

Journeys of Grief

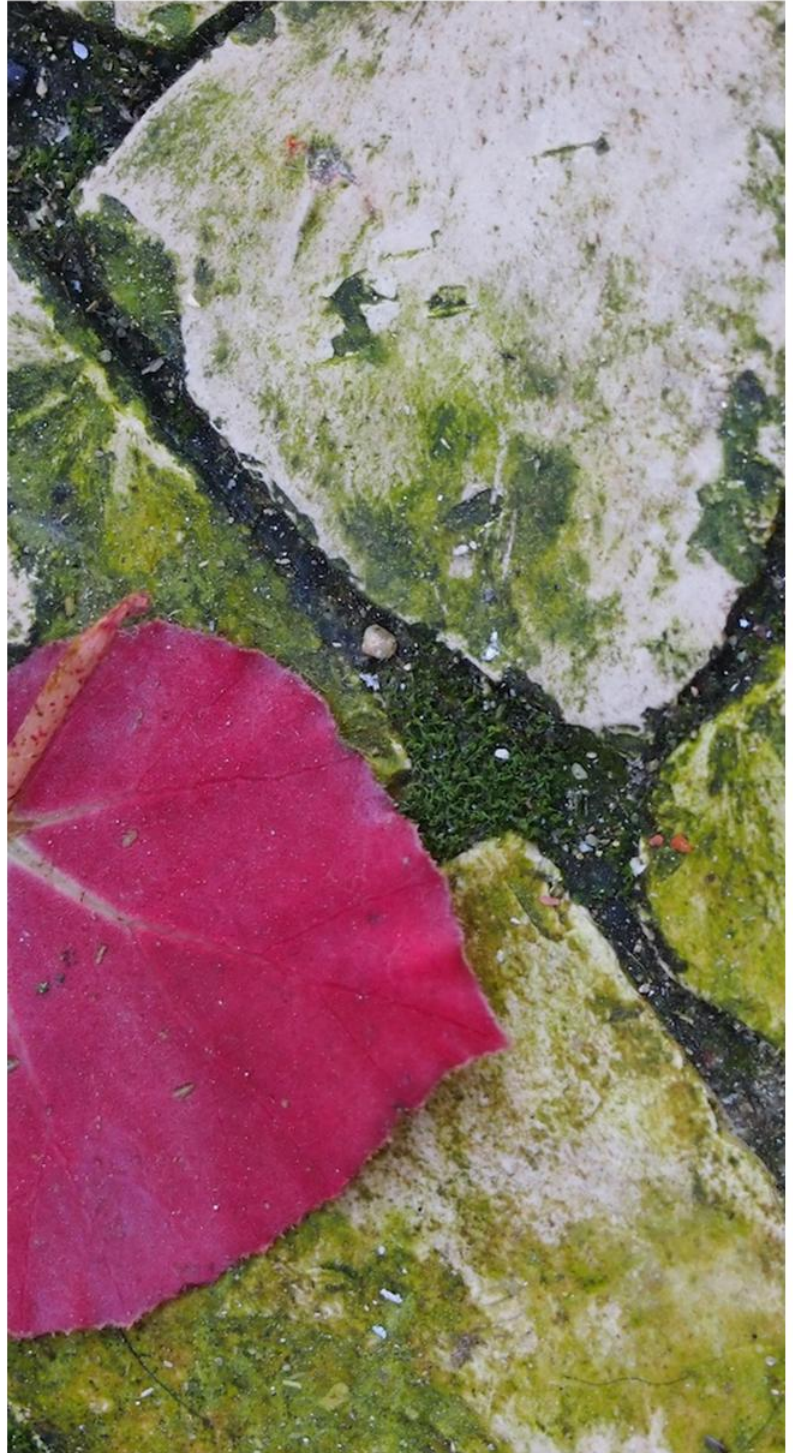
Research Report



THE UNIVERSITY
of EDINBURGH



Centre for Creative-Relational Inquiry



Journeys of Grief is a collaboration between the **Centre for Creative-Relational Inquiry** at the **University of Edinburgh** and **Cruse Scotland**, who commissioned this research project led by:

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At the bottom of the ocean by Ilona Suojanen

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Aims and Objectives of this research

Cruse Scotland commissioned the University of Edinburgh, through the Centre for Creative-Relational Inquiry, to conduct a qualitative research project that explores how bereaved people experience grief and how they navigate their grief at various points in their mourning.

The research project title *Journeys of Grief* refers to how people experience and navigate their loss, in their own way, at various points of their process to answer the following questions:

- a) How do people experience their *Journeys of Grief*?
- b) What have bereaved people found helpful to navigate their grief at different points in their process?

To answer these questions, the project focused on exploring two aspects:

- 1) How do people **narrate** their experiences of mourning throughout their *Journeys of Grief*?
- 2) What have they found helpful in their processing of loss **throughout this period**?

It has long been a central pillar of Cruse Scotland's integrity that its practice is informed by evidence. Cruse Scotland is keen to explore their approach to the allocation of new clients.

Cruse Scotland's current policy is to not provide regular counselling to clients in their first six months of bereavement and provide alternative services instead. Their stratified model of care references specific academic publications in support of research findings that suggest interventions early after bereavement appear to be ineffective (Bonanno & Lilienfeld, 2008; Currier & Holland, 2007; Stroebe et al., 2017). From anecdotal evidence by service users, which suggests that they would have appreciated receiving regular counselling earlier, Cruse Scotland is questioning their current policy, which is also highlighted by the recent development of their early support services. Therefore, this project, *Journeys of Grief*, explored how individuals navigate their grief at various points in their process to support and review their current policies and, if necessary, update them.

Introduction

Grief is a deeply personal and multifaceted experience, shaped by individual, relational, cultural, and societal factors (Cacciatore & DeFrain, 2015; Neimeyer et al., 2012; Neimeyer et al., 2014; Paxton, 2018; Pearce & Komaromy, 2020). The fieldwork carried for this project provided a rich exploration of the diverse *Journeys of Grief* that bereaved individuals undergo. Grief is not a singular experience; it is a dynamic and multifaceted journey that varies widely among individuals. It is shaped by the nature of the loss (e.g. a sudden death, a death after a long period of illness, a death by accident, etc.), the relationship with the deceased (e.g. losing a partner, a parent, a child, a friend, etc.), cultural norms (e.g. funeral rituals vary across individuals, families, cultures, countries, etc.), and personal coping mechanisms. Grief is not merely an emotional process, but also an embodied, relational, and socially constructed phenomenon.

