

Hermine's Story

When my husband, Don, and I married he already had two sons, I had a daughter and two sons, and then we had a son of our own. My stepsons spent a lot of time with us and were very much part of our family life. Sadly, Don's eldest son had mental health issues and was being treated in hospital when he suddenly disappeared, causing great concern for his safety. When the knock on the door came and we saw the police standing there I knew something awful had happened. They broke the news that he was missing from the hospital and asked if I knew where he was, they informed my husband that he was missing, that was Tuesday afternoon on the 17th of February 2009. The next morning I was woken by the phone, it was a friend telling me to watch the news and that's how we found out my stepson had taken his own life by jumping in front of a train. Local family members all came to us and Don's other son travelled down from his home in Peterborough on that day, which was Wednesday evening. He spent time first with us and then went to visit his mother, returning to our home that night grief stricken by the death of his brother. He spent some time that evening in the bedroom talking with our son his half brother. He eventually fell asleep on the same bed with his brother. Next morning he slept on, but eventually his brother went to wake him, but could get no response. He called the emergency services. I woke to hear lots of feet running up and down so got up to see what was going on, only to find that he had died in his sleep. Unbeknown to us he had a heart condition and was taking medication – the shock and reaction to his brother death was just too much for him. We were devastated. My husband Don had lost both his sons in the same week, one on Tuesday and the other on Friday

Our heartache was not to end there. Our youngest son got in to a fight where he was seriously injured, someone died and he was wrongly accused of being responsible. After spending 6 months on remand and going through a two week trial, he was cleared of the charges and thankfully was able to return to us. Then my second son Anthony was drawn in to the fringe of people using cannabis, I warned him that there would be a cost to getting involved and that he was not to bring trouble to our house. But he continued to be friends with people who were involved with drugs. One weekend he went off with some friends and disappeared for a few days. At first we did not worry. Anthony was an adult and had stayed away before. A few days later I reported him missing then on Friday 7th of May 2010 I got a phone call from the police saying that they found him but could not give me details of where he was and could not force him to come home, but confirmed that he was fine. On Tuesday 11th May at 2pm an agitated young man knocked at our door and kept saying Anthony had been stabbed but would give no further information. We were demented. The police eventually arrived and confirmed that Anthony was seriously injured and on life support in the hospital around 9pm. As soon as I saw him I knew – I knew that it was no longer Anthony – just a machine that was acting for his own bodily functions. We had to make the agonising decision about turning off the machine but I knew that Anthony was really dead and so we took that awful step on Wednesday 12th May 2010. I was just numb.

I gave permission for his organs to be donated, but the hospital could not take them as Anthony's body had to be preserved as 'evidence'. I was distraught – the loss of his life could not even give others the chance to live. I had to think of my son's body being kept cold and subject to a number of post mortems – we were not to get him back for 8 weeks – all that time before we could have a funeral. I don't know how we survived that.

I was grief stricken and did not know which way to turn. I am a religious person, and gained some comfort through my beliefs and from friends in our prayer group, but it was not enough. I did not want this to happen to other people and so I joined the charity Word4Weapons (www.word4weapons.co.uk)

to try to deter young people from carrying knives and violent crime. In turn Word4Weapons referred me to Through Unity where I have been able to meet others who truly understand the anguish and the aftermath of losing a child through homicide. It was a place where I could tell my story and begin to learn to survive in our very different family unit. We will never recover from the loss of our children, but it helps to be in touch with other parents who understand that and have found ways of coping with their loss. Knowing them has made a difference.

Hermine Caesar

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