at my wife, before feeling like I had been jolted forwards. I saw the vehicle flying through the air, and then heard the most horrendous noise of the car engine. I went into shock as I watched the driver speed off. I was bewildered and numb as I tried frantically to understand where my wife was – I could not see her anywhere. I spotted her laying against the wall of a building behind the bus stop. I ran towards my wife; I was screaming and shouting. I was vaguely aware that people had gathered around us, telling us that the emergency services were on their way. The



next thing we were surrounded by blue lights. I did not know what to do – I just lost it. In the crowd that had gathered, I noticed Annette’s brother, who lived close by – he had not realised it was his sister who had been hit.

The head paramedic explained to us that Annette’s injuries were so bad that they were going to take her to the Queen’s Medical Centre. Myself, my brother-in-law, and his partner got into the back of a police car and were driven to the hospital – this felt like the longest journey of our lives. Our eldest son joined us at the hospital. We were shown into a family room and given the news that the driver had been caught and arrested on suspicion of *Dangerous Driving* and driving under the influence of alcohol and drugs. We waited for what seemed like an eternity but was, in reality, an hour. A guy then entered the room, wearing scrubs, and began to explain Annette’s injuries from top down. I knew what was coming, and just wanted to run from the room, I was holding my son so tightly. We were told they had tried extremely hard to save Annette, but everything was in vain. This was the moment our entire family’s lives changed forever. I felt my heart had been ripped out, torn to bits and shredded, and that a huge part of me had died with Annette. My wife missed meeting her granddaughter by days.

It took 13 weeks and 3 days from the crash, for the phone call to come saying that Annette’s body could be released. This was a time of awful anxiety and fear – we did not know what was going on and had so many unanswered questions. At this point, I was finally able to proceed with funeral plans. We somehow got through the funeral – and to this day, I cannot tell you how. The court process was another nightmare – having to relive that night over and over was heartbreaking, the judge gave a sentence of 9 and a half years, and an 11-year driving ban. I realise on paper, this seems like one of the tougher sentences, but this man already had convictions for dangerous driving, and I do not consider the punishment reflected what he did.

In the weeks that followed Annette’s death, I was put in touch with various organisations, and was put in touch with RoadPeace. I attended the West Midlands Support Group for the first time – what can I say? The strength and support I drew from everyone at the group and the immediate connection I felt to them – especially Jane and Lucy – but also everyone at RoadPeace, was unbelievable. Without RoadPeace, and the support of others too, I do not think I would be here today. They have played a huge role in keeping me going, giving me strength, and helping me to find the courage to want to carry on. It is through this strength and hope that I have been able to talk to you today about Annette. I think of all of those who have lost loved ones in this way, or been left with serious injuries, right across the world.





# 'Taken'



by Steve Booth

*Steve, and his wife, Annette, were waiting at a bus stop after a night out, on 29th September 2018. A speeding, hit-and-run driver crashed into the bus stop. Annette sustained serious injuries, and lost her life shortly after. Annette was a treasured wife, mother, grandmother, daughter, sister, auntie, cousin and friend. Steve is a member of the West Midlands Support Group.*

The pain of your loss throbs through a broken and shattered heart,  
while the days roll into weeks.  
Emptiness and loneliness become my only friend,  
my tears wash away the nights.  
Months pass by, but I realise my tomorrows disappear,  
like the time of your passing.  
Never more to tell you of my love or even to say  
farewell and goodnight.

The pain of losing you,  
nobody could feel like me.  
Not just a loss; but TAKEN.  
TAKEN without any reasons why.  
A big part of me, died alongside you that night, my love.  
My life, my world, now torn apart.  
Gone but never forgotten.  
Rest well,  
until we meet again.



**Annette Booth**





# 'My Friend Gareth'



by Juliet Brunner

*Juliet Brunner is a supporter of RoadPeace West Midlands. The cause of RoadPeace is close to her heart as she lost a dear friend in a road crash.*



**Juliet Brunner**

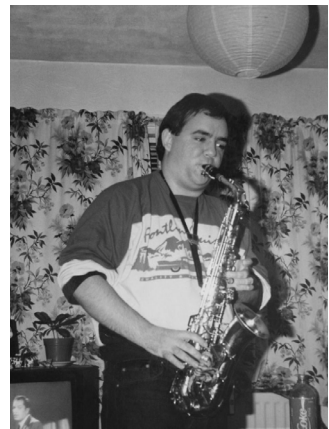
On Tuesday 26th April 1994, the world changed with a simple phone call. It was my cousin who rang to tell me that our friend, Gareth, had died in a motorcycle crash.

Suddenly, you find that you are in the middle of an emotional tornado; besieged with feelings of grief, sadness and anger. He was only 29 years old. Why him?

Gareth was one of the first friends I made when I came to England. He was kind and generous. Gareth loved playing the saxophone and riding his motorcycle. He was a comedian, whose jokes were terrible, a very talented computer engineer, and a wonderful friend. He died just before he was due to be godfather to my daughter. Gareth's funeral was a wonderful celebration of his life; the church was packed.

My regret is that we did not get more time to enjoy our friendship.

Now, instead of crying when I hear a saxophone play, I smile and give thanks that my life has been enriched, by having a friend called Gareth. My memories will always be here to comfort me.



**Gareth Bawden**





# 'Why road safety should be a priority for us all'



by John Campion

*John Campion is the Police and Crime Commissioner for the West Mercia region; he is determined that safer roads should be a priority. John has recently funded RoadPeace to provide support groups for those who are bereaved or seriously injured through road crashes, in West Mercia.*

Roads are used each day by people to get us from A to B, yet we do not often think about the dangers they can present.

As Commissioner, I have long seen road safety as a priority in West Mercia. As a force area we have motorways and many rural roads. Over three years, 130 people were killed on our roads. **130.** It is simply not acceptable that this is happening and I refuse to see that number increase.

In order to truly tackle this, we have to look at it from different angles, and not expect fines and bans to stop the problem in its tracks. A large part is education. There is a great amount of awareness raising around drink and drug driving, the use of mobile phones, wearing a seatbelt and speeding. However, we also need to prioritise careless driving - where people are rushing, failing to judge other road users properly or not driving with due care and attention.

I am proud to support initiatives that focus on getting to the root cause of why collisions happen, as well as programmes that focus on training, so that our road users are as equipped as they need to be in order to be safer drivers.

As Commissioner, I have worked with partners to identify solutions for problems that have been identified by communities, this includes introducing vehicle activated signs, or white gates at the entrances of villages. I have also supported communities that want to set up Speed Watch groups in order to keep themselves and those that live in the area safe.

Road deaths are not what you would necessarily class as 'normal' deaths, as they are sudden and devastating for all involved.

I am proud to support RoadPeace, because no one should have to suffer alone. It is so important that those injured, or the family and friends who are sadly bereaved and left grieving, can speak to someone and seek support from others to allow them to cope and find a way forward.



I will never give up my fight to make our roads safer, and ensure those using the roads are kept safe too. We have a chance to make a difference by working together. It certainly is not down to just one group; it is about working with the police, local authorities - to ensure the infrastructure works, road users, and the many other organisations whose priority it is to tackle this.



**John Champion**





# 'I Wish You A Merry Christmas'



by Diane Cash

*Diane is a member of the RoadPeace West Midlands Support Group. Here, she writes an open letter to her partner, Barry 'Baz' Middlebrook, as she reflects upon having to spend Christmas time without him. Barry was killed in a collision with a lorry, in April 2019.*



**Barry 'Baz'  
Middlebrook**

It is Christmas and time to decorate the tree, to make plans and dreams for the future. The key to my dreams and happiness belongs to yesterday, with you, Baz – you were so tragically taken away. The love of my life and my best friend, this has truly broken my heart in two. You will always stay deep inside my heart; and in my heart, I know we will be together one day. Yet, that seems to be so very far away.

The thought of those Christmases past will hopefully get me through - the fun, the laughter, the pictures in my mind. These are the beautiful memories of the wonderful Christmas times I spent with you, Baz; those Christmases that have been left behind.

Christmas and New Year will come and go. So, as the bells ring and the fireworks light up the skies, my heart breaks a little more and tears fill my eyes. There will be no New Year plans and dreams because you, the love of my life, Baz, will not be here by my side.

To everyone else – keep Christmas within your heart and enjoy the day you have with family and friends, those that you love and hold most dear.

To you, Baz – this is just to let you know that I wish you a Merry Christmas, and although you are far away, I love you more with each and every passing day.

Di. Xx



**Barry 'Baz'  
Middlebrook and  
Diane Cash**





# 'Remembering James'



by Natty Cash

*Natty attends our West Midlands Support Group, along with her mum, Diane. In the below piece, Natty remembers the life of her cousin, James Mulvaney, who was killed in a road traffic crash in 1993. Natty's stepfather, Barry, was also killed in a road traffic crash.*

James Mulvaney was not your usual teenage boy - he was friendly, funny, handsome, he enjoyed sports and he loved everybody - young, old, family or friends. James' personality shone. At seventeen years old, he was a keen runner and ran for the Birchfield Harriers. He was the baby of our family, he lived with his mum, Joan, his dad, Jim, and his big sister, Sam. James was adored by us all - a big family with many cousins, aunties and uncles. He was my little cousin, and we did so much together - sleepovers, family parties, discos and our first pop concert together. He grew into a young man with a very bright future; he was a cheeky chap, with piercing blue eyes. He was the heart of our family.

One sunny afternoon, on the 23rd of June 1993, James had been planning a game of tennis with his mum. James was supposed to be visiting me first, to come and see my new Labrador puppy. I can remember every detail of that day. Joan got home from work and James' trainers were in the doorway ready for tennis later on; but he was not at mine. At that time, unknown to us, he had been killed in a road traffic collision. We will always remember the fierce grief of that day. How could someone so full of life, with everything to live for, be gone? He was just seventeen years old.

We will never celebrate James' wedding, we will never know his children, or where his budding career would have taken him.

We do know that James would have been a wonderful uncle to Sam's children; and now Sam also has a grandson, that James would have enjoyed spoiling. James is remembered at every family occasion; his photos sit proud, alongside newer members of the family. James is often talked about, even by the children who never got to know him.

Last year, we got in touch with RoadPeace after the tragic death of my stepfather. We now get to remember James, alongside so many others whose lives have been tragically cut short, at RoadPeace memorial services.





Jane and Lucy have been there to support us at times of indescribable inner grief. It has been lovely to meet other people, who understand the sadness of holidays and celebrations without loved ones – we have made lovely friends, under devastating circumstances.

RoadPeace have been the rainbow after our storm.



**Natty Cash**



**James Mulvaney**

**HEARTBREAK,**

**HOPE**

**and a**

*Call for Change*





# 'My Beautiful Son'



by Jane Chater

*Jane is a friend and supporter of RoadPeace West Midlands. Jane's son, Daniel, died on 10th November 2017, after being severely injured in a crash the day before. Daniel had been a passenger in a car, the driver of the car was later convicted of Causing Death by Dangerous Driving. Jane reflects on justice – or the lack of it.*

I wanted justice, but I never got it.

My precious son Daniel was twenty-nine years old when he was killed by a drink driver, who had been travelling at speeds of up to 65mph, along a 30mph country lane. Daniel was a passenger in the car. The driver had no licence and no insurance; he was driving so fast that the car went airborne and hit a tree, then carried on travelling into the middle of a farmer's field.



**Jane Chater**

My son was left with severe head injuries; in reality, he was gone as soon as the car went into the tree. However, I spent hours at the hospital – wiping away his blood and holding him, while his broken body tried to hang on to life. I never wanted to let him go.

As soon as the police had arrived at the scene of the crash, the lies began.

The man responsible for Daniel's death claimed that he had been a passenger too, and the driver had fled the scene. LIE.

He was arrested and taken into custody, he continued to make up an imaginary driver, a person that did not exist. MORE LIES.

He refused to have a breathalyser. WHY?

The breathalyser could not be enforced. AGAIN, WHY?

This man was the driver, and he was seen leaving the driver's seat by a witness.



At no point did this man who had driven so recklessly, ask how Daniel was. Our barrister said he had watched the custody tapes and that his behaviour was disgusting.

He pleaded not guilty to all charges. He said he was not guilty of causing Daniel's death. He said he was not guilty of drink driving. He said he was not guilty of taking his girlfriend's car without her consent. He said he was not guilty of not having a licence or insurance. It took a whole year before we got to Crown Court – he carried on pleading not guilty until just before the jury were about to be sworn in. In court, it came out that he had numerous drink-driving offences, he had been in prison before, and he had never held a driving licence – he knew the whole system inside out.

In my eyes, he killed my son.

His sentence? Three years and nine months in prison and a ban from driving for six and a half years. He will likely only serve just over two years by the time he will be due for release.

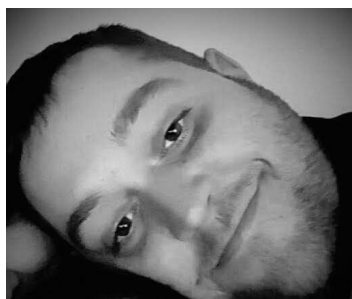
My sentence? Watching my son die from horrific injuries has given me a life sentence. Most days, I cry. I have a pain that goes so deep I cannot even put it into words. My baby boy, gone. I have been diagnosed with PTSD – the smallest of things can trigger it – and I find myself back in that hospital room, holding my son's broken body.