Grief manifests differently for each individual, influenced by the unique structure of their lives and relationships. For example, the loss of a young person can shatter their loved ones' sense of future possibilities, the loss of a partner can disrupt long-term projects and routines, leaving the bereaved to navigate a world that feels fundamentally altered. Grief can also be anticipatory, occurring before the actual death when a loved one is terminally ill. This form of grief involves mourning the loss of future possibilities and the gradual decline of the loved one's health and abilities. Ambiguous loss, where the circumstances of the death are unclear or the person is physically present but psychologically absent (e.g. like in the case of dementia, or when someone is living abroad), adds another layer of complexity, often leaving the bereaved in a state of suspended agency and uncertainty.

The physical impact of grief is profound and often underexplored (Leichtentritt et al., 2016). Bereaved individuals described physical sensations such as pain, numbness, or changes in appetite and sleep habits. These experiences were not only reflections of emotional distress but are integral to the grieving process. For instance, some individuals used their bodies as a means to maintain a connection with the deceased, engaging in body-associated actions like visiting graves, holding onto personal items, or even experiencing sensory perceptions of the deceased's presence (Leichtentritt et al., 2016). These embodied practices challenged the traditional psychological view of grief as a purely mental process and highlighted the importance of the body in mourning.

Grief is shaped by cultural and social norms, and this is present in the way that people mourn, remember, and honour their loved ones (Alavez, 2022; Carson, 2011; Sabucedo et al., 2023). In some cultures, the presence of the deceased is actively maintained in the long term through rituals, such as keeping the remains of the deceased at home or engaging in practices that honour the dead.

Disenfranchised grief, where the loss is not socially recognised or supported, further complicates the grieving process. For example, individuals grieving the loss of an ex-spouse or experiencing involuntary childlessness may struggle with a lack of acknowledgment and support, which can exacerbate feelings of isolation and hinder the mourning process.

The timeframe of grief counselling

Grief counselling within the first six months of bereavement has been considered unnecessary for most individuals, as the majority experience normal grief and recover naturally with the support of loved ones (Bonanno & Lilienfeld, 2008). Research suggests that early intervention during this period may even disrupt the natural grieving process, potentially causing more harm than good (Bonanno & Lilienfeld, 2008). However, given the quantitative provenance of the research focusing on the six-month timeframe, it is important to consider the people who fall outside this specific time frame, and ask who is been left out by considering this indicator. Is this six-month timeframe suggesting a generalised, uniform process for the bereaved? Evidence from qualitative studies suggests that people experience grief in multiple timelines that do not fit a stage or linear model (Lykke, 2022; Paxton, 2018; Rodríguez-Dorans & Méndez Díaz, 2025; Stroebe et al., 2017), characterised by prolonged and intense mourning. The six-month mark is often seen as a critical point for assessing whether grief has become ‘pathological’. Ultimately, grief counselling is most appropriate when tailored to the individual’s specific needs, particularly for those at risk due to factors like prior mental health issues, multiple losses, or lack of social support. Throughout this report, participants in the study speak about the different needs they have experienced, as they navigate their process from the immediate aftermath of the death towards up to years after the loss.

Methodology

The study consisted of a series of interviews focused on participants' narrated and felt experiences of bereavement. Participants were invited to two interviews with an approximate period of two weeks between them. In the first interview, participants were invited to share their experiences of grief through an act of narrating. The second interview had the purpose of exploring any potential topics that emerged from the first interview and bringing an 'object of grief' to accompany the narrative exploration of their mourning.

The inclusion of documents and objects as part of the process of inquiry responds to how 'objects lend grief a form that exposes rather than compensates for bodily absence' (Tanner, 2006, p. 178). Objects and documents of grief refer to written materials and objects associated with their bereavement (e.g. journals, letters, photographs, possessions of the deceased, etc.) that are used as part of the interviews to explore the participants' experiences of grief.

The inclusion of documents and objects was agreed between the interviewer and participant as part of the opportunity to make sense of their experience.

The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by the research team themselves for full immersion in the data, allowing for listening and relistening to more than 26 hours of the recorded narrative data that constituted the participants' stories.

A narrative portraiture approach

The project took a narrative inquiry approach, which attended to people's capacity to give meaning to their losses through the act of narrating (Bruner, 1986; Bruner, 1991, 2004). As part of our questions, we asked about aspects that have been helpful for participants in navigating their loss. This focus attended to the acknowledgement that people have an expertise in their own lives (Anderson, 1997) to give an account of what has been helpful in navigating their experiences of loss, as well as expressing their support needs.

This narrative lens supported the research team in gathering information from participants on how and when they have used these Cruse Scotland services. To represent the participants' narratives, we used a Narrative Portraiture (Rodríguez-Dorans, 2022) for the analysis of data and research communication. Narrative Portraiture is a qualitative research methodology that allows an in-

depth exploration of how individuals navigate their grief over time. This approach combines narrative analysis with relational and affective engagement, enabling researchers to delve deeply into participants' lived experiences while exploring the relational and temporal dimensions of bereavement.

Narrative Portraiture emphasises that grief is not a generalised process but a deeply relational and evolving experience, shaped by interactions, relationships, and the passage of time; an individual process of meaning-making represented through storytelling.

The relational aspect of narrative portraiture is enhanced by the use of phronesis, or practical knowledge derived from experience (Flyvbjerg, 2001). Phronesis encourages researchers to engage empathetically and reflectively with participants, recognising the importance of the researcher's own embodied and affective responses during the research encounter, similarly to how a counsellor connects with the affective world of the bereaved client. This relational engagement allows for a deeper understanding of participants' *Journeys of Grief*, including the relational connections and support systems that shape their experiences.

Our approach to narrative portraiture involved mapping and coding narrative data to identify key features such as characters, orientation signs (time, space, and circumstances), complicating actions (e.g. death itself, and unexpected responses after the passing), results, evaluations, and special narrative features. This process is particularly valuable for understanding how individuals navigate their grief over time, as it allowed researchers to trace the temporal and relational aspects of their experiences. For example, mapping orientation signs can reveal how participants' grief evolves in different contexts, such as the first six months of mourning or years after the loss.

Narrative Portraiture also incorporated relational and affective dimensions (Finlay, 2009) as we deliberately paid attention to our own emotional and bodily responses during the research interviews, which provided valuable insights into the participants' experiences. For instance, the inclusion of objects and documents of grief – such as photographs, letters, or possessions associated with the deceased – evoked powerful emotions and deepened the relational exploration of grief.

Who are our participants?

Cruse Scotland offered their service users the opportunity to participate in the research, which facilitated participant recruitment. The call for participants was also distributed via the University of Edinburgh and Cruse Scotland's wider networks. To explore a plurality of experiences of grief and to better understand diverse journeys of grief, we recruited participants who were at any point of their grief, including the first 6 months of mourning, which is a critical point for exploration for Cruse Scotland. Participants were invited to participate in *Journeys of Grief* regardless of whether they had engaged with support services from Cruse Scotland or not.