My hope? That one day the law will change and that there will be some kind of justice for all those who lose loved ones in this way. Our pain is endless. The law is outdated – society is too accepting of drink drivers, of dangerous drivers.

This is not something that is just in a newspaper, or just on the television – it is terrible loss, happening daily to mums, dads, sons, daughters, brothers, sisters...

When will it end?

My beautiful son, forever in my heart and thoughts.



**Daniel Chater**





# 'Stories of Life'



by Michelle Cresswell

*Michelle is a Partner and catastrophic injury solicitor at CFG and has worked since 2007 supporting clients and families who have been seriously injured or bereaved as a result of road traffic collisions. Michelle is compassionate and caring and fights for justice for people who have been affected by road crashes.*

Throughout my career, I've supported many families who have been impacted by road collisions, but there is one case I recall that was one of the most devastating. Within a matter of seconds, a wife lost a husband, two sons lost their father, grandchildren lost their granddad and many lost their dear friend. A good, hard-working man was killed almost instantly when travelling as a passenger in a vehicle due to the acts of another. He was only a few minutes from his home. The effect this has had on so many of his family and friend is unthinkable.

When investigating this case, I got to know and understand what a wonderful person this man was. How he helped and supported so many people and how his family adored him. What will always stay with me is hearing about the plans they all had which were cruelly taken away from them, looking at the photographs of the scene of this heartbreaking incident and photographs of the vehicle. I will never forget seeing his booty box and bag that will never be used by him again, his glasses, hat and gloves on the seat and floor of the van where he had placed them after finishing work, someone who was just on his way back home to his family. What I will also never forget is seeing the strength his family showed during this devastating time.

It is always emotional representing bereaved families who have suffered loss due to the unjustifiable actions of someone else – actions that could so easily have been avoided. However, I feel a strong sense of determination to obtain justice and bring some kind of closure. No amount of money will ever be enough, but sometimes settlements can bring some closure. This man's son once said that it was not about money, but ensuring proper recognition for their father's loss and this is so very true.

I have seen the devastating impact road traffic deaths can have on families and have seen the fantastic work RoadPeace do to support and bring together those affected. As Lucy Harrison, the RoadPeace West Midlands Coordinator once explained it is a group none of them wanted to be a part of but one they couldn't be without and this has stuck with me.



I have been privileged to be able to meet members of this group on remembrance days and group walks and to listen to their stories of loss but also their stories of life, hearing about the lives of their loved ones which is so important and should never be forgotten.

That is why I was honoured to contribute in some small way to this book, so that those stories of loss and life can be shared and remembered. The title of the book *'Heartbreak, Hope and a Call for Change'* inspires us all to recognise the devastation caused by road traffic collisions, the great strength shown by those affected by them and to be bold in continuing to push for justice.



**Michelle Cresswell**





# 'Grief is Love'



by Rachael Colley

*Rachael is a member of the RoadPeace West Midlands Support Group; her partner, Simon, was killed in a road traffic collision. Rachael often looks to nature for comfort in her bereavement.*

## **Strangling Thorns, 2020 (climbing rose prunings and nettle cord)**

Simon, my wonderful partner of fourteen years, died on the 5th of December 2019, in a car crash that was not his fault. He was coming home to me and had called briefly before he set off from work to ask me to prepare his dinner. I find I am still waiting for him to turn up on the drive, and enter our home in the happy, lively way he would always do.

I now live alone in a suburban area and often want to go out into the garden for some peace and quiet, to sit and be calm. The neighbours play loud music and there is usually the sound of kids playing in the nearby park and school playground. As a result, I often do not get to experience the quiet solitude I would like to. I have been longing for the open wide vistas of the sea or mountains, which can help to put things into some sort of perspective - by experiencing the enormity, vastness, and continual, unstoppable progression of nature.

For my addition to this anthology, I wanted to create personal spaces for isolation and introversion using natural materials. As I contemplated this, I noticed the climbing rose that has grown a bit too vigorously this year, reaching up into the lilac, in our beautiful 'mature' garden (as Si used to say). Despite being an atheist, I borrowed Christian symbolism to create headpieces using the rose's thorny stems and tendrils, referencing a crown of thorns. The weight of the pieces was more significant than I expected and although tricky to put on, the headpieces were strangely reassuring, the cut foliage surrounding me so closely, providing concealment and freshness. It reminded me of how I feel when I go out food shopping whilst wearing a face mask during the Covid-19 pandemic. I find the partial concealment and the warmth of my breath oddly calming, though juxtaposed with feelings of being insular, trapped and panicked.

People have told me that bereavement through road death brings with it a form of post-traumatic stress. The wearing of these strangling, spiked headpieces brought me closer to the trauma I hold and consolidated the sense of worthlessness I feel. They aim to convey my pain and isolation, as well as the absurdity, ridiculousness, oddness, and loneliness of my life without Simon. I love and miss Simon so very much; much more than I can express in words.



**Simon Taylor**



## **Elder, 2020 (charred elder wood and organic cord)**

Simon loved nature; he cared such a lot for animals and the environment. We were lucky to have a beautiful garden, with scampering squirrels in our trees that playfully chased and chattered at each other. He would get all excited when we would see one of the less common garden birds, most especially the salmon pink breast of a male bullfinch, the lesser-spotted woodpecker, and the characteristically ‘hoppy’ jay. Simon became a vegetarian because he was keen to do what he could to support the planet and to help prevent climate change. He also loved trees and woodland and was keen to support sustainable forestry and tree planting schemes. To continue his legacy, I have taken to planting trees where I can, and make regular donations to tree planting initiatives and charities.

Simon was a carpenter/joiner by trade and took a great deal of pride in his work. He had a special affinity with wood as a material, working it so deftly with his skilful hands, manipulating it with his expert tacit knowledge. I admired the knowledge he held within his body. He was always in tune with it. Physical skills are so often overlooked, but his were plain to see.

Despite being the healthiest and the strongest person I knew, Simon died in December 2019, leading to such heavy grief, which became most especially evident during the Covid-19 lockdowns of 2020-2021. In March 2020, I went out on daily walks, noticing the small changes nature brings as the seasons moved forward relentlessly, pulling me reluctantly with them. I tried to find companionship in nature and hoped that it would help me feel connected with Simon.

On my walks I began to photograph and collect natural materials, such as the elder wood I gathered that had been cut from a roadside hedgerow. The heavy weight of wood in my backpack as I walked brought some physical sense of connection to the pain of my mental struggles; the constant repetition of the walks, the weighty wood collection and relentlessly going over and over the events of the 5th of December 2019 again and again in my mind. Could I have saved him? Could I have done something, anything, to stop this from happening to him? I spent days and days in the workshop, using his woodworking tools to roughly fashion large elder wood beads that I charred with a blow torch. I created a series of elder neck pieces, with the aim of conveying the weight of the loss I carry, as well as the sense of hopelessness and loneliness I feel in having to lead a life without the man I love.



**Rachael Colley, Simon Taylor and Roger the cat**







***Strangling Thorns* (headpieces), 2020, climbing rose prunings and nettle cord**



***Elder* (jewellery), 2020, charred elder wood and organic cord**



# 'We Wish You Were Here'



by Daniel and Katrina Corcoran

*Daniel and Katrina's mother, Victoria Kavanagh, was killed in a road traffic collision in July 2020. Here, Daniel writes a letter to his mother, while Katrina reflects on what it has felt like, to lose her mom so suddenly.*

"I wish you were here."

That's what I think every day. Since you have been gone, life has been a spiral of sadness and stress. You did so much for us, that I did not even realise most of it. Since you have been gone, I have had to learn so many new things, things that I thought I would learn when I grew up a little more. Things I thought I would have you to help me learn, laughing by my side if I made a mistake. But now, myself and my sister must learn these new things together, trying to make the most of what has been left behind, unable to have you teach us everything. But the lessons you had taught us, we will remember and use.



**Victoria Kavanagh with  
Katrina and Daniel Corcoran**

Without you here, the house is quiet. It is lonely. Still, every day I expect you to come home, to call, or text me, or to hear your laugh. You would often find videos or pictures that made you laugh. I wish I could have seen you that day, before you left the house, or let you know how much I love you.

But now, I hope that seeing me work through university, like you did, makes you as proud as I was, when you graduated. When I do graduate, it will be wholly in your honour. I hope that seeing us now, living on our own, trying to fend for ourselves in this big and scary world, makes you proud of us, and happy that you set us on the right path. That you are the reason that the both of us keep fighting.

Mom, I love you. I miss you.

What I would not give to hear your voice again, or your laugh. I hope you and Nan are together, watching down on us with smiles on your faces, remembering all the good times. I know that the memories you made with us and others will last for our entire lives.

Daniel.



On 27th July 2020, my mom, my best friend, and my hero got taken away from me, way too soon. That day seemed like a blur, but somehow, I remember every single detail. Mom was loved by everyone who met her. She taught me so many things and shaped me into the girl I am today, and I will forever be grateful for having such an amazing mom. Her laugh filled up the whole room and her smile made everyone else smile.

I still wait for her to come back from work every day, expecting to look out of the window and see her bright red car on the drive; but now the drive is empty. Everything is still so raw to me and nothing feels real. I wish she could be here to teach me so many things - like how to be an adult, how to maintain the house, and many other things you do not learn when you are young. I wish I could hear her laugh or could see her contagious smile.

I was always the child that would get into trouble all the time, but my mom still loved me, just the same. She was my best friend, and always gave me the best advice, and she knew me better than I even knew myself. Everyone would say how much we were alike, both in terms of how we looked at the same age, and our mannerisms. I am glad I always got told I looked like my mom, or got compared to my mom, because she was the best mom ever and raised me and my brother so well.

For my 18th birthday, my mom got me something I have always wanted, a dog. My mom loved my dog to pieces, and never came back from the shop without getting him something too. I will never forget the confusion my dog, Buddy, had when seeing every red car going past, but not my mom's. My dog was the last present I had from my mom and I feel like a piece of her got left with him - he will love and miss you loads, Mom.

At eighteen, you never in a million years expect to lose your mom. It is a day I will never forget. I hope she is watching over me proudly and watching how much of a terror her third child is (Buddy). I know she will still be watching over me in heaven, with my nan.

Mom - I will always look after Daniel, and Buddy. I love you so much, stay safe up there, until one day I will see you again.

Katrina.



**Victoria Kavanagh**





# 'Victoria, Our Disney Princess'



by Larry and Debbra Kavanagh

*Victoria was Larry's daughter, and Debbra's stepdaughter; she was tragically killed in a road traffic collision on 27th July 2020. Victoria was remembered as a part of the 2020 RoadPeace West Midlands Service to mark World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims. Here, Larry shares some thoughts about the loss of his daughter, while Debbra writes a letter to Victoria.*

My wonderful daughter, Victoria, was also a mom, a sister and a close friend – especially to her work colleagues. Victoria was all of these things and more; she has left behind so much praise, kindness and a lifetime of fantastic memories. I am writing this with a heart that has been broken, I have so many things I want to say about her life - but I have to give up because we have all lost one of life's true angels. I could never express the true depth of feeling felt for Victoria.

The 27th July 2020 is the date that my life came to a stop. Those early days remain so vivid. Victoria's funeral service made me feel so proud, and strangely happy. Victoria's friends and hospital colleagues lined the road to the crematorium, and even more of her colleagues had formed a guard of honour. As I write this, my feelings are still so raw, but I know Victoria is with her mom, and watching over us.

Victoria – I love and miss you so much.  
Dad. xx



**Larry, Debbra and  
Victoria Kavanagh**



Victoria,

That day, time stood still, but not in a good way. The shock of hearing your dad cry out when we heard the news, will stay with me forever. We muddled through in haze and shock, clinging to each other. We were filled with grief and loss, but also immense pride – as the messages came flooding in from your school friends, and your fantastic work family of beautiful nurses, all sending us such love and thoughts. Family have stepped in to help guide us through different moments.

Your funeral was beautiful, and we look back and feel the love, pride and wonder. We have you with us always, in our hearts, and looking down on us from your shelf in the lounge. I feel so proud of what you had achieved and how far you had journeyed. I remember how we would talk about our beloved profession, and the ups and downs of it. We were looking forward to the opportunities that were opening up to you, but you were taken too soon.

We talk about you often – some days with smiles, some days with tears and some days with mixed emotions. Life will never be the same, but I feel so lucky our paths crossed, and I promise to look after your dad.

Sleep tight, our Disney Princess.

Debra. xx



**Victoria Kavanagh**





# 'Our Hearts Will Go On'



by Elwyn and Diane Davies

*Hugh Davies was Elwyn's son and Diane's stepson, Hugh was killed in a road crash in 2015. Elwyn and Diane are friends and supporters of RoadPeace West Midlands. They wanted to contribute to this anthology in the hope that sharing their experience would give help, support and hope, to others who find themselves in a similar, devastating situation.*

On 30th June 2015 my son, Hugh, a senior charge nurse at our local hospital, was on his way to work. A van driver crashed into him, throwing Hugh from his motorbike. Hugh died at the scene. My wife and I received the terrible news while on holiday in Kent. The driver who caused the crash, in broad daylight, claimed that he had lost concentration. He could not explain why he did not see the motorbike, or a car, which he also hit. Hugh took the full impact. The driver pleaded not guilty for almost a year after the crash, even though police and witness evidence proved he was guilty. This resulted in a Crown Court appearance at the end of April 2016, when the driver finally pleaded guilty. Hugh was fifty years old. He was loved by all the family, his friends and his hospital colleagues. The funeral was held near to the hospital and was full of nurses, doctors and all who knew him. We were told that the church had never been so packed. The music from the movie *Titanic* was played at Hugh's funeral, hence the title of this submission. A light went out in our hearts that day. Hugh left behind a heartbroken daughter who was about to leave for Bath University. Hugh was so proud of his daughter and excited for her future.