The call for participants for *Journeys of Grief* brought together a diverse group of people, each with unique experiences of loss, to explore how they navigated their grief. 12 participants engaged in two research interviews, sharing their stories, objects of grief, and reflections on bereavement. One of the participants decided to withdraw their data due to feelings of overwhelm with their grief. The researcher who interviewed them provided them with relevant sources, including the opportunity to receive individual bereavement counselling from Cruse Scotland, to ensure they were supported.

Scott, a Scottish man in his 60s, cared for his father with Alzheimer's until his passing. Balancing caregiving responsibilities for both parents while working left Scott emotionally drained, and he later sought support through group support provided by Cruse Scotland.

Thalia, also in her 60s and Scottish, experienced profound grief after losing her only daughter at the age of 21. Her journey of grief involved finding purpose through supporting young people and maintaining continuing bonds with her daughter.

Jordan, a Thai man in his 40s, shared his experience of losing his grandmother, who lived with Alzheimer's for nearly three decades before passing away at 104. His story highlights the complexities of disenfranchised grief, the financial aspects of dying, and the cultural nuances of mourning across continents.

Martha, a Ukrainian woman in her 60s, lost her husband to leukemia after a challenging journey of treatments and complications. Her grief was compounded by feelings of guilt and the struggle to support her son, who was deeply affected by the loss.

Alara, a Turkish woman in her 30s, faced the loss of both her grandparents within two months. Her grandmother's passing, shortly after her grandfather's death, led Alara to reflect on how maternal the bond with her grandma was, and the lasting impact of this relationship in her life.

Sophie, a Scottish woman in her 40s, lost her father unexpectedly at 32 and her mother 18 months prior to the interview. Her mother's death deeply affected her, leading to depression and a need for grief counselling to process the loss of such a significant figure in her life.

Eva, a Scottish woman in her 30s, experienced the loss of her mother-in-law and father-in-law, which significantly altered her family dynamics. She found comfort in tangible objects and sought grief counselling to manage the emotional challenges of her bereavement.

Victor, a Scottish-Polish man in his 40s, lost his mother to dementia 18 months ago. He found solace in nature, physical activity, group counselling, human connection, and travelling to Poland to connect with his family roots.

Beth, a Scottish woman in her 50s who lost her husband to a sudden death more than five years ago. She described her grief as a devastating, permanent, and all-encompassing experience that colours every aspect of her life.

Ruth, a Scottish woman in her 50s, reflected on the life-changing impact of losing her mother, with whom she shared a close bond. Her grief journey involved finding comfort in her mother's belongings, music, writing, and connecting with her siblings.

In the following section, this report presents the narrative portraits of the people who participated in the project. These are constructed using their own words, arranged into compelling stories that foreground their unique perspectives. The researchers' interpretive work is implicit in the selection and arrangement of narrative excerpts, but the portraits are designed to authentically represent the participants' voices and experiences. Their stories form the heart of the *Journeys of Grief* project!

Scott

60s, Scottish, Male

My father was 85 when he died. My dad had Alzheimer's. [He was diagnosed] 2 years ago. And I was there every day, looking after him... he didn't know where he was and I tried to... calm them down and get them up and things like that... he used to call me his brother because I would look like his brother – I felt that hard. I would take him out for the day, for lunch, and hospital appointments, and mostly done all the, the running about. It was very difficult because I had to deal with my mum at the same time... and everything was just so... really, pressing. I was going to the hospital... I was up every day with my mum visiting them... [for about] eight weeks. And then we got the phone call that he died – in November, he died – and we went up and I didn't really want to go in to see him when he died, but because my mum wanted to go in, I really had to go in. And I kind of regretted that; I'd rather seen him the way he was when he was alive, than just lying there, not breathing. I felt that really difficult. I imagine that in my head, and didn't like that. I still have that image.

And I think when he died, it just struck me... like a burnout. But I couldn't grieve because I was running about looking after my mum. I couldn't even cry because I was working as well at the same time. I was up every day at 3 in the morning, I would go to my work to start at 4, finish at 12, go to my mum's for two hours, so that I would be there back for three, then head to get my dinner. I was going home and my mum [would be] on the phone for something. I just felt as though I was going 100 miles an hour every day. I couldn't even get a breather because it was just, I know I had to deal with my mum, because my mum and dad were married for about 60, 63 years... and they've never been apart. When he went at the hospital my mum didn't want to live by herself... but she had to... we managed to get [her] into a sheltered housing where there's carers that go in every day, so it took a bit of the pressure off me, but I still do a lot of roundabouts for my mum. I've got a brother, but he very rarely does much. He's, he's more interested in living, than doing anything different. If he's there with my mum and she's not feeling well, he'll phone me and say: 'mums not well, you need to do something.' It falls on me...

I'm married and my wife helps, deals with me because a year ago, I nearly had a nervous breakdown with all the carry on, and she's been there trying to get me through it. I'm on antidepressants at the moment. And that's when the bereavement [care] came through, and I feel that was a blessing in disguise. That kind of helped me a bit. To move further on. I still can't cry when I think of my dad, but I'm not as bad as what I was. I can't cry, I don't know why I can't cry. I've been sad, ready to cry. But I just... When my dad died, I couldn't because I had too much to do. I was running here, running there, running here, running there. I worked in [department's store]. But I don't do it anymore. I left. I collapsed. The counselling's really helped... it was group counselling that we got, six folk; there's two people that ran it and they asked questions, and they were really good. I really appreciated what they did for me: talk[ing] about my dad when other people are there. I felt other people had been having the same problems I had had, and that helped, listening to them and they were quite considerate as well. About a month or two months ago that I finished the course, and every time I went the Cruse course, my wife would say: 'you're totally different person' when I came out 'you were talking positive, you were talking about things'. But when my dad died, I hardly spoke to my wife. I just went into a wee shell. Wouldn't talk. My wife's seen a big difference, after certain weeks when I came out, that I was a totally different person. My head was high. I wasn't slumped, and actually, it's been a really great thing to have done the Cruse. Yeah. It was really good.

[And now] I go to the men's shed three days a week. That's helped out... It's a men's shed for people that had, like mental health... and not being keeping good. The doctor asked, advised me to go and that's when I went up and when I came back down, that's when I cried because there was a lot happening then. But I'm enjoying. It's the best thing that's happened to me since I left work... it helps you. There's other men there. Yeah. And they're good as well. They talk to you, and I talk to them. And I first went up I very rarely said anything because I was kinda, in a wee shell... But now I've known them for a wee while, it has been great for me. It's on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursdays, [and] It's done good for me.

I think bereavement [counselling] may have been better [in the first few months of my bereavement] because... I had too much to deal with, worrying about my mum and other things. I just totally, didn't do it. Maybe I've done it straight after the funeral and got in touch, but because I just felt

as though I'm a man, I should be able to deal with this... That's how I felt: 'I'm a man, I should be strong enough to deal with it.' But you can only deal with so much. And then I realise that I should have done it a lot sooner. I left it too long... I'm 62, and I'd never had to deal with a relative's death. It was something quite difficult, having to get the death certificate, organise the coffin, and things like that isn't something I've never ever had to do before, and it was a bit nerve-wracking. I wasn't sure if I was doing the right thing. I think if I had had counselling even when my dad wasn't well, I may have, I may have coped better, but you just don't know until you realise: 'I've been having a hard time.'

Martha

60s, Scottish-Ukrainian, Female

I will be over 60 in September. I have one son, he just has turn 36, and I have a grandson. My husband Oleg, he was diagnosed with leukaemia out of the blue in September 2023. It was horrible. And he went to three courses of chemotherapy. And as being from Ukraine, it was very difficult. Basically, even with chemotherapy there is no cure. You, need to have bone marrow transplant. As it was very difficult to get, his brother was only living relative and is in Ukraine. And because of the war and everything, it was difficult to organise anything. His brother wasn't very keen either to give blood for his transplant. Our son was suitable, but luckily for us they found a donor who volunteered to give stem cells for my husband. Which was very emotional and very dramatic, [because] I always think about what could go wrong, because due to my work I need to think about all those eventualities, so I always rethink and overthink, as my husband used to say. What if the plane from Germany won't arrive on time, but I luckily the plane came.

My husband was released from the hospital in March. He was doing very well, and then he started to develop some temperature. He was submitted to hospital, and they couldn't find what was wrong with him for three weeks. Until he was so bad, he was admitted to ICU, and he was very bad. Then they found the medication that worked, and he spent almost two months in the hospital. Just before our anniversary he was released, and he was doing really well. He was weak, but he was recovering and through the summer he started to do some work in the garden and everything. For him to be weak and to be unwell –he was very fit person before he was diagnosed, we were going to gym, and he could swim two lengths of the swimming pool without breathing.

During this time as he was diagnosed because of his immune system was so low, we were basically isolated, so we were communicating with my son, with our son, and his wife who was pregnant at the time, on the phone. We didn't see our grandson or our son in person, which just saw them outside as we were in there.

[My husband] was so looking forward to his 64th birthday. But unfortunately, at the time he was waiting for, basically his birthday was at

Bateson cancer centre. He started medication and chemotherapy very aggressive one and next day, it was the first time I saw him crying. On Monday he was admitted to hospital he was not doing very well. I didn't know why they didn't move him to ICU faster. I said to him, as the doctor was saying: 'would you like something to eat?' and he said: 'yeah, I like cottage cheese'. So, I left him there thinking that he is in a good hand and everything. So, I went to home to get cottage cheese. And then I got the phone call that I have to come back immediately. So, I did. And the doctor explained that he had cardiac arrest, and we managed to bring him back, but he is unconscious, he is not breathing on his own. Wednesday, we come after 1:00 o'clock, and I was there with him. I don't know why they were too late with putting [him on] dialysis. Doctor came in and said, we couldn't do anything. We need to switch off the machines. So, we went in. My son is a pharmacist, and he told me there is some, they were doing whatever they could, because there is whatever they are adrenaline stings and everywhere, so they switch off the machines.

We were together about 40 years. I did have questions about his care about everything, and I had to chase the doctors in the corridor because they would not give him his liquid or something... So, we know that he died from sepsis, but what exactly caused it, we don't know. So, I did ask for autopsy just to get me closure. Unfortunately, they didn't do autopsies as such. I got a letter about six months after his death confirming that it was sepsis. And I still don't know why it took them six months, because I was hoping to get some answers. It's just, after you have this guilt, you cannot get out of this guilt it's just absolutely overwhelming.

I didn't want to upset my son more than he was already upset. What I didn't know that he was off work for six for eight weeks at the time because he wasn't coping at all. I didn't realise the extend of the problem. And I went to him, and I am like you need to go back to work. And he said, mum I couldn't. He is a pharmacist; he really, he couldn't make any mistakes. He works at hospital and he, you know, if you brain is not working, you will make mistakes. And he said, every time I go to ICU I can see where my dad died. He phoned the mental health services they call him every day to check how is he, because he said to me, the fact that I am still here it's miracle. I did not realise the whole state. So, in a way it's like it switch my mind I was worried about my son more than I am thinking about my husband.

I am lucky that I have a friend. I phone her, and we talked, and she really helped me, and she said I am sorry I couldn't come to you, I am with my sister, but we will talk on the phone.

What I didn't realise at the time, which was I coming to those this Cruse bereavement, which really helped, the workshop really helped me, not the workshop, the group sessions. [They] explained to me that the six months you couldn't, or there is no point of going to counselling, because you need to really deal with [grief] within yourself. [However, before coming to Cruse, I access counselling through my husband's work], they were very supportive [his company], and they offered me to talk to the counsellor on the phone, bereavement counsellor. It was very strange, I still remember the session, it was on the Zoom, and she was very kind of ...matter fact, and first thing she said: 'how is you with the drinking?' And I am like: 'I am ok.' But and at the time, even though, I do like a glass here and there, you know, especially going out and everything, but I thought, there is nothing for me to celebrate, so I have not been drinking since September 2023, at all. I just don't feel, you know, I don't have reason to celebrate. So, having this question, and I totally understand that people might go to excessive drinking, but as a starting question I felt that it's a bit harsh. I am not drinking at all, and she is like: 'Are you sure?' And I am like: 'yeah', and I explain to her about [the journey], and she said: 'just tell me'. I start to talk to her and obviously I cried and everything, and after the 45 minutes she said: 'So, are you feeling better now?' I like: 'not really'. So, at the time I didn't feel any help from [it], maybe I was just unlucky.

So again, coming back to this group session, when we had more information about grief and how you know going this and that, and just get it all, and I am very, I don't know, structural person, so it gives me understanding what, why it wasn't working for me. Cruse, I phone them straight away, and I got the 50 minutes appointment with one of the ladies, and she said she will ask for another appointment because I wasn't doing really well. I had two 50 minutes [sessions] once and then so, and then she said: 'if you want, we will put you on the [waiting list]'. But it was kind of next appointment, I think it was December, I totally understand it was the long wait. First when we get together, and we were like very not sure about us, you know, but then it's kind of ...and it was hard to listen because there

was brave ladies who, you know kind of, was talking about their issues on the first meeting, and it was very brave because I wasn't ready. I was ready later on, but it was hard during the session, but I felt strangely better afterward.