**Diane and Elwyn  
Davies**

In June of this year, it will be six years since Hugh was tragically taken from us. A day does not pass without him coming into our heads. There is no manual for grief. Emotions become a mixture of anger, blame, guilt, emptiness – feeling lost in a world that moves on, when we want it to stop, to go back in time...

That sickening feeling of utter disbelief returns so often. It comes whilst driving along, gardening, listening to music; just everyday situations, even during mid-sentence it can happen, it never goes away.

We have suffered so much loss. Hugh was my middle son of three sons. His



brothers died in 1991 and 1997. So, the impact of the road crash was a final straw, with enormous consequences for us all. We want to help others and we need to say to other families who suffer from losing a loved one in a road crash that - if we can survive such devastation, then you CAN and you WILL survive. It takes unbelievable courage to carry on and to start surfacing from the darkness. Family and close friends do help. We often cry, for a man it can be difficult to openly cry, but men do cry, and there is nothing wrong with that. It is so important to let your feelings out and to talk. True friends will just listen, no words or solutions, but just listen, and never ever say to you, "It's time you got over this," or "It's time to move on."

In the beginning, friends are there offering support, but as time goes by, they get on with their own lives. This you accept, but true friends and family never stop putting a hand on your shoulder and taking time to say, "Are you okay?" The look in their eyes lets us know exactly what they mean. We now know that we must do this to others too, who lose loved ones, through any reason. We have dark days, we always will. For our survival, we had to learn how to manage our grief. We slowly began to attend invitations to social functions knowing that if the feeling of panic gripped one of us, we would do a disappearing act. We learned to cope and choose where we go; walking through woods or along a riverbank helps us both. We will never get over losing Hugh or his brothers, they never leave us. Our lives changed forever the day Hugh was killed, but we keep going, we keep living through our memories.

We send our heartfelt love and support to all those who read this short account of our loss and we hope that in some small way it helps families who are grieving the loss of a loved one, due to a road crash. Loss of life is so traumatic for those of us left behind. Our thoughts and prayers for you all.

There is a book which sits on our coffee table and which we dip into from time to time, it is *The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse* by Charlie Mackesy. It is our recommendation to you.

We would like to give special thanks to our Police Liaison Officer, DC Tara Atkinson, who looked after us so well, and to Lucy Harrison and Jane Evans for their hard work in compiling this anthology. We would also like to say a special thanks to our close family, whose love and support continue to mean so much to us. Finally, a thank you to RoadPeace, who do such wonderful work for us all.



**Tanaya and Hugh Davies**





# 'Sudden - Six Years On'



by Susan Devenney



*Susan Devenney was one of the first members of the RoadPeace West Midlands Support Group. Susan's father, Reginald, was hit by a dangerous driver on June 7th 2014 - he suffered serious injuries and sadly died in hospital, three weeks later.*



**Susan Devenney**

Sudden - just a small simple word but to me it opens a cavity that can never be closed again.

The phone call - the taking in of the information, however little you take in, it blows your mind. Oh, that pain that takes your breath away, it seems never ending.

My dad, my hero, survived the impact of this weapon called a car. It then became a journey, a path, we were all so frightened to walk. The visiting, the waiting, the praying, and most of all the hoping. Oh, the hoping.

Twenty-three days of watching this strong man weaken and fade away slowly, in front of our eyes. The pain was unbearable, our hopes shattered and our lives in pieces, as I held my dad in my arms. Dad's body was limp as he slipped into a sleep, never to wake again.

My head, buzzing. How? Why? Dad's life should not have ended this way, walking across the road, only a few yards from his home, on a Saturday lunch time. Visibility good, road conditions dry. Dad had no idea that a driver, behind the wheel of a one-day-old, powerful car, was approaching. A driver showing off by driving in an aggressive manner; undertaking and showing no respect for other road users.

On that dreadful day, 7th June 2014, my dad was not given a chance of completing his crossing safely.

Dad used to say to me, "Don't worry so much. I know how to fall without hurting myself, learnt that in the Army." However, that was of no use to him when he was being tossed into the air, landing after hitting the windscreen, roof and bonnet, of this weapon called a car, that was used on him.





Remorse shown by the driver? None at all. No, he just got out of his car, checked the damage, and rang a friend. Not an ambulance. At Crown Court, the driver's defence barrister tried to explain his actions as being down to shock. I have no words to describe how I feel – I can only say that this will always haunt me; no remorse for taking a life.

Six years on, does time heal? How many times do people say that to you? Well, time does not heal, but in its defence, it helps. So too, do organisations such as RoadPeace and Brake, and Family Liaison Officers, some family members, and some friends; most of all though, the people in the RoadPeace West Midlands Support Group. Thank goodness there are people there who understand. No words need to be spoken; they just know how you feel. Why do they? It is because they are all treading the same path of emotions, not at the same time, but they are there and they understand.

Just like me, this remarkable group of people have experienced 'SUDDEN' - that little word that has opened up a cavity, that can never be filled up again. Why? Well, because we are missing our loved one or loved ones and they are the only ones that could fill this cavity for us.

I personally find the support group and the special services held in memory of our loved ones comforting because this is what we are left with - memories to hold close to our broken hearts. One of the things that comforts me the most is knowing that my dad, my hero, is never forgotten. His life was precious to me. I admired him, he was my strength, he was simply, my dad. Taken suddenly, before his time.

I thank my dad for his wisdom and wicked sense of fun. I feel so blessed that he was such a huge part of my life - my hero Reginald 'Reggie' William Morris.



**Reginald Morris**



# 'My Thoughts'



by Jack Dromey MP

*Jack Dromey was the Member of Parliament for Birmingham Erdington, until his sad death in January 2022. Jack was a close and much respected friend of RoadPeace West Midlands, who was committed to helping road crash victims; he spoke at the launch of this anthology, in September 2021. Jack is greatly missed.*

Two tragic road collisions involving victims from Erdington, have led me to work closely with bereaved families campaigning for justice for their loved ones. The families' determination through grief, to campaign for justice is remarkable, and never ceases to be an inspiration to those around them. Their stories are heartbreaking. Underneath their resolve to secure justice, is also a deep sense of hope that through their campaigns, no other family should ever have to endure the grief that they have lived with.

In July 2012, Sarah Child, 26, and her sister Claire, who was thirty weeks pregnant, watched a film together at their mum and stepdad's house, before taking a short walk. As they crossed the Walsall Road, they were struck by a car that was being driven at 64mph. The driver made no attempt to slow down. Sarah was thrown into the air, and tragically died from her injuries. Thankfully, Claire and her unborn baby survived the collision.

The aftermath of Sarah's death was devastating for her mum, Avril. After the initial trauma of the event, Avril was overcome with frustration at the subsequent trial of the driver. After pleading guilty to *Causing Death by Dangerous Driving*, the driver received just a four-year sentence. As Avril has said to me often, "If he had killed with any other weapon, he would have been tried for murder." Even more frustrating, was that while the driver was disqualified from driving, this ban would start during his time in prison, and therefore did nothing to prevent him from driving upon his release.

Avril resolved to prevent these two injustices from occurring again, and it has been an honour to work with her on her campaign. A few years ago, together, we were successful in ensuring that those disqualified from driving serve their bans on release from prison, not during their sentence. The campaign to ensure those who cause death by dangerous driving face tougher sentences, continues.

In July 2016, three-year-old Poppy-Arabella Clarke, and her mum, Rachel, were



waiting to cross the Chester Road. As the pedestrian lights turned green, they made their way across the road before they were mown down by a driver who failed to see the red light. Rachel woke up in the gutter with serious injuries. Poppy-Arabella lay just a few feet away. Sadly, Poppy-Arabella would later die from her injuries.

During the following court case it came to light that the seventy-two-year-old driver had been told twice by optometrists in the weeks leading up to the collision, that even while wearing his glasses, his poor eyesight made him unfit to drive. Despite these warnings, the driver still got behind the wheel that day, without his glasses. Witnesses explained that the driver did not swerve, did not brake and did not stop. He only pulled over when flagged down by another witness.

Since then, Poppy-Arabella's parents have campaigned to make it a requirement of medical professionals to inform the DVLA of someone medically unfit to drive, and for that to be underpinned by changes in the law. After the grief they have suffered, they are determined that no one else should have their lives shattered as theirs were, on the day when young Poppy-Arabella lost her life. It has been an immense privilege to witness their devotion to Poppy-Arabella and the love for her that will always endure.

The campaigns born out of these two collisions are so powerful because of their exposure of the total inadequacy of the law, for the families of the victims of road traffic crashes. It seems incomprehensible that someone can kill another human being by dangerous driving and receive just a four-year sentence. Likewise, it seems unbelievable that there is no proper process for the DVLA to be notified of those clearly unfit to drive. Rectifying these two gaps in our justice and licensing system could prevent so much more suffering. The two families affected in my constituency have shown remarkable fortitude to pursue these changes, and as their Member of Parliament, I will continue to ensure their voices are heard.



**Jack Dromey MP**





# 'A Victim Personal Statement'



by Lyn Drury

*Lyn's daughter, Amy, was twenty-two years old when she was killed in a road traffic collision, in 2017. Lyn shares her Victim Personal Statement, in which she reflects on the immediate and devastating loss of her daughter. Lyn read this statement in court, before the sentencing. These statements are the only chance grieving families have to convey to the court how they have been affected. Amy went to school with Kieran Rutter, who was killed in a separate road traffic collision, and is also remembered in this anthology.*

My life before losing Amy was a happy and comfortable one. My only worry was about Amy; she had an ongoing battle with anorexia - an illness which made her vulnerable. I loved to spend time with all my family, but I would say a lot of time was spent with Amy. Amy was my only daughter, we had a special relationship, we were extremely close. Amy would often refer to me as being her best friend, and she was mine. We would do lots of things together, we enjoyed each other's company, and we valued each other's opinions.



**Lyn Drury and  
Amy Savage**

Life as I knew it ended on the morning of 2nd July 2017. Losing Amy is indescribable. How are you supposed to carry on after losing a child? I constantly relive that Sunday morning, when two police officers came to my door; I can still see their faces. This is every parent's worst nightmare, and I am living it. I relive going to see Amy in the mortuary, I remember the Family Liaison Officer warning me about visible glass in Amy's head, telling me that it could not be removed just yet. I was not prepared for seeing my beautiful girl lying there, her eyes and mouth still slightly open. This image does not go away. I visualise the crash over and over in my head. The thought of Amy lying there dying - it breaks me that I was not there for her when she needed me the most.

I often think about my reaction after the police told me that horrific news. I gave the news to my oldest son over the phone, not thinking how this was impacting on him, as I was telling him. I did not realise that my youngest son was sitting in his bedroom, listening to everything being said; and I did not think to go to him



and comfort him. I try to explain my feelings, but the truth is I do not understand them - overwhelming sadness, anger, an overall sense of emptiness. Try to imagine how you would feel if you lost a child - if you quadruple this feeling you still would not be anywhere near the pain that I feel each day. A physical pain, my heart has been ripped out.

My life changed that day, I am not the person I used to be. I have been left withdrawn and not wanting to do anything. I still think that Amy is going to walk back through the door or phone me - the realisation that she will not makes my heart sink. I cannot help but feel guilty that I am not giving my sons more support. The truth is, my mind is totally consumed with Amy, all my thoughts and feelings are centred around her, constantly. Losing Amy has destroyed our family - Ryan and Elliot have both struggled emotionally, this in turn affects me, I worry about them a lot. Our family have had a lot of happy events since Amy was taken - a wedding, an engagement and most recently a new nephew for Amy. She should be here to witness all of this. Again, I have guilt on these special days. I always have this overwhelming sadness - sadness because Amy is not here. Also, because I know Amy had longed for her own engagement, wedding and children. This has been taken away from her. I will never see Amy in a wedding dress, or walking down the aisle, or telling me that I am going to be a gran. Amy dreamt of having her own place with Darren, having her own family and having lots of animals.

I worry about everything these days; I feel anxious and panicky. I worry if my sons or stepsons are out in a car in case there is a collision. If they go socialising in Leek, I worry about them bumping into the man who took my daughter's life. This man has shown no remorse at all. We have seen a post on social media where a young girl asked him how he sleeps at night after he caused Amy's death; his response to this girl was to write, "I hope it happens to you." How could anyone wish such a thing on someone? I have been sent screenshots of this man's social media, of posts in which he shows a complete lack of respect to Amy and our family. I no longer want to go into my own town because of the thought of possibly seeing him.

Since losing Amy, I have endured Christmas, her birthday and Mother's Day without her. Time has not healed anything. I do not sleep, I do not eat properly, I have a fear of answering the phone, I do not like to drive on country roads - it makes me nervous. I cannot think straight, I am disorganised and this affects my work, most days I do not want to get out of bed. I make excuses not to go out with friends because I do not want to socialise. I no longer do any of the things I once enjoyed doing. I cry a lot - mostly in private because I worry about worrying others. I have stupid, irrational thoughts. I have found it increasingly difficult to cope with life without Amy, resulting in me being prescribed medication by my doctor, and seeing a counsellor.