I like structure, so we had some kind of theory to explain what we are going through and then we would chat. And the more weeks progress I was looking forward to that, because I never experienced any group session before, and I didn't know they exist or [how they] work, and I keep saying if I know about something I will tell everybody. The last session we had, the one lady who was sitting next to me, she said: 'look you were not talking in the first session, and now you [are] more open', and I agree. I felt benefit from it.

I totally understand that it won't work in the first six months, it's just won't. It might be at the end. In my experience, you need to go through it. It's very difficult, it's what people were saying at this group meeting, that they've been told that they won't get proper counselling after six months, and they were all saying: 'we need it now'. It's very difficult [to] understand that you have to wait. But I don't think, it's easy to explain why, from the point of view the Cruse, they might say, [and] they might not explain fully. [The guy at Cruse] said that it's very important that to get this message to the people that it's not because we don't want to, it's just because it might not work.

I did like talking, it's what the other people in the group said, that they really like talking to Cruse.

Beth

50s, Scottish, Female

I don't know how I got through it. It was just a blur. In the initial days, I had an idea in my head – because a friend had lost her husband seven months before – she came and sat in the garden and spoke to me... And when I looked at her, I thought: 'Well, she's OK.' So, I had it in my head that at seven months I was going to be okay. And the seven months came, 'well, I'm not okay'. A year. No. It felt like my heart, my chest was actually sore, my heart actually felt broken and now you understand what that means. It's physical ache in the heart. I stopped eating, didn't speak very much. Shocked. It's just like the last five years I've waited for [the grief] to go away. And you gradually realise – two years in – it's permanent. I had to be moving all the time, to the point of exhaustion. I woke up at 6:00, even on the days of cold, just, 'get my car and drive somewhere'. Go out, over the bridge over to Fife, then onto the beach. Just moving all the time and... just doing things all the time. I didn't sit. I just kept busy. And that's where I got to travel more. And what I was looking for, it wasn't there because I'm looking for my partner. I go to my siblings. Go to my friends. We did go abroad. It wasn't easy to travel, but my son and I, went to holiday destinations. The first holiday we had, people were still wearing masks, and there were still restrictions. You couldn't go into the pool, OK, you could go to the sea. We're sitting in places and when we got there, it was just another destination where I had got to. I was looking for something. I was looking for him, and he's not there or, I'm looking for somewhere to make me feel better. And I never find it, never find it. So, there was always that sense of absolute desolation. [It's] always searching for something and getting somewhere, and it's not there. Yeah, that's maybe eased a bit [over the years], because I think I'm going places and I'm looking at the places I'm maybe not thinking: 'He should be here', but I still see him everywhere. I still feel him everywhere. I still want him to be here.

So, you asked me to bring something today, so I'm wearing it. This is his T-shirt. This was the T-shirt he was wearing the day before the day... before he died. The clothes that he had worn the day before his body was taken away were in the basket. I didn't really go into the room after that until his [siblings] came, and then the basket was still there. And I think I said to

them: 'You have to, could you wash his clothes? Because I can't do it.' So they went into the room and luckily, one of my [in-laws] said: 'We should keep the clothes'. And this was one of them, and a shirt. So they, they weren't washed and they were hung in the wardrobe. So the shirt's still there. It's something like that. But just recently I'd gone into the wardrobe and I just thought: 'I'm going to wear it now'. I wore it, but I have washed it, but it's getting really thin now because I wear it constantly. This is his as well. So I wear his clothes, but the shirt is there, and I open the wardrobe and I just bury my face in it, but it doesn't smell of him anymore. It used to. I'll... I'll keep that forever.

He had this on the day before he died. And I can remember it was a nice day and we were –he had come in from a bike ride and he had gone up, got changed and he put this on so. And I always wonder, I think about that, when I was sitting looking at him: 'Why did I not know? Why did I not know that this was going to happen?' I think a lot of people that lose somebody, they can't believe they didn't know that it was going to happen. There was your life and it was going to end. Just going to end and we had no idea. I just feel I should have known, which is irrational. Irrational. It was a regular, ordinary day, but at the same time, it was such a fateful thing.

Grief just changes... it changes everything you do; the way you think, feel about others and the world, nothing is the same. And in the early days, nothing makes sense. I still have nightmares, so I should have done it [getting support in the first six months of bereavement]. I should have... sought support. Yeah. It's a psychiatric... because. I did in the early, early days, I was at the GP, and I got antidepressants. I brought them home and I thought: 'No, I'm not... I'm not depressed.' I'm just sad and there's a difference between depression, being mentally ill, unstable and being totally sad. This is grief. It's like you're catapulted into felt like a parallel universe [to one where he] was still alive at that time. But I wasn't in the world. The world, the world, everything had stopped for me, and then even to see, you know, hear people laughing next door in the garden having a BBQ. Everything is just enormously painful. There, there's no preparation on life for this. You've lost your life. It's felt like a bomb went off; a bomb went off beside me, and I'm in this big crater and then all the, you know, the fallout coming down, and you're down in the bottom of it. You're trying to crawl up that hole, [to] get yourself out that hole. That's the grief. There's no real recovery. It takes you years to get out. And nothing, nothing is the

same. You don't recognise, you don't recognise the world anymore. I think maybe that's what it felt like. Yeah, it was. It was terrifying. Absolutely terrifying. I thought that death came to our house.

I met Per travelling. He was travelling. He went from Europe over [this vast land] He travelled that way, [via] The Pacific. And then he went to [this island]. And I was travelling the other way [via the opposite side of the world] and we met in a place called... He got on the bus, and it was a bit bizarre because [it is] a really big place. You know, if you get a plane from [the West], to like the other end, that's five hours. It's enormous, enormous distance. So I met him [there], and then the next time I met him was in [this other region], which was miles away. Met him in the street... just by... he was just walking. He was out walking. And then I thought: 'Oh, I like him!' But then, what do you do? It's just a chance meeting... So he went away. He, he toddled off. He went off. And then I met him again in [another region] a third time! Yeah, it was 11:00, he was waiting outside this museum... It was Christmas Eve. [I decided] I would go to this museum that day and that was the 11:00 am, I was walking in, and the person he was to meet hadn't turned up. So, we spent Christmas Eve together and that was really the start of it. It was like it was meant, meant to be, because what are the odds that you meet three times during a trip?! So it was quite romantic and special. Yeah, it's almost. Destiny. That makes me happy... to remember that. Maybe Per and I [were] a bit disillusioned with... both disillusioned with jobs, life back home, hadn't met anybody special... and then we did, we met each other. Then, when we started travelling; we went to really magical places and fabulous things. And then we went home and then I went to live in [Europe] with him for two and a half years. And then we saved up money and we went to the Americas. Then we came to Scotland. Yeah. And then same again: crossing the Pacific, and then home again for another year... and we didn't have any money left at all. We had to stop. I'm glad we did because he didn't get to live past 53, so he had that; we had all that travelling, which he loved. They were good years...

Sometimes, I mean, I always say I don't believe in God, but I think there was something guiding me, especially in the, the Christmas Eve that we met because I had, I was still in a very distant family home and they were busy that day, so I had to take myself away out of the house. Yeah. So I got on the train into [this city] and I thought: 'Right, I'm going to the museum' And I, I changed the direction where I was walking and I went back, so I

don't know why I did that, and I went back to this other museum and I'm going to that for one and... And then I thought: 'No, no, I'm not going.' I changed again. So, I never really told him this, but I always feel there was something forcing me back there, and at this 11:00 in the morning, you know? The odds of us meeting again were vast. So yeah, sometimes I think there was something doing that for me. Is this where you're supposed to be?

One of my friends said to me in the early days, she said: 'Well, you have to hang on to the fact that you had that, and a lot of people didn't ever have that, that love. That special person. And she said: 'I never had anything worth having'. So, I had something worth having. And I've got my beautiful son. So, I am lucky. I know that I'm lucky. I haven't had a bad life.

Alara

30s, Turkish, Female

We lost my granddad in July. He had dementia for the last four years or so. It was expected when he died. But we didn't expect my grandma would die almost two months after his passing. I lost my grandma last September. She had health problems, but we didn't expect her to die that soon or that quick. She was struggling with the grief, with my Granddad's passing and that happened in July. When I called her after my Granddad passing, she said: 'Oh, Alara! I want this pain to be taken from me as soon as possible, immediately. I want to forget about it.' And I'm exploring now the importance of her in my life. I think she went too quick, I was going to see her. I talked to her two weeks before she died and I remember thinking: 'Oh, I'm going to see my grandma'. But then the last place I saw her was when she was in ICU. I never thought about this like: 'Oh, she was like a mother to me'. But I think she gave me some, like, maternal, if you like qualities, that was harder to get for my mum, due to her nature and also her difficulties. Now I'm exploring this in my therapy because... I always knew that I was close to her. I loved her, my grandma.

I'm from Turkey. Whenever I could... whenever I went to Turkey to visit my family, maybe 95% of the time I was there, I went to their city to visit my grandparents, mostly. I was thinking 'ok maybe this is going to be the last time that I'll see them'. So, I went to Turkey, I came at night. My mom told me to maybe, just have a rest one day and then we can just drive there the following day, Thursday. And I said: 'No, no, no. Let's let's go tomorrow. I want to see her one last time'. But in Turkey, ICU has visiting hours. I could see her at 12:00 PM. So I waited.

I saw [a] baby crying and I was like, 'oh, these people are going to die in ICU, and other people are just, yeah, been born'. [When] I went in, she was on the machines. We weren't allowed to touch [her]. But if I asked, maybe, you know, I could just hold her hand. I didn't even ask. I don't know why. I just looked at her and just thanked her...that I felt so loved. But I'm just so thankful to have her.

So, [when] I was leaving... And even in that moment, that is something super uncontrollable, but even in that moment, I was thinking: 'I am going

to see my grandma'. Still like, there was a sense of having the control, still this illusion.

Then [back at the grandparents house]...this thing happened like I mean it. Never. I don't know. It's if it's like this spiritual thing. I got this horrible... you know, when you [get into a] lift and [it goes] super-fast, you have this emptiness you know, your body... So I had this kind of feeling, and then my aunt went to sleep, and we were just talking with my mum. Then maybe 5 minutes later my aunt came in, she said: 'well, I just received this call from the hospital... her heart stopped. They did everything, [but] they couldn't save her.'

I saw her face like, you know, there's this washing ceremony after she... once someone dies, before they are buried, they... you wash them. I mean there are people whose job is to wash them. And then you are wrapped in a white cover before you are buried in, you know in Islam. So, then the lady called us: 'if you want to, [give your] farewell'. I was in between but...I went in. My aunt said: 'I wouldn't want you to see', and then I wasn't sure in what state, you know, my grandma [was]. And then my mum said: 'no, no, no, you can come, come in'. So that encouraged me. I saw her. I saw her face and I think she wanted to live. Like, her face was a fighter's face, like she really wanted to stick to life, I guess. She doesn't want to die. Like she didn't have a good relationship with dying either.

Two days ago [during therapy, private therapy, I didn't seek support from Cruse because] I know that they do like 6 sessions, I didn't want like 6 sessions, I wanted it to be more open... So, two days ago, it hasn't happened for a long time until two days ago, I was talking to my mum, we talk almost every day, we just, you know, catch up, and I was going to tell her: 'Oh, have you talked to my grandma? How is she?' But that, that one second felt so nice that she was still alive. And then immediately...the hit, if you like.

If you like, you can call this an illusion... we tend to think that older people are, that death has an order. I mean, yes and no because we can all die in a minute, you know, in one second... I think that losing someone is always like a source of fear in my family, or at least like the mum's side. And in dad side, yes, there's an actual death, actually a tragic one. And then this actually explains why I'm feeling the way I'm feeling towards my grandma, for instance, my mum tells me: '[As a child] I never cut your nails because I

just couldn't'. It was my grandma [who did it]. My mum couldn't wash me, [give me a] bath me when I was born, [she was afraid of dropping me]. My grandma was super comfortable [to take care of me]. It feels nice to talk about her.



I never thought that this was significant. This would be a significant thing until not even until she died. The day she died, the day I went to the hospital, I was wearing this. It's a shawl. It has so many functions. I can have this when I go visit her grave. I I'm wearing this like almost every time really, sometimes less, but when I need to feel more cheerful, I guess because it's a colourful thing. And then I know that this is going to be shown, and I always get compliments from random people.

This is a pyjama; the new one and this is a really old pyjama. She's the most generous person I've ever known. My grandma would always buy things for us. I remember thinking: 'Oh yeah, we are going there [visit my grandparents]'. And the second thing would be. I mean that I'm going to see them, but I think: 'Oh, what did she get for us? And what is she going to cook for us?' She was an amazing cook. That's how I think felt her love, explicit love.