My life will never be the same again. Our family will never be the same again. There is no 'getting over it' - losing a child is not something that you can ever get over. Even a good day is a sad day. I am not living; I am existing with a brokenness that can never be healed. It feels like living two lives – one where I pretend I am okay, and another where my heart is screaming in pain. As long as I breathe, my heart will ache. I feel I died with Amy that day. I have lost Amy, but Amy lost her life.



**Amy Savage**



# 'My Brother, Wallace'



by Samantha Edwards

*Samantha's brother, Wallace, was killed in a road crash in November 2020. Samantha wrote this submission after attending the West Midlands Support Group, for the first time.*



**Wallace Wakeling**

It is now two months since my brother Wallace's life was so abruptly taken, due to a driver not paying attention.

The phone call, that unbearable phone call, that everyone prays will never happen to them, happened to me. I felt like I had been physically smashed against a wall. In that split second my life had changed, never to be the same again.

Wallace was a beautiful person; he had an infectious sense of humour and a cheeky smile that would make anyone feel at ease. He loved life, he was a free spirit and lived life to the full, always looking for the next adventure.

He was my most favourite person on this planet. We talked about everything, and no matter where he was living, even Spain, we always made time for each other. It did not matter what it was about - relationships, work, even sending photos of our dinner. We always talked.

Grief is always a difficult process to go through, but when it is an untimely death, as well as being sudden and traumatic, it is almost unbearable.

The value of RoadPeace is critical in times like these. I have a long journey ahead of me; but knowing I have support along the way, makes such a difference.

Broken-hearted.  
Samantha Edwards.



**Samantha Edwards**





# 'Hope'



by Jane Evans

*Jane first became a RoadPeace volunteer in 2006, manning the helpline. In 2010, Jane became a befriender, and in 2016 helped to set up the West Midlands Support Group; Jane was the West Midlands Support Group Facilitator until 2021. Jane's husband, David, was killed in 2004 by a hit-and-run driver. The driver was never found.*



Whatever  
the future holds,

Whatever the present  
unfolds,

Love is shaping  
the future:

new shape,  
new fear,  
new hope,  
new me?



Jane Evans

*2010*





When my husband was killed, I experienced some very deep and dark emotions. I had always enjoyed drawing and found that sketching became a way to deal with those emotions. I literally drew my emotions. This sketch reflects the time when I found lightness and hope were beginning to grow once more.



**David Evans**





# 'The Visit'



by Emily Evans

*Emily became a supporter of RoadPeace after her father, David Evans, was killed by a hit-and-run driver in 2004. The driver has never been traced. This poem was written after the family went to identify David's body as part of the police investigation. Emily was 19 at the time.*

Strange all the formality just to see my dad.  
We were sat down in a chair whilst three policemen fixed their stare.  
“Now, we must emphasise, he won't look the way he had.”

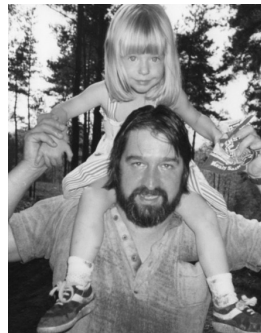
They all blocked the door to where my father now lay.  
And, we were all trapped, whilst three policemen just flapped:  
“Don't worry if you have to let go, everyone reacts in a different way.”

Silence.  
It was time to visit dad.

He looked tall, for once,  
and it took time to walk around his sleeping body.  
I crept not wanting to wake him, I know how cranky he can get.  
I stroked his hair, but my daddy was not there –  
I kissed his skin but there was no heat from him –  
I studied his familiar face and thought:  
“Just another hit and run case.”



**David Evans**



**Emily and David  
Evans**



**HEARTBREAK, HOPE**

**and a**

*Call for Change*







# 'My priorities to tackle road crashes and support families'



by Simon Foster

*Simon Foster was elected as the Police and Crime Commissioner for the West Midlands, in May 2021.*

Losing a loved one in a road traffic collision is a senseless and tragic catastrophe. The unexpected and sudden nature of these road crashes means they shatter the lives of families, who are left behind to pick up the pieces. As I stated in my election manifesto, it is neither acceptable nor inevitable that anyone – pedestrian, cyclist or motorist – be killed or seriously injured. When we leave our home each day, we should feel safe and confident about the journey ahead.

Behind every road crash statistic are family members who must somehow overcome their shock and exhaustion, pull together, and do their best by their loved one for whom they are mourning. This is the reason that I allocate funding from my Victims' Fund to deliver a bespoke support service. This is modelled largely on the National Homicide Service, and offers support to bereaved families following the death of a loved one as a result of a road traffic collision.

The Victim Support Service assigns dedicated case workers to support a family's welfare, while helping with practical needs relating to funeral arrangements, childcare, transportation and financial assistance. They also coordinate existing support services. I realise it is not only road deaths that shatter lives. This is why I extended the remit of my road service to include those impacted by serious injury as well.

Although I commission this service in the West Midlands, I am aware that this level of support is not currently being offered to families in other parts of the country. Whilst the Homicide Service has been well-received nationally for bereaved families suffering from a homicide, there is a notable gap for the same level of support following a road death or serious injury. Bereavement under any of these circumstances – whether as a consequence of a homicide or a road traffic collision – is sudden and leaves victims' families needing intensive support for a prolonged period of time. More can and should be done to level up support nationally for families, following the loss of a loved one as a consequence of a road traffic collision.



I am involved, via the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC), in work they are leading on to inform a Department for Transport and Home Office review of roads policing. This is an extensive project with many strands of work but a key one is post-crash care for victims. There is a definite consensus that not enough is being done to support families and this work will be looking at how, nationally, that support can be improved and more consistently offered in all parts of the country. The West Midlands service is held up as best practice in this work and only a few other PCCs commission an enhanced offer.

I am grateful for the opportunity to have contributed to this anthology. I pay tribute to the work of RoadPeace and the West Midlands Support Group. They have campaigned extensively for the victims of road crashes, offer a peer support service, organise the annual Service of Remembrance for the Midlands and provide a platform, through the anthology, to bereaved families who have lost a loved one in a road traffic crash. My sincere thoughts are with those bereaved families.



**Simon Foster**



# 'A Speech to Remember'



by Preet Kaur Gill MP

*Preet Kaur Gill is the Member of Parliament for Birmingham Edgbaston, and Shadow International Development Secretary. Preet was a huge support to Elaine Gordon and Lucy Harrison in their campaign to prevent second post-mortems on road crash victims. Preet gave this speech at the RoadPeace West Midlands Service to mark World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims, on Sunday 17th November 2019.*

In 2018, 1,784 people were killed on our roads and around 28,000 seriously injured. That is why days like the World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims, are vital. They allow us to take stock, to remember the impact on the individual, and the families of victims of road traffic crashes; and take decisive action to prevent and rectify the dangers that exist on our roads.



**Preet Kaur  
Gill MP**

Since the day was first commemorated, more than 30 million people have died on the world's roads. It is non-drivers who are most at risk; as a pedestrian, you are nineteen times more likely to be killed on Britain's roads than if you are in a car.

Those figures are staggering and heartbreaking. Beneath them too, we must never forget that every person who is killed on our roads was a human with a life, with a family, with a past. They are not just a statistic. We must also be careful to recognise the differences inherent in road traffic deaths where, due to their sudden nature, there is rarely time for friends and families to say goodbye.

Almost exactly a year ago, and only a few days after I was commemorating the 2018 World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims, I stood up in Parliament and read an extract from the poem that Lucy Harrison had written about her experience of losing a loved one in a road traffic crash. As I read, I could see the impact it was having on my colleagues from all different political parties, and I felt honoured to have so directly brought the voice of the bereaved to the seat of power.

RoadPeace organises remembrance events and the work they do year-round is vital



to building a community and a stronger voice to call for change.

So, what needs to happen?

We must stop pretending that we can deliver safe roads on the cheap. In 2010, there were immediate cuts to the Road Safety Revenue Grant and the Road Safety Capital Grant was abolished. Safety improvements have stalled, and it is totally unacceptable to try and cut corners when people's lives are at stake.

We need to look at sentencing. I was pleased the 'Roads to Justice' led by bereaved families and the road safety charity Brake, forced the government into action and to review sentencing in relation to dangerous driving. The fact that the consultation received more than 9,000 responses reinforces the breadth of interest and feeling. However, despite promises, at each stage, the government has hesitated to take action.

We must change the way we use language. If someone breaks the law and commits a crime on the road, we must call it what it is. The thing that I have been told by numerous victims and victim's families is that using the word 'accident' trivialises what has happened. This is the same in regard to the term 'careless'. Both terms clearly undermine the act. I am not saying there will not be genuinely unavoidable accidents, but all too often we conflate the two. So, we must stop calling collisions accidents and we must transform our legal framework and our justice system to send the message that road crime is a real crime; only then will we all be able to treat it as such.

We need to listen to the emergency services. They undertake unbelievable work responding to crashes and collisions and this can put a clear physical and emotional strain on them. All too often they are just expected to 'do their job' but we need to listen and learn from the people on the ground dealing with deaths and injuries on our roads, day in and day out.

Finally, and most importantly, we need to listen to those who have been affected and have gone through the pain and heartache either as a victim, or as a loved one of a victim. This brings me to my own work with Lucy Harrison and Elaine Gordon.

I have worked to support Lucy and Elaine as they have successfully campaigned to push Birmingham City Council to commit to a 12-month trial on a CT post-mortem scanner for victims of road traffic collisions. The scanner will provide an alternative to the often unnecessary and invasive, second post-mortems being carried out on the victims of road death. This is a key example of where it is important to listen to the





bereaved. I have been told by numerous families that they have had to wait for a second post-mortem as part of the accused's defence in court. This can add further grief for the families of the victim and lead to delays before they can bury their loved ones.

It has been a pleasure working with these two amazing, driven and hardworking women on this campaign. I am pleased that the council listened to their experiences and I know we will all be keeping a close eye on the impact of the trial.

I know that it is election season and pledges are everywhere but, I will end with my own to victims of road traffic crashes. I know that for the families and friends of road traffic victims it is not just one day a year when you remember or think about what has happened, but the feeling of unity that exists at those remembrance events - the chance to share stories and plot a more positive future are vital. So, I will continue to listen to you. I will continue to hear you and I will continue to push for justice.



**Lucy Harrison, Preet Kaur Gill  
and Elaine Gordon**





# 'What is lodged at the back of my mind for another time'



by Andy Gillespie

*Andy Gillespie has worked for the Fire Service for 20 years and is currently serving as a Watch Commander at Walsall White Watch.*

After twenty years in the field of dealing with fires and road traffic collisions, I would be the first to tell you like a badge of honour, "I've been there, seen it all, done it all and there's nothing left to shock or phase me." The bravado is there like a warm and fuzzy wrap-around comfort blanket for this firefighter. On the occasions when I get home from work and my wife or kids will casually ask me how my shift was, I will bat it straight off and respond with, "Same old same old, the football's on, what's for tea?" whether I've had an easy shift or a shift of turmoil. The latter is thankfully sparse but after twenty years, the times that something traumatic lodges at the back of my mind, is really adding up. My family do not need to hear the traumatic details and I do not really need to relive a bad shift.

Home time is home time. Work stays at work.

As a generalisation, men are good at compartmentalising things to the back of their minds and boxing off their thoughts - for days, weeks, months, even years down the line, if necessary. On the flip side however, when guys come to verbalising those thoughts, the words struggle to come out and get stuck. Whether it is something from last week or last year, whether it has a happy or a sad ending - if it has involved people suffering then I have always put some emotional investment into it. It is my human instinct to care. Whether you have pranged your dad's car that you have borrowed, and he's "gonna go mad", or you have run over a dog, or if there is a loss of human life - I am feeling your pain. I will always empathise with you - I cannot help it.

Sure, I get paid as some might say, which is true; and I need the money to support my family. But fundamentally, any emergency service worker will be working for the simple pleasure of being there for you in your darkest hour, when you need help the most. There are a thousand other ways I can earn the same modest amount of money I get without any of the risk to my physical or mental well-being, but where is the sense of achievement in that?



**Andy Gillespie**



When your boy tells his teacher that his dad is “a real-life hero” or your daughter tells you “you’re the greatest” - no wage in the world can compensate for that feeling. I have never had one particular thing that I have been good at in life, no subject I was the best at, at school, or not much of note that I can bring to the table. So, when I think back on what is lodged at the back of my mind in later life, I want to know that I have made some kind of difference for people. When people are at their most desperate, their lowest, their most painful - I have this instinctive urge to be there for them. The gratitude that people show in despair is always the most sincere. Whether it is cutting them free from a car, carrying out CPR, or simply holding their hand through the pain, I am the guy who is there for you and I feel such privilege and take such pride from it. In the modern era, if you are politically correct, I find that in a life and death situation, political correctness goes out of the window.

I am going to put an arm around your shoulder when you cry. I am going to call you “darling” or “my love” or “sweetheart” when you are in pain. I am going to sit, listen to you, empathise and take on your emotional burden.