And so, pyjamas became a thing. She had this minibus seller. He would go around places, and he would stop in some of the houses and my grandma

was one of them because she would buy so many things. She bought more and more pyjamas because she became more, more and more immobile. She wasn't able to go to the centre. And in those supermarkets there [in Turkey] were so many pyjamas, like different kinds of pyjamas, and she would always buy one or two. She would give away, give to others, and to us as well. And this is one of them. I'm being more careful with this [one]. I would never believe that, you know, a pyjama would be... would define that my grandma's dead. [When she was struggling with her own grief] I told her, I thought that I would do a favour to her. I said: 'Grandma, my pyjama is getting older, buy me a pyjama'. And then I just, I think how naive I was. I guess. That the PYJAMA would make her distract her from everything.

However, after my grandmother died this fear of dying has really reduced significantly. Now I'm like: 'if my grandma died, anyone could die'. How weird. She made it more possible that I... to be more in peace with death.

Sophie

40s, Scottish, Female

I lost my father when I was 32, which was quite tragic. I didn't expect it. He was only 54. And then I moved back to Edinburgh about 15 years ago and started up in a relationship. Well, we weren't estranged, but we started back, you know, as a family, just my sister, myself and my mum. And then I lost my mum about 18 months ago, 19 months ago. Which we weren't expecting. We weren't expecting.

Because we've taken her to... everywhere, so surely you can find something wrong. You can see if she's losing her mind, but it didn't happen.

Anger at a system that lets down so many old people. And because I'm working with vulnerable people, you know, it's like I know there's no real... you feel that doctors have to place necessity on, you know, the younger ones. There's not as much time spent on the people that are vulnerable in society, and with mum, you know... and you think how can somebody go from living on her own and doing everything for her, and she can't remember how to put on the telly?

She died in August, so the house was empty and we checked the house every now and then and in January, the tank above her house burst and just absolutely destroyed the house. So we had to get the insurance involved and get that all done up, completely done up. And then it just got finished this year because we had to go through so much with insurance. And then it's just been sold now, nearly two years later.

I think it just, it got, for me, I fell into a bit of a depression and I had to take some time off work. I mean, I suffer from depression anyway, but this, I wanted to drive my car into a bloody... wall and I thought: 'no I need to step back from work'. You deal with grief in a different way, and you think: 'Right, okay, she's gone, that's it'. But when she's such a big part of your life...

And I suppose the thing is, your own mortality as well, because now that... Mum, she was only 77 and now she's got a younger brother and we're the old generation now. You know, when you start to think of your own mortality, we are getting to be the older generation now because all your

aunts and uncles... I mean, I only think I have three, four, four left. No. And that's kind of scary.

We've still got mum's ashes with no dealt with them.... (Laughs...) We've not done anything about them and we're like, I said: 'I don't want to get rid of them... (Laugh) I'm not ready to put her in the ground yet'. And [my sister] is like: 'Well, neither am I, really'. So we've still got her ashes and everything.

And that's been good. And just, you know, not forgetting her. Making sure she's... we've still got pictures everywhere of her, and it's not like an altar or anything like that, but we still keep pictures on our phones, and we talk about her constantly, so that's not too bad, but I was a mess. I mean, I couldn't stop crying at every turn. I couldn't stop...miss and hurt....It was almost physical. And now it doesn't feel like that.... Time definitely helps but when you actually, when you put things in perspective, you have to keep on going. You have to keep working, you've got bills to pay, you know, when you finally say: 'well that's life you know that's like'.

I think you have to show weakness. ...before you can get help and that's when I went to the doctor and I said: 'I just I don't know how to process everything I've got all these feelings I've got all these I'm constantly in tears I'm getting stressed from work...' and she says: 'I think you need something' and Cruse helped put everything into focus everything into perspective. I don't think I would have with dad because it was a different kind of grief with dad, but with mum –because she was such an integral part of everyday life... Whereas with dad, I was living in Glasgow at the time when I heard that he had passed away because my sister had to go and get the door broken down and everything and I was like: 'right, okay'. You always sort of expected it and you didn't, you know, you didn't really, you didn't have the same relationship with dad as with mum, growing up because mum was the one you wanted to protect and keep safe and everything. So, mum's death hit me more and if I'd known about Cruse last year when I was going through all this I would have definitely given them a phone call or got my GP to put me in touch.

I've got my mum's signet ring, which I've worn. she gave me it when I was in my teens and I gave her it back and then she gave me it about a couple of years ago. And I wear her signet ring. It's getting a bit worn now, but she's had that since she was about 16. So it's quite old. I carry with me her

fingerprint. And I remember giving me it when I was at school to wear that finger and it slid off when I was playing hockey and I lost it, and I did find it again so I gave it back to her to say: 'look when my fingers are a bit bigger I'll wear it'. And then she gave me it, she kept it and she's like: 'I said I need to get rid of this ring mum because it's it's... not it's'. My old one, the shank was getting really thin then, and she actually made this broader.She got some gold, extra gold put into it, so the shank is, it looks kind of sturdy, so I thought: 'right, okay', I'll put it on. So I've wore it now for about four years. It's a bit of her. I know for a fact that the lady that did it actually went into the undertaker's to get the fingerprint done because we were going to get a little bit of the ashes turned into jewellery, where you can get a little bit, and I thought, no...because I'll either get her big toe or her nipple... and I just didn't want to, I thought: 'no, I don't want to start getting wee bits and scraping them'. She's keeping intact, you know, she's totally intact. And it's weird; we both said this yesterday that none of us are very religious at all, you know, or not religious. And yet my sister has a thing like a sixth sense thing. I don't at all, because it freaks me out, all that spiritual stuff. But none of us have had... You know how they sometimes say that you get visitation or something? None of us have had anything from her. Anything. I mean, there's the odd smell when I've gone into the house, but that's because her clothes were there at the time. You know, and we've never had any dreams about her, we've never had any unusual happenings, or... For instance, my... One of my sister's friends, her daughter, went to San Francisco, and her grandmother had just died. And her maiden name was Mason. And she came upon a Mason... And then this guy just took out his guitar and started to sing the same songs that were in her funeral..... out of the blue in the middle of San Francisco. And her uncle's name is Mason because that was her grandmother's maiden name. So she called her son Mason. Nothing ever has happened with us like that.

It would be nice to know that she's safe and sound and meeting up with the pack up there, you know, it would be nice. It would really freak me out. Really freak me out.

And since it, we've got in touch with an old aunt that came up from Swindon, my godmother actually, which is my dad's side, but she knew my mum very well. Mum's sister has come up for the week and we've had her. I've gone down to Auntie Alice as well. So we're really sort of closing ranks

on all the old days, you know, and making sure that we see them and spend quality time with them, you know?