All of these things that are politically incorrect, that are deemed as unprofessional, I will ignore them because I have fathomed from twenty years’ experience, that I know what helps people through the worst of times. At countless road traffic collisions over the past twenty years, I have dealt with the death of infants, children, teens, adults and the elderly. I have dealt with the survivors, the grieving relatives, the witnesses, the work colleagues, those to blame, those not to blame and those who feel they are to blame. Each and every one of them has taken a little piece of my heart away with them. So, whenever you see me or another firefighter, a police officer or a paramedic - feel free to offer us a big hug, I am certainly not going to turn it down.

And when you see us and ask if we are all right and we laugh and joke and say, “Yeah, couldn’t be better” – remember, what is lodged at the back of our minds for another time.





# 'My Story'



by Elaine Gordon

*This is a speech that was given by Elaine, as part of the first RoadPeace West Midlands Service to mark World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims. The speech was given at St. Martin in the Bull Ring on Sunday 18th November 2018.*

On 18th December 2014, my family had been living a fairly normal life. We were looking forward to the preparations for the Christmas season. We had planned to go to my sister Gina and her husband's house for a Boxing Day family get together.

On Friday 19th December, everything changed. That morning, my sister Gina had got into her car and begun her journey to work at the hospital. About ten minutes into her journey, another driver came speeding down the road in his girlfriend's car. He was driving at about 70mph on a 30mph road. He was uninsured and unlicensed. He crashed into Gina, in an almost head-on collision; he had veered over onto Gina's side of the road. He did not stop to call for help - he got out of his car and went over and looked into Gina's car. He saw that she was dead and then ran off. We are told that she would have died instantly from her injuries.

While he was running away, Gina's car caught fire. We never got to physically see Gina again. Later that day, the police found this man and arrested and charged him. That year, we went through a court trial, where he denied the charges. He was found guilty and sentenced to eight years in prison.

On the day that Gina was killed, everything changed for us as a family. We had lost someone who was so precious and special to us. We were thrown into the darkness of grief. The days and the nights that followed felt like utter despair. The grief was overwhelming and unbearable. I often wondered, how was I going to survive this? How was I going to live without the person who had been beside me, since I could remember?

I had lost my sister and I had lost my closest friend. It has been the most awful loss that I have ever experienced. It has been hard to come to terms with the fact that Gina went out to work one day, and she never came home; and we never saw her again. Words do not seem enough to express how deep and horrific that pain has been. The shock and disbelief of this has taken years to come to terms with.



A road traffic death is an unnatural, traumatic death. The suddenness of it, makes it difficult to comprehend. It has now been almost four years since Gina was killed - but it does not feel like four years have passed. Over this time, I have learnt that you learn to live with your loss and your pain. You learn to adjust your life around it. It is no longer the life I had before, it is different, because I am now different.

Though I have lost my best friend, I am really thankful that I was blessed to have had Gina in my life. She did not live as long as we, her family and friends, would have liked; but in the years that she had, I know she made the most of them. Gina was a loving, compassionate and generous woman and I am not saying this because she was my sister – but, because I saw her practise this. She was always ready to help others, no matter what the cost was, she gave of herself to her family, and to people in need. She did not like to see people suffering, she would always try to help and give. Gina also really cared about living a fulfilled life, setting her goals, going after them and achieving them. This is what she did in her career, and in setting up her own business. She was artistic and creative. She was also my best encourager and motivator. I would tell her about something that I wanted to do, and she would say to me, “Well, what is stopping you?” or, I would have some form of excuse, and she would tell me to “stop procrastinating and do it.” That is what she did.

It will always sadden me that my family and I do not get to make any more memories with Gina, and that we will not laugh with her again. But I can now look back, and be thankful for what I did have, and for the imprint that she has left on my life, and the lives of others. Gina lived a generous and a fulfilled life. Gina has taught me that you should make the most of your life and your days. Though she is not here, her memories, for me, live on. I know that Gina is safe with God, and one day I will see her again.



**Gina Johnson**





# 'Hope after the Rain'



by Elaine Gordon

*Elaine's sister, Gina, was killed by a dangerous driver on 19th December 2014. Elaine became one of the first members of the West Midlands Support Group; she has campaigned extensively for changes in the way road crash victims are treated. In 2019, the Chief Coroner issued guidance on post-mortems, which recognised the concerns that Elaine had raised, and some of the work she had done. The guidance also paid tribute to the life of Gina.*



This picture was taken by my sister Gina's husband. It is of a rainbow, over what was their garden. Gina loved rainbows; she always looked for them when the sun shone after a downpour of rain. She loved the colours and the brightness of them; they uplifted her. She found something very special and beautiful in the array of colours that spread through the sky. I remember being at her home with her, while we sat and looked out of the window, and she pointed out a rainbow. She would always seem to see them before I did - they gave her such joy, and her face would light up after seeing them.

A rainbow is a symbol of hope. When Gina was killed, by a man driving at over double



the speed limit, I felt like every ounce of hope had been taken from me and crushed. I felt completely broken on the inside and the outside. Every day when I opened my eyes, the pain felt so overwhelming. I thought that I was drowning, and I could not swim against the tide and waves of loss and grief. Knowing Gina was not here, felt unbearable. The emptiness of her loss sounded so silent; I would never hear her speak to me again, and I would no longer hear her laughter and her jokes.



**Gina Johnson and  
Elaine Gordon**

Life changed from being in colour to a dark grey. All of the beautiful colours of life had been taken and exchanged for only sadness and dullness. Could I live again, without her? I struggled to get through those days. Those days turned into years and it felt like the darkest moments of my life. I felt as though I was in the deepest, darkest of pits and could not climb out. Often, I did not even have the strength to try.

The loss for me was so great and overwhelming. I felt as though I had entered the door to an all-consuming grief. I grieved for the beautiful sister that I had lost, for all the things that we had planned to do together. My heart yearned to speak to Gina, to call her on the phone, but I could not. Nothing prepares you for missing someone like that.

The pain of losing her does not go away, but now I have learned to live with the pain. I have come to understand that joy and pain can walk alongside each other. You can feel both emotions at the same time, and still manage to face the day. There are still difficult days - but I can smile again, and I can feel hopeful again. I now remember the fun times we had and the laughter we shared, and all the jokes. I can laugh now; I did not think I ever would or even that I could. I do not spend much time now, thinking about that awful day we lost Gina, and the days that followed. I think about the beautiful person she was, and the impact she left on my life, and the lives of others. I think about our happy memories - though I still have moments of deep sadness.

It has taken me a while, but now I can look at the rainbows and see hope - and see the beauty that Gina saw. Life is no longer grey – the colour has come back, though my outlook is different. My faith in Jesus has taught me to keep going by holding on to the knowledge that one day I will see Gina again.

Even through deep devastation and loss, hope can still arise.





# 'My Story'



by Mandy Gayle

*Mandy is a member of the RoadPeace West Midlands Support Group. Mandy delivered the below speech at the West Midlands Service to mark World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims, at St. Martin in the Bull Ring, on Sunday 17th November 2019.*

The 19th February 2018 had been a normal day; I went to work, and after at about 6.15pm, I took my dog, Ralph, for a walk. As I walked onto the main road, I could see police and ambulance lights flashing. I could see that there was a person in the road, who must be dead, because the body had been covered with blankets. There were people standing there with their phones, taking photos of this person under the blankets. I did not stop. I carried on walking. I thought to myself that even though someone had lost a loved one, it was some kind of comfort, that people from the nearby bungalows had come out to cover the body and were acting out of respect. When I walked back along the road, even more people had gathered and were staring at the body. That night, I thought about the people who had tried to save the person, and had covered the person with a blanket, and I felt thankful for them.

The next day, while I was at work, my mum phoned me, and she said that my dad was missing. I said, "Someone was killed last night, right by my house." I ran out of work, and straight to my son and his girlfriend, and I just started to ramble that they needed to come with me. My mum and sister had called the police, we did not know where my dad was. My dad would come to my house each day to walk my dog, I went home to see if he was there. My son and I could find no sign of my dad.

I went back to the road where I had seen the body lying the night before, and I knocked on the doors of the nearby bungalows. A man answered and I asked him if it was a man in his eighties that had been killed the night before, and he said, "Yes."

I then had to go home and tell my mum and sister that it was probably my dad, and that he was dead. Twenty-two hours after the hit-and-run, the police came to tell me that yes, it was my dad who had been killed, while he was at the pelican crossing. At first, I thought they had got it wrong, because the body I saw lying in the road the night before was nowhere near the pelican crossing. Neighbours that I knew, and neighbours that I had never spoken to before, found that they needed to stop me, to





tell me what had happened on that night. They asked me if I wanted to watch the security cameras that they had at their house and said that they had handed footage to the police. I spent all that week walking my dog either early in the morning or late at night, so that I could avoid being stopped by more people, and being told, again, what had happened.

When we finally got to court, it was no shock to learn that the driver was responsible for killing my dad. The driver had been racing with another car, in rush hour traffic, when he hit my dad on the pelican crossing. The nineteen-year-old driver did stop after he hit my dad, but only to push his mangled bonnet back down, and to punch a hole through his shattered windscreen so he could see, then he drove off. This driver never even looked once to see if my dad was okay or to see if he could help him. He then took the number plates off his car and dumped it. The police had traced the driver, they contacted his parents, and said that if he handed himself in quickly, he would get a lighter sentence.

It was nearly a year after the collision, that we were in court, and I was listening to what had happened to my dad on that night; even though neighbours had already told me some of it. In court, I had to listen to how the driver was a good person, and had never been in trouble before, that he had been studying law. Six months after the collision he had changed to a different course. The driver was studying at the same university as my son. Yet again, I felt shocked to the core. My family were suffering, but this driver was busy planning his future, he was not even expecting to go to jail for what he had done. The judge made the point that the driver had, had many opportunities to plead guilty; but had only decided to do so nearly a year later.

In two statements, the driver said that my dad had run out in front of the car. Then he said it was the other car, that he was racing, that hit my dad. It was all lies.

He was sentenced to four years and nine months in prison, and that was after a third being taken off because he had pleaded guilty. With good behaviour, he will only actually serve half of his sentence, and will be released in July 2020. I have been told that we are lucky that the driver pleaded guilty, and lucky that he got a custodial sentence, because many do not even get that.

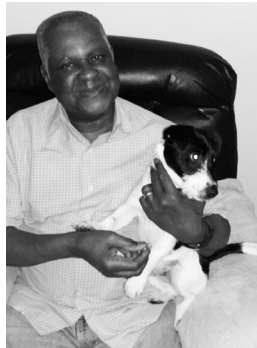
Every night I go to bed and I dream about my dad being covered by those blankets. Sometimes this feels like a comfort or blessing, and sometimes it feels like a nightmare. The only people I think are lucky are the driver's family, because they will get to have him back in their lives next year.

After my dad's death, I found the charity RoadPeace, and I went to my first support



group meeting. This was the first time that I found that my brain could stop, and that I could think clearly. To be among other people, who really do know what you are going through, helps me a lot. Some meetings I talk, and other meetings I am quiet and just clear my head.

I share my story with you today, in memory of my dad, Hopton Gayle.



**Hopton Gayle**





# 'Hit-and-Run'



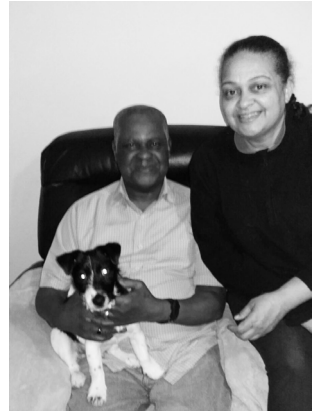
by Mandy Gayle

*Mandy's father, Hopton, was killed by a hit-and-run driver, in 2018. In this poem, Mandy reflects on the suddenness and shock of a road death, and the particular pain caused by drivers who fail to remain at the scene.*

Time.  
Understanding.  
Caring.  
Preparing.  
Sharing laughter, special moments to remember.  
To know - and talk about how things will end.  
To understand, how to feel as a family.

## KILLING BY HIT-AND-RUN

Immediate.  
No goodbyes.  
No last hug, or kiss.  
No time - because within that second of impact  
the person has gone.  
Family mourns, alone.  
To learn how the law works, in hit-and-run.  
To learn that the person who kills has more rights,  
than the person killed.  
To know about courts,  
and the unfairness of a sentence.  
To know the driver's sentence has a time limit -  
my grief is NEVER-ENDING.



**Hopton Gayle, Mandy  
Gayle and Ralph**



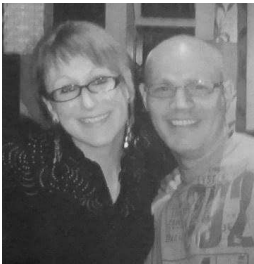


# 'Storm Clouds and Rainbows'



by Lucy Harrison

*Lucy's brother, Peter, was killed by a speeding, hit-and-run driver in November 2014. Lucy was one of the first members of the West Midlands Support Group, and became the West Midlands Coordinator in 2017. Together with Elaine Gordon, Lucy campaigned on the issue of second post-mortems; resulting in the Chief Coroner issuing new guidance on post-mortems in September 2019.*



**Lucy Harrison and Peter Price**

For my contribution to this anthology, I wanted to share two poems, which although written not that far apart in time, could not be more different in the emotions that they convey.

After Peter was killed, I lost my faith in the world. I struggled desperately with the fact that my big brother, who had always been there, had suddenly gone. There had been neither a warning or a goodbye; we went from looking forward to Christmas to planning a funeral. Peter was loyal, loud, hilariously funny, and he always gave his absolute best to everything. After his death, my brother's body was retained for weeks, while the defendant was allowed to consider a second post-mortem. This broke something inside of me which will never repair. The whole justice system felt like it cared more for the defendant than it did the victim; it seemed like my brother was no longer considered as human, just a piece of evidence.

It took eighteen months for the court case to complete, and if the hurt was not already deep enough, we were faced with a defendant who was only sorry for himself. He had told all kinds of lies in his police interviews, and had continued to drive until an interim disqualification was eventually imposed. In court, we listened to information about the defendant's 'good' character and how much his family relied on him. My brother's character and what he had meant to our family was condensed down into the handful of lines that were read out from victim personal statements. As the sentence was passed, we watched members of the defendant's family celebrate. Thankfully, there was a successful appeal, and the sentence was increased; though it was still nothing compared with the years of life that were stolen from Peter. With every passing day, the storm cloud that was over my head grew and grew, life felt incredibly unfair and too painful to bear.



## Look at Us

“One last chance” I thought,  
as I stared right at you across that cold court,  
the wooden surroundings, raised platform for the judge,  
“Look me in the eyes” – but your eyes would not budge,  
from staring at the floor -  
I guess you were choosing to ignore  
our family.

One last chance to look at us, with some sorrow or some sadness,  
sixteen family members sitting here, your actions turned us to madness.  
One last chance to say sorry, ease the sense of black,  
even though “sorry” will not ever bring my brother back.  
But no, you just stare at the floor –  
I guess you are choosing to ignore  
that you killed him.

One last chance, I actually want to forgive,  
free my heart, and continue to live,  
adjust to this new world and  
accept the pain that has unfurled,  
all because you were driving at 93 miles per hour -  
yet you behave like it is you that has reason to be feeling sour.  
So yes, just stare at the floor –  
I guess you are choosing to ignore  
what you did.

One last chance for a damn apology, it was the least you owed,  
because that was my beloved brother that you mowed  
straight over, like his life was a zero –  
but we must listen to your previous good character. Are you some kind of hero?  
No, you are a killer. Where was his last chance?  
You could not even stop to call for the ambulance.  
Carry on and stare at the floor –  
I guess you are choosing to ignore  
my burning eyes...  
that see straight through your lies.



For a long time I felt isolated and found it impossible to convey the thoughts that went around and around in my head. I could not find peace. My brother's life had been taken, and the lives of all those who loved him were changed forever. I became a different person. I was overwhelmed with guilt and regret for not treasuring my brother more while he was alive – I had just never considered the possibility of him one day not being there. I directed all my anger inwards, while trying to convince myself that I was okay.

I punished myself, by eating less and less, until it became a real problem. It was only when I was finally able to be honest about what I was feeling, that there began to be any sense of relief. Finding RoadPeace and being able to talk to those who understood was crucial. I wrote this second poem for a friend, who was there for me unconditionally, even when I was in the most awful of moods, or unable to be much of a friend in return. I will be forever thankful for this. I wrote this poem for her, but it is also about the many people who went out of their way to do everything they could to keep me going. My family, my friends, the people I met at the West Midlands Support Group, all those who encouraged me to find my voice and use it.

The hole in my life left by the loss of Pete will never be filled, it will never not hurt and there will never be a day I do not think of him or miss him. Yet slowly, through the love and care of others, I have realised that I am not alone – and that on the days the dark clouds are too heavy to bear, there are people who will help both to carry the weight and bring out the light. This too reflects how I feel about my brother, for all the terrible pain of his loss, I can shut my eyes and remember him, with such joy. Trying to sum Peter up in words is impossible, he was truly unique – all I can say is, I was so lucky to have been his little sister. He may not be here anymore, but he will always be with me.



**Peter Price and  
Lucy Harrison**

## Rainbow

Well, anyone could describe a rainbow –  
the way they sparkle in the sky,  
or list the seven colours they show,  
and tell you how they form and why.  
The reflection and refraction,  
a scientific spectrum of light –  
an awesome arc of distraction,  
to make you pause at such a stunning sight.  
And then there is the myth and story  
of what a rainbow means,  
a pot of gold if you seek glory,  
or a sign that all is not as it seems.  
A bridge that links us to those we have lost,  
a magical and mysterious view,  
a thing of beauty, of priceless cost,  
or a chance to start anew.

But...

Not just anyone could be a rainbow  
and illuminate the dark,  
making a special kind of love grow –  
that leaves a lasting mark.  
You must come from that enchanted world  
of dazzling, dancing brightness,  
for you appeared as storms unfurled,  
and filled the sky with lightness.  
Yes, this is what you are you see –  
a dazzling, dancing rainbow,  
and this is what you mean to me,  
when I am feeling low.  
A plethora of creative colour,  
so wonderful and kind –  
you make this life feel so much fuller,  
because you are rare and hard to find.

Well, I think it was Maya Angelou who wrote “Be a rainbow in someone else’s  
cloud” –

well you, such a striking rainbow, would make Maya Angelou proud.





# 'I Stand at the Front Door'



by Tracy Herron, WPC 9332

*Tracy Herron was a Family Liaison Officer with CMPG (Central Motorway Police Group). Tracy has recently retired, but she was the FLO appointed to work with the RoadPeace West Midlands Support Group, and has assisted greatly over the last five years.*

I stand at the front door. I have done this so many times before, but it does not get any easier. I have no idea who lives here, I just know that I am about to change their lives forever. I ring the doorbell. A lady answers the door and gives me a bewildered smile upon seeing my uniform. I ask to come in, and she lets me in without question. I take off my hat and follow her into the lounge, past toys and drawings, that clearly belong to children. I tell her to sit down and ask her if she is alone. She tells me she is - her children are at school and her husband has gone to work. I check her name and ask her to confirm the name of her husband, and she tells me. She asks me what is wrong, I can see that it is dawning upon her that I have bad news. What do I say? No words are the right words, but I am acutely aware that whatever words I use, will have a profound effect upon her forever. That is a huge responsibility. I tell her that we are currently at the scene of a serious collision, we believe that one of the people involved is her husband, and that I am very sorry to have to tell her that he has died.

The shock is replaced by disbelief. Am I sure it is him? It cannot be, she only saw him a few hours ago. His tea is in the oven, they are going to friends at the weekend. How does she tell the children?

So, our journey together begins.

I sit with her. I tell her that there will be a full investigation into the circumstances of the collision. I tell her that this investigation will be lengthy and complex and right from the start I try to manage what she can expect. I talk about post-mortems, the investigation process, court hearings and the press. I know that she is not taking this in, shock and trauma will prevent her from processing it, but I reassure her that I will be there with her every step of the way. She asks if she can see her husband, and I promise her that I will do my best to arrange that. She asks me what happened, and I tell her that the exact circumstances are still under investigation - so I am not able to tell her much at the moment. Eventually, I leave





her. I agonise over the words I used and replay the scenario, wondering if I got it right.

I am back at the front door. She opens it and lets me in. My news today is no easier to deliver. Today, their two children are there. I see them as they are ushered out of the room, one too young to understand, and the other confused and bewildered. I try to push away the thoughts of all the milestones they will miss celebrating with their dad. Today, I have to tell her that the post-mortem has taken place but that the pathologist has taken the brain for a more detailed examination. I decide to call it 'the brain' instead of 'his brain' to try to impersonalise the situation. Does this have any effect? I have no idea, but I have put a lot of thought into this. The look of horror and devastation on her face tells me that it has not softened the blow; I did not really expect that it would. I also have to explain that there may have to be a second post-mortem, at the request of the other party involved in the collision, who is under investigation regarding the death of her husband. Her horror turns to anger, how can this be fair? It is not fair, none of it is.

I am standing at the front door. Today I am taking her to say goodbye to her husband. We stand in the Chapel of Rest and I do my best to describe what she will see. I walk in with her and put my arms around her as she collapses, sobbing. She composes herself and I stand back, trying to be unobtrusive. It is upsetting to hear her tell him how much she misses him, how the children are struggling without him. I feel like an intruder and I try and distract myself from this truly heartbreaking scene with thoughts of grocery lists. It only partially works.

Perhaps those are some of the hardest parts over with now? The investigation continues and I keep her updated regularly with progress, although I can hear the tension in her voice return whenever I speak my name on the phone. The investigation is slow, I reassure her that this is normal. There are times when she is angry with me, but I know it is not personal. That does not stop me thinking about how I can try to make things better for her, before I realise that I cannot.

I am back at the front door. I am here to tell her that a decision has been made to charge the other party with causing the death of her husband. I discuss the court process with her and the sentencing guidelines. I tell her that sentencing for road death is woefully inadequate. I always say this - because it is.

She is dragged through a trial. The facts are discussed in detail and the defendant is clearly remorseless. The tension is almost unbearable as we wait for the verdict to be given. Thankfully, it is guilty. I watch her incredulity as the defence counsel tell the court just how remorseful the defendant is and ask for leniency in the sentence.



The sentence is passed, pitiful in comparison to the crime. It has been an exhausting rollercoaster of emotions, trials always are. They do not get easier either.

I am here at the front door. One last time. I say goodbye. I will think of her and her children in times to come. I remember them all.



**WPC Tracy Herron**



**HEARTBREAK, HOPE**

**and a**

*Call for Change*







# 'Grace'



by Arron Lennon

*Arron Lennon works for the Road Casualty Reduction Team, West Midlands Fire Service. Arron has a passion for encouraging vulnerable road user groups, especially young drivers, to make smart and safe choices when it comes to using our roads.*

The impact, left a stain,  
pain in the form of rain,  
put everyone under strain,  
life is no longer exciting, just plain.

Grief, as I lay down your wreath,  
silence in the air,  
life is not always fair,  
it is something, I did not plan to prepare.

Loss, writing your name on the cross,  
drivers/riders, poor choices, come at cost,  
do not think you are the boss,  
in a split-second, all can be lost.

Heartbreak caused by a dare,  
I stop and stare, at your glare,  
as my emotions flare,  
my heart began to tear,  
no amount of treatment will ever repair.

Where there is hope, we can learn to cope,  
broaden your scope,  
carry on walking up the steep slope,  
you're all giving everyone out there,  
hope...



**Arron Lennon**





# 'A CPS Word Cloud'



by the staff of the West Midlands  
Crown Prosecution Service

*This word cloud was created by the staff of the CPS West Midlands – after a presentation was given to them by RoadPeace West Midlands, to mark National Road Victim Month. The former Deputy Chief Crown Prosecutor, Suzanne Llewellyn, has attended the West Midlands Support Group, and shown great willingness to listen to and work with road crash victims. Suzanne is now the Chief Crown Prosecutor for Wessex and continues to engage with and work with RoadPeace West Midlands. The word cloud reflects the service those working for the CPS aspire to provide.*



Suzanne Llewellyn





# 'A Debate on Road Safety'



by Rachel Maclean MP

*Rachel Maclean is the Member of Parliament for Redditch. Rachel is currently serving in the Home Office as the Minister for Safeguarding. Rachel was previously a Minister in the Department for Transport, with responsibility for transport decarbonisation and the future of transport. The below is an extract from a contribution Rachel made to a debate on road safety, in January 2020.*

“I want to speak about an organisation called RoadPeace, which is involved in my constituency. My friend, Lucy Harrison, has brought this charity to my attention. What RoadPeace is doing is relevant for the Minister when he comes to look at the wider powers in the Sentencing Bill. It is calling for driving crime to be looked at as real crime. My friend Lucy lost her brother, and it had a profound impact on her life. We definitely need to look at sentencing for driving crimes, as it is currently not adequate. I am sure that many of our constituents all across the country, who have experience of that, would like to see the system changed.”



**Rachel Maclean MP**





# 'My Story'



by Gez McManus

*This is a speech which was given by Gez, as part of the online West Midlands Service to mark World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims, on Sunday 15th November 2020.*

I would like to tell you about my eldest daughter, Rebecca McManus.

Rebecca lost her life on the roads of the West Midlands, in May 2014. Rebecca was twenty-one years old and had just completed her degree in English Literature and Creative Writing, at the University of East Anglia. From an early age, Rebecca had shown academic promise, and like her younger sister, thrived at school and in the world of studying. Passing exams with good grades, in order to achieve the career that she wanted, was very important to Rebecca. There was never any question of Rebecca not achieving academic success, for her it always seemed to be guaranteed through sheer hard work and determination.

All that hope, expectation and promise was taken away forever on a sunny Saturday evening on 31st May 2014; when Rebecca was struck by a speeding driver. She was killed instantly, and her lifelong friend who was with her, was left with lifelong injuries. Both girls had been standing at a bus stop, looking forward to an evening in Birmingham City Centre, where they would meet other friends from school days. Before the collision, two cars driven by adults, raced along the nearby roads, in what became a deadly game of cat and mouse. The speeds were terrifying - as described by the witnesses. Moments before the collision, the car that struck and killed Rebecca had its speed measured as being driven at 101mph. Following the collision, the emergency services arrived, and there was suspicion that the driver was under the influence of alcohol. In December 2015, two men were jailed for their involvement in the collision that took Rebecca's life.

The conclusion of the legal proceedings gave us no relief; coming home from court was like coming back from Rebecca's funeral all over again. We knew we would never be able to accept the jury's decision to find the second defendant not guilty of causing Rebecca's death by dangerous driving. That decision at Crown Court would lead to big challenges in my personal beliefs and my faith in the criminal justice system, and indeed the whole establishment. A young life taken in such a violent and reckless way by people who should have known better. How





had we come to this point where two grown men would race performance cars on public roads, with seemingly no fear of the consequences?

In the year after the conviction, we had to endure the insult of the main defendant appealing his sentence. Thankfully, the Court of Appeal saw through his claim that his actions were of low criminal culpability. The court rejected the appeal and asserted that his actions in causing Rebecca's death were of high culpability. That concluded the criminal proceedings once and for all. In my mind, a collision under those circumstances, should never have happened in the first place - if only drivers would stick to the rules and the law. I often wonder, for some people, has it become socially acceptable to race cars on the road? Has it become acceptable to knowingly drive above the speed limit and risk everything? I think there has been a lot of conditioning of people by the media and car manufacturers. There has been a push to bring racing car features to normal cars, and the inevitable temptation to speed this brings, is reflected in the statistics of lives lost.

Following Rebecca's death, for all those close to her, it was a time of extreme shock and overwhelming sadness; those feelings remain to this day. We became socially withdrawn. Facing the world when grieving is a difficult thing to do after any death, but in these circumstances, it is more difficult. I do not necessarily think that time is a healer, it only gives you more time to think about the loss - but sometimes, in a different way. In the years following Rebecca's death we were able to celebrate her life in different ways. A book of her poetry was launched to great reviews in 2017. In the summers of 2017 and 2018, we held a small music event in the park where she played as a child - the weather was perfect on both occasions, and I am sure Rebecca would have loved it. A poetry competition has been established in her name at the University of East Anglia; the idea of having her name associated with a place that brought her so much happiness in her life, is a source of great comfort.

It will always be impossible to accept that Rebecca is gone - saying that she will never be forgotten is not enough - we must celebrate her life to keep her spirit alive.



**Gez McManus**





# 'In Memory of Rebecca McManus'



21st January 1993 - 31st May 2014

by Gez McManus

*Gez's daughter, Rebecca, was waiting at a bus stop, when she was hit by a driver who was racing and had been going at speeds of up to 101mph. Rebecca loved poetry; here, Gez intersperses his thoughts on his loss, with poems written by Rebecca.*

A poem by Rebecca McManus called *Nonnet*. A nonnet is a type of poem that has to conform to a particular structure, which this does not. I think when she wrote this poem, it was Rebecca just being Rebecca - just having a little giggle.

## Nonnet

Every night we watched the stars, bad times  
made good. For this was the age of  
starry skies, not a day  
went by without my awe  
of the clouds. Painted  
we were but this is just the  
way things  
end.

The loss of Rebecca and the circumstances in which she was lost, is difficult to put into words - the words to describe such a massive loss, may not exist. The feelings of loss are real; and losing a person that no one or nothing can ever replace, is a heavy burden. Rebecca's life was cut short at the age of only twenty-one, by a speeding motorist, as she stood as an innocent pedestrian on the Hagley Road in Bearwood. The losses multiply for all those close to such a tragedy. Early on, there is the realisation that the world as we knew it, is now lost forever - replaced with a different set of eyes, old beliefs washed away with Rebecca's tragic death.

## Shady Groves

I sought solace amongst no-one, friends in the darkness.  
Who is to say what can happen when there is no witness.



Grieving for Rebecca was a mixture of disbelief, shock, physical exhaustion and absolutely crushing sadness. I can still take myself back to exactly how I felt; the feeling of how unfair it was for Rebecca to have lost her life in that way. Grieving became an intensely private matter with less and less people involved in what was going on, as it was, and still is, so very painful. The first Christmas without Rebecca, followed shortly afterwards by her birthday, were intensely difficult days, and remain so. During the most intense periods of grief, it was possible to establish a new way of living, that was very withdrawn from how we had lived previously; I think that is a common thread with many people who lose a loved one in such tragic circumstances.

## **An Untitled Poem**

We are the stars; We fly to the moon Gaze down lovingly at the place that made us.

In Rebecca's memory, we have done numerous things to celebrate her life and love of music and poetry. A book of her work entitled, *A Book of Fragments and Dreams*, was published in 2017, to good reviews. It contains all of the work we could find of Rebecca's and is a lovely reflection of her young life. We have held small music events in Rebecca's adopted hometown of Norwich, and in Bearwood where she grew up - local musicians entertaining the crowds on a sunny summer afternoon, with an image of Rebecca watching over. She would have loved it, and I HOPE, and I know, she was there to see it with us. In 2020, we created a poetry competition for students of creative writing at the University of East Anglia, where Rebecca completed her degree shortly before her death.



**Rebecca McManus**



# 'Just Like Chemistry'



by Colin Roberts

*Colin was one of the first members of the West Midlands Support Group. He now volunteers as a befriender for RoadPeace. Both Colin's wife, Gloria, and daughter, Dawn, were killed in a road crash in 2015.*

Life can get pretty lonely at times, especially having been married for almost forty-three years and then having my wife and daughter snatched away from me in a car crash; reducing my immediate family to my son and my younger sister.

I was bewildered because before Glo and I married, we were two separate people, but then we both contributed all of ourselves to become a new identity. It was just like in chemistry, where two separate elements react together to form a compound – making something new and nothing like the original elements. Then, when I lost Glo, it was as though half of me had died. Again, it was just like in chemistry – you do not return to your original single element, you are never the same again. How could you ever expect to be? Over the years we had both worked hard to ensure that our marriage was a successful union, and usually put each other's interests above our own, even though that could be difficult at times. We poured so much into our marriage; love, care, emotion, and all kinds of feelings. In our case we may not have had quantity, but we certainly had quality.

Glo was my best friend, my companion, and my soulmate. You might ask, what was our recipe for a happy marriage? It was give and take, with not always the same person giving, and not always the same person taking. We had a partnership in every sense of the word. I was often the one who made the decisions, but I always consulted Glo and considered her thoughts and ideas.

I find it really hard to believe when some couples will say that they have never had an argument. I have always thought of our marriage as a bit like when glass lenses are polished or lapped. Initially, there can be a lot of lumps and dips in the glass, but as you continue polishing, the surfaces become



**Colin and Gloria Roberts**



perfect matches to each other. So much so, that later on in our marriage both of us would say the same thing at same time. Consequently, we had a lot of arguments when we were first married, but very few later. I can remember my dinner ending up on the floor once, I am not sure if it was intentional or not. Now and then I would go stomping out of the house in a sulk, sometimes I would go off on my motorbike. On one occasion, Glo went stomping off, out of the house. There were many times we looked back and laughed over these memories – but strangely, we could never remember what we had been arguing about.

I belong to a couple of groups which try to help those whose loved ones have been killed on the roads. I go to these groups to try to help others who experience the trauma of losing someone who means so much to them. For me, my strength and comfort are from God - who is with me and helps me every moment, whatever may befall me, whether good or bad. I feel that God is actually a part of me and never leaves me. The tragedy of losing my family in a split second has not destroyed my faith. Many may find it strange, when I say that this has actually strengthened my faith. My rationale is that if for a moment I doubt, it means that I am doubting the fact that I will be reunited with Gloria and Dawn when I die.

Initially, after my loss, I was crying often. Little things would start me off - a poignant memory or seeing pictures of places where we had all been together. Sometimes, nothing in particular would start me off crying, the grief would just seem to come bubbling up from nowhere. Now, I find that there are not quite so many triggers – although I can guarantee that watching *Songs of Praise* will set me off. It is not the case that I am coping better, more that I am getting used to a situation that I never imagined I would be in.

I do find that no matter how busy I try to keep myself there are still plenty of times when I do feel totally alone. I can be in a room full of people and feel totally alone, I can even be in a room full of family and feel utterly alone. That said, I am fortunate to have a few very close friends. There is one friend in particular, who has been invaluable to me. She has been widowed for around twenty years. She has always been there for me, and I have been there for her; we understand how each other feels. If one of us is having a bad day, we will contact the other for a chat, and try to cheer each other up. Sometimes, I must admit, I have considered the lonely heart adverts as a way of tackling my loneliness - but I don't want a relationship, just a friend to spend an evening with now and then.

Anyway, at this point I am more or less coping, and beginning to look to the future and wonder, what will it bring.





# 'The Angel'



by Colin Roberts

*RoadPeace West Midlands member, Colin, has a profound Christian faith. Colin sought solace in his faith while grieving, and it has provided him with the strength to keep going.*

I know I will be reunited with my wife and daughter when I die - that is what gives me strength, comfort and keeps me going. I know they are in heaven with God, in an atmosphere full of peace and joy; and are together with all those who have meant so much to me but who are no longer with us.

They are amongst God's angels and may even be angels, which is why I wanted to draw one.



**Gloria Roberts**



**Dawn Roberts**





# 'So sorry we had to say goodbye'



by Alicia and Steve Rutter

*Steve and Alicia founded the Kieran Rutter Legacy Fund in memory of their son, Kieran, who was killed in a road traffic crash in 2015. Through the fund, Steve and Alicia have raised thousands of pounds for charity and paid for defibrillators to be installed in community settings. Kieran went to school with Amy Savage, who was killed in a separate road traffic collision, and is also remembered in this anthology.*

It wasn't meant to be -  
our lives haven't been the same without you by our side.  
There's not a day we don't think about you and wonder what would have been.  
You had everything to live for, but it was snatched away in the blink of an eye.  
Life will never be the same again - without you.  
We look at your picture each day, and wish you were here –  
so that we could say we love you one last time.  
We aren't able to do that as we had to say goodbye.  
Our lives will never be the same again –  
until we meet again.  
Love, always.



**Steve and Alicia Rutter**



**Kieran Rutter**





# 'A Sign of Hope'



by Professor Guy Rutty MBE

*Guy is a professor of forensic pathology and chief forensic pathologist for the East Midlands Forensic Pathology Unit, based at the Leicester Royal Infirmary. He responds for EMICS (East Midlands Immediate Care Scheme <https://emics.org.uk>) in Leicestershire, as a volunteer emergency doctor.*

Early morning, South Leicestershire.

Emergency services attend a two vehicle, head-on collision. The road is blocked by the collision and closed higher up for safety by the police. Ambulances, Fire and Rescue, EMICS (East Midlands Immediate Care Scheme) doctors and the Air Ambulance are in attendance. As the last of the injured are removed to hospital by air ambulance, one of the volunteer road-based EMICS doctors (Professor Guy Rutty) walks up the road reflecting upon the collision, as a rainbow appears, lifting the mood of all present.



Photography: recovered from rear video camera of the doctor's response vehicle.







# 'With Love'



by Jade Louise Scarrott

*'With Love' has been submitted to this anthology by Karen Scarrott, Jade's mum. Jade was severely injured in a road traffic collision in Leamington Spa on 23rd June 2004. Jade was airlifted to Birmingham Children's Hospital, but died from her injuries two days later, on 25th June 2004. Karen found this poem after Jade's death, amongst other poems that Jade had written. Jade suffered from ME and it had been her dream to write a book called 'Young Hearts'. Jade's family went ahead with her book of poetry in her memory. Terry Waite launched 'Young Hearts' at Warwick Castle on 29th November 2004.*



**Jade Louise Scarrott**

With all the stars shining bright for you  
And the moon glowing in life for you  
And nature following your spirit  
Your heart is surely a treasure within

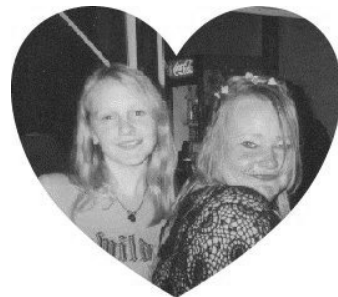
You're truly one of a kind  
As gentle as they come  
As kind and as thoughtful  
But just as fearless and strong

Love is your light, in a dark place  
Courage is your power in a strange case  
And the sun shines because you smile  
But it also rains when you cry

With everyone you know  
And everyone you've touched  
In all yesterdays and tomorrows  
They remember you with love

In the hearts that you have warmed  
In the frowns that you have raised  
In the cloudy days you have made shine  
In the path you have left behind

Words are a compliment  
Expressions are a care  
From friends and from family  
We know that heaven must be looking.



**Jade and Karen Scarrott**





# 'Why I Care About Bereavement Services'



by Councillor Sharon Thompson

*Councillor Sharon Thompson is the former Birmingham City Council Member for Homes and Neighbourhoods. The responsibility for Bereavement Services fell under Sharon's remit, during her time in this role. Sharon created a Bereavement Services Roundtable, of which RoadPeace West Midlands take part. The roundtable aims to try and ensure that grieving families receive the best service possible in their time of need.*

I am really pleased to be able to write a few words for this anthology project. During my time as the Member for Homes and Neighbourhoods, bereavement services were an incredibly important part of my portfolio of responsibilities, as ultimately bereavement will impact on every single person in their lifetime. The loss of a loved one, particularly in unexpected circumstances, is a life-changing moment. This can cause too many people so much anguish, they never get through the pain.

This project will, I believe, provide great support to anyone suffering from such a loss, by gaining an understanding of the level of support available, and how many others have been impacted. Sharing the experience of everyone involved in such bereavement support (whether they are bereaved or a support for the bereaved) will provide comfort for some. For that alone, this project is one I am pleased to take part in.

Bereavement matters, and I was committed to work with organisations providing support, so that the City Council's services could signpost people to organisations like RoadPeace, who provide an excellent service - with care, knowledge and compassion.

My remit was to not just show leadership when it concerned council services, but to also provide some leadership across the city. When I came into this portfolio, it was essential for me to listen to the perspective of others when it came to bereavement, and to work collaboratively across the sector. I believe we are a part of a jigsaw puzzle, to be used as a tool for bereaved families, to support them through the various stages of grief and loss, including the process of arranging a funeral. Therefore, I instigated a roundtable meeting with various organisations who are integral pieces of that jigsaw puzzle. This includes hospitals, coroners' services, the council's bereavement services, funeral directors, and faith and action groups - such as RoadPeace West Midlands. Each are a valuable member of the group and each



have an equal stake when it comes to contribution. It is an opportunity for everyone to provide service updates and raise concerns.

The next stage for the group will be to look at joint ambitions, and to look at how to collectively improve services, and also innovate. This meeting proved to be invaluable when it came to clarity during the pandemic and gaining a better understanding of what resources were available not only to families, but to each other. I am personally looking forward to being a participant in training from RoadPeace, so that I can better understand the needs and experiences of people who have lost loved ones through road traffic collisions.



**Councillor Sharon  
Thompson**





# 'On the Receiving End'



by Stephen Thompson

*Stephen is a member of the RoadPeace West Midlands Support Group, and also a serving police officer. Stephen's brother, Paul Thompson, was killed by a drug driver, in 2018.*

Being a police officer for nearly twenty years, I have knocked on many a door, to give a family the most awful news, that a loved one is dead. The horror, the heartbreak, the grief of the news you have delivered, changes lives in that instant. I had never expected to find myself on the other side of the door. However, on 26th November 2018 at 4.30pm, I was. An ashen-faced traffic officer told me that my brother had been killed that afternoon. Paul had been hit by a HGV, while on his mountain bike.

I have relived that day, that moment, over and over again. I best describe it as the day my flame was blown out. This is the only way to describe this, because up until that point life was great from all aspects - family life was amazing, work was great, everything was heading onwards and upwards.

I had been cooking dinner when I was told Paul was dead, and I recall the officer taking the saucepan from my hand and helping me to a seat, before going through the details he had to give me. If that news was not awful enough, more was to come, in being told the driver had tested positive for drugs. Sitting down, listening to all that was being told to me and looking back and thinking of the families I have sat with, in the same situation – it certainly brings home the impact of that knock on the door.

Being surrounded by the grief from the death of a loved one, while also having to deal with everything that goes with this, is just so hard to comprehend. But things have to be done, the funeral, Paul's house and his possessions. Then on top of this, the awfulness of going through the court case. I had never experienced emotions like these, my grief turned to anger, which in time turned to hatred, pure unadulterated hatred. I had never felt this way in my life... it was truly awful.

It took time but I learnt that talking helps, it helps so much to unburden yourself of those emotions, that grief, that anger and that hatred. There are still bad days, some very bad days, but it is a case of learning how to deal with them, and not letting them take over. The support from groups, and from friends and family is unmeasurable.



Just over two years have passed now, and I have asked many people who have been unfortunate enough to experience what I have, whether my flame will ever relight? No one can actually answer that because we do not know the answer. I can only hope with the support of family, friends and the amazing people involved in groups such as RoadPeace West Midlands, that I may one day be able to have my flame burning bright once more.



**Paul and Stephen  
Thompson**



**Stephen Thompson**





# 'I Loved My Brother'



by Karen Wainwright

*Karen has recently joined the RoadPeace West Midlands Support Group and has also received befriender support from RoadPeace. Karen's brother, Ian Barry Neal, was killed in a crash on the A46 on 13th June 2020.*

I was never afraid to talk to my brother about anything, though he did not always have the answers, he always had a big heart and time to care. He was a very good brother to me; we were only 23 months apart. My brother was supportive and never stopped loving me, even when we had our differences (like most brothers and sisters do). Ian never stopped being my big brother, he still told me that he loved me and that he would always be there for me. I could always count on Ian, no matter what, because I was his little sister, and he was my brother; that meant a lot to me. It is true to say that Ian had a heart of gold - I was always proud to have a brother that I knew cared about me, like he did.



**Ian Barry Neal and Karen Wainwright**

We shared many happy memories together when we were kids, we enjoyed playing out together with our friends. One of our favourite games was knock-door-run (though I do not think the neighbours always found it funny), we had lots of fun, and enjoyed going on bike rides together. We went on family holidays together and enjoyed our camping trips to Devon, with mum and dad. We were never far away from each other.



**Ian Barry Neal**

Later in life, Ian and I, continued to enjoy spending time together. We both had a passion for watching our local football team, though Ian seemed to understand the game more than I did. I loved my brother and would have done anything to make him happy. He was always full of enjoyment and was always trying to find ways to make others laugh, especially when they were down in the dumps.

I will never forget my big brother and the fun and laughter we shared together; I was lucky to have a brother like Ian, and I know he will be watching over me, always...





# 'Woody'



by Jean and John Woodcock

*Jean and John are friends and supporters of RoadPeace West Midlands, and Jean is a 'second mum' to the West Midlands Support Group Coordinator, Lucy. Jean's son, Paul 'Woody' Woodcock was killed in a road crash.*

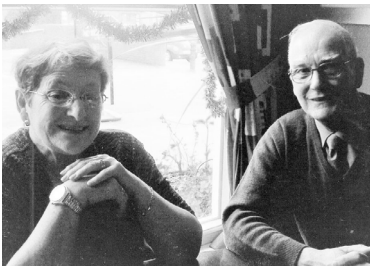
Paul was born on 9th June 1975. He was a wonderful son. Paul was always there for his friends, and he loved to be with his mates, playing football or cricket or playing on his spectrum games console. As Paul grew up, his goal was to save to buy a red car. Paul was in a road traffic collision on 21st November 1993, and sadly died aged eighteen, two days later.

Paul helped so many people during his life; he was an organ donor, and so helped others even after his life ended. We were able to be put in touch with a gentleman named Ken, who received an organ from Paul. He rings us every year on the anniversary of Paul's death, to see how we are, and also to tell us how well he is still doing. We are always pleased to know that Ken is well, it gives us some comfort.

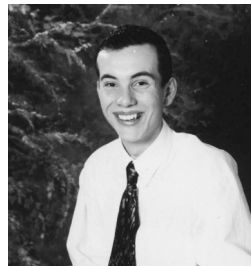
We are so proud of Paul.

Paul's childhood best friend, Peter Price, was sadly killed in a hit-and-run, twenty-one years later, on 29th November 2014. Paul and Peter are now remembered with trees next to one another in the RoadPeace Wood, at the National Memorial Arboretum.

God bless you both Paul and Peter.



**Jean and John Woodcock**



**Paul Woodcock**





# 'Death is not the end, it is not final'



by Revd. Jeremy Allcock

*Jeremy Allcock is the Rector at St. Martin in the Bull Ring in Birmingham. Jeremy and St. Martin in the Bull Ring have very kindly hosted our West Midlands Service to mark World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims, since it began in 2018. Jeremy is a highly valued friend of RoadPeace West Midlands.*

Whatever the circumstances, whatever the nature of the relationship, the death of someone we love, is always a very difficult thing to face. It is inevitably a painful and sad experience which may produce many different feelings of loss, grief, guilt, frustration and invariably a sense of what might have been. When the death is unexpected, brutal, shocking, avoidable and unnecessary - is it not fair to say those emotions are amplified?

The great challenge of death is that at one level it is so final, so definite. However much we would like to stop it happening, unwind things, reverse the events, or go back and make things different, we cannot. Suddenly, the person we were talking to, sitting next to, eating with, laughing with, and making plans with, has gone. That person we loved has gone. Their death is irreversible, and each one is irreplaceable.

Their passing - even if seemingly unnoticed - leaves a hole in the life of our communities, in our towns and cities, and in our world, but most especially in your lives. Their death has left a hole inside each one of us, as if someone has reached inside us and removed a part of our very own life. The hole, the space, will never be completely filled because it is as unique and special as our loved one was to each of us - but that is not the whole picture. However great our loss, and painful our mourning - I want to suggest in three fundamental ways that death is not the end, it is not final.

Firstly, our loved ones continue to live on in us. We, as their family and friends, are their primary legacy they leave in this world. Maybe for some they will live on in a physical resemblance, but more than mere physical appearance - their influence will have been central and integral to the people we have become, the shape and character of our lives. Each of us have been enriched and blessed by their love and friendship, the times we have spent together, and the experiences we have shared. Our lives would have been so much less for not having known them - put simply we would not be the people we are today.





Our loved ones live on in us.

Secondly, they live on in our memories. Special occasions, certain places, or even little actions will spark off all kinds of memories that will remind us of them and help to keep them alive in our hearts. Just because that very special person has died, we must resist the tendency and temptation to lock those memories away, as if the pain of thinking about them will be too much to bear. That is how the person will fade, pushed to the margins and the dark corners of our memories and emotions.

Rather, our memories are a living treasure that we can hold in our hearts, reflect on, share together; memories to make us cry, memories to make us think and wonder, and I hope – plenty of memories to make us laugh. As we constantly reflect on those memories, we will find that our loved one is kept very much alive within us.

So, at one level it is up to us – will they be left to quietly slip to the margins of our minds and the recesses of distant memory? Or will we choose, despite the pain, to keep them in the forefront of our minds and make them an easy and comfortable part of our gatherings and conversations. Will we choose to endure the pain and enjoy the treasure?

*“There is nothing that can replace the absence of someone dear to us, and one should not even attempt to do so. One must simply hold out and endure it. At first that sounds very hard, but at the same time it is also a great comfort. For to the extent the emptiness truly remains unfilled one remains connected to the other person through it. It is wrong to say that God fills the emptiness. God in no way fills it but much more leaves it precisely unfilled and thus helps us preserve -- even in pain -- the authentic relationship. Furthermore, the more beautiful and full the remembrances, the more difficult the separation. But gratitude transforms the torment of memory into silent joy. One bears what was lovely in the past not as a thorn but as a precious gift deep within, a hidden treasure of which one can always be certain.”*

### **Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison**

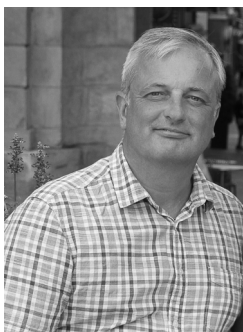
Thirdly, for many of us our faith leads us to believe that death is not the end. For myself, as a Christian, my belief and hope is that death is not final. The story of Jesus is the story of His triumph over death. He was raised from the dead, and God promises that for all those who have faith in Him, they too will share in his resurrection and receive eternal life. For as Jesus promised in the scriptures, in His Father’s house there are many rooms, and he goes to prepare a place for us.

As a Christian, I have a hope - that one day all will be different. There will be no



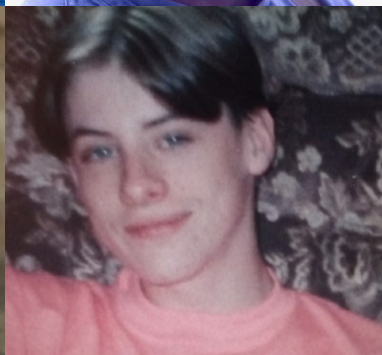
more tragic death and waste of life, for as the scriptures promise God will ‘wipe away every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain’ (Revelation 21 v4).

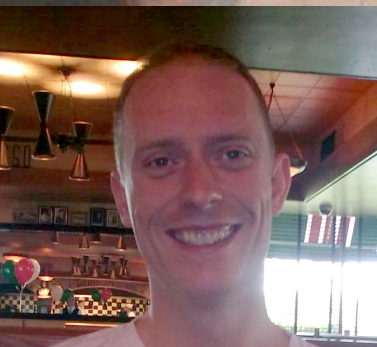
Surely, whatever our faith - and even if it is purely in the ultimate goodness of human nature - that is a hope to which we can all aspire, something to which we can fully commit ourselves in an attempt to make this a present reality, as much as possible, in the here and now.



**Revd. Jeremy Allcock**







**Heartbreak, Hope and  
a Call for Change**

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# HEARTBREAK, HOPE

and a

## Call for Change

### The overlooked stories of road crash victims

This project was born out of a desire to give a voice to road crash victims, who are often overlooked, by a society that has wrongly accepted road crashes as both accidental and inevitable. With a foreword by Baroness Helen Newlove, contributors include: the RoadPeace West Midlands Support Group and others who have been bereaved; emergency services, who see first-hand the impact of road crashes; MPs, who can help to make a difference, and those who support families after a road death.

Each individual story reflects the terrible impact that road death has, conveying the **heartbreak** each family endures and the **hope** they desperately seek to find. This anthology is also a **call for change**, and a call for society to stop accepting these **needless deaths**.

However, most of all, this anthology is **for the next family**, who will sadly need it.



**The national charity for road crash victims**

[www.roadpeace.org](http://www.roadpeace.org)

[#crashnotaccident](https://twitter.com/crashnotaccident)