No. Just memories are really important. And having something I think tangible really helps. I mean, I could bring in so much stuff, and it wouldn't mean as much as this or my photographs. Totally. It just wouldn't, because each time that I look at a photograph of my minute, I'll think, right, where were we that day? Oh yeah, we went down to Gullen that day, we had fish and chips. She ate all my fish supper and left me chips. Do you know all these little memories, which is brilliant. And then Lindsay and I were sitting, going through some photographs. And you're like: 'oh my God, remember that? And remember when she cut my hair?' Like I've got a school photo in there. She cut my hair all squint from a school photo. And I'm like, oh my God. It was just, you know, even that is just fun, fun stuff.

Ruth

50s, Scottish, Female

So, I have experienced grief personally with my mum and my dad and particularly ...and other family members, younger ones, but particularly with my mum, it was a life-changing event for me. And up until that point, I'd lost a grandparent. So, death was quite far away and I'd lost a brother-in-law to suicide. But they were all quite far removed and I'm extremely, I was extremely close to my mum, I still feel her with me... so.. and it hit me really, really hard.

And June was a worry for us because all the kids came off school. I've got 12 nieces and nephews and mum was always the sole carer. So, there was a whole load of juggling going on within my family because my brother had his own business, my sister, so there was a whole load there. And then she died the day before school came off.... So the caring for her was really, really tough because (A), she couldn't sleep, (B), she became paranoid and she wanted to count.

But I used to take her washing home when I left in the morning, and I used to remember thinking: 'I could do this forever'. Just tearful speaking about it if she stayed alive, which was never going to happen. So yeah, that surprised me, and I'm okay with my grief. I truly am okay with it, so I don't want you to feel upset. I think it's just thinking about these things again.

And when she died, it was during the night, and I was in the room with my husband. We were on like a bed thing, and my sister was sitting next to it.

And then, because I was the power of attorney, I was busy because I had to do the paperwork, I had to get the death certificate, all that sort of thing. And my sister, who's a year older than me, she came with me to do that. And then with the rest of the family, undertaker, arranged the funeral, all that sort of stuff. And that keeps you busy right up to the funeral, which we were.

But all through that, my feeling was I'm on automatic pilot. And mum had always said when she was ill to all of us: 'Don't cry. You're going to cry, get out and get somebody else that can do this. I don't want you crying in front of me'. And she made me promise that when she passed, and she made us

all promise that we would all go on holiday because we were all so tired. And obviously you don't want to show that, but your mum knows you ey.. And we had rented a house in the south of France for six weeks, and my sister was going off to the States. My other sister was going off somewhere else, and we all parted ways. But see, after living together for three months, literally on top of each other, it was the worst mistake I could have made in my life.

And (Husband) knew my mum for 40 years and 30 odd years at the time. And he loved my mum dearly and he did so much for her. And I think when I reflect on it, I think maybe I thought: 'You don't deserve this grief. This is my grief'. So, it may have been me..... But we couldn't share the grief.... And at night time, I used to wait till my husband was in bed and my daughter was asleep when I was in France. And I would get up and go out on the patio with my cigarettes and a cup of coffee. And I would sit and I'd pour every ugly thought and feeling that I had into this book... but I think inside, I was so angry. So angry that this had happened to us. I was so angry my mum was never going to leave me. And my mum had helped me so much. My husband and I tried for family for about 15 years. My mum was always there and here we got our daughter, and she bloody left me.

But I loved my mum so much and she was my best friend that I didn't want to betray anything about her. I don't know if that makes sense, but... I didn't want to share any of her private stuff with people who wouldn't get her and who may judge her.

It [grief] was present a lot of the times and I hope this doesn't sound weird, but I talk to my mum all the time. I do believe she's around and she's at home, but my grief was really experienced with my sister, and we'd go for walks, two or three hour walks on a Sunday, we'd take the dog out during the week, have a chat, things that came up for her, she'd phone me or vice versa.

Really, really painful. And I owned my mum's house, and I held on to it for a year and a half... And also, I used to go along on my own and sit in my mum's house. That gave me great comfort, real comfort. Just sit around her things and it was a nice place just to be on my own because I had this child running around all the time and a nursery was right at the end of my mum's street. So I would just go and make myself coffee and it was a great

peaceful place just to, I would say, probably help my heart heal, help me come to terms with things.

So, it came out in that, came out in music, came out in my writing, came out in my walking, being on my own, yeah, visiting her grave way too often. I just, I think I felt I needed to have that closeness to her, and just even her clothes and in the house just sitting there and just, yeah, I think that's how I processed my grief

So, I've brought one or two things, and really, when you see an object, for me, it's kind of like more a legacy of who my mum was. I shall pass through this world but once. Any good, therefore, that I can do, or any kindness that I can show to any human being, let me do it now. Let me not defer or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again

..... so, once the funeral had settled down and we were all home, my niece said to my sister: 'Mum, let's bake some cakes and tell them at the school fair and raise funds for Marie Curie'. And then we started thinking: 'Right, how can we pay back?'

And we started doing little things, bake sales at the sports centre, our local hotel, schools, little things. And then my sister is in licensing trade, she has a hotel, right, we'll do a Christmas fair at the hotel. And we did that. And so it snowballed. And then we started doing an ab sale at Dundee University where I worked. And there's a 120-foot tower, I don't know, you might probably see that as you come across if you bring it on the train and we started doing that and then my sister did a cycle Vietnam to Cambodia and she became a patron. So we did loads and loads of stuff.

[Continuation of] Who my mum was. And she was a care assistant, and she worked with old people. And even at Christmas time in that, she would pull one of us in, Who's off on Saturday? Right, come up, I want to take old Jess. a 90-year-old woman for a drive down to the beach. She was just that sort of person.

So, there's all these little things. And that's how I choose to remember her. Not as being... She wouldn't want us to remember her. My mum would have taken her own life if she'd had choice, but she didn't have mental capacity by the time she was diagnosed. So that's how she wanted us to remember.

You lose a parent and you lose both parents. My siblings are really important to me. And even though we're more about each other, what do you want to do? 'Oh Jesus, he's going to say this or she's going to say that'. Underneath there's a deep love and appreciation and we're there for each other. I think that's what mum always taught us to be like.

And I remember after she died, I don't normally smoke, I went and sat under this big oak tree that I liked and sat and had a cigarette and thought: 'The trees were rustling up above me'. I thought, 'Where are you, mum? Where have you gone?' Well I have to go somewhere. I have to go somewhere and I choose to see my mum floating around in little rays of light and you know and butterflies. It's a big thing for us as well. We've got a big butterfly done and flowers for her, and butterflies is a Chinese symbol of happiness. I remember when I was in China, I had a lovely butterfly dress and gown, and in my garden, walking along, these little butterflies would have gone in the front and even Petra and I now will walk. She wouldn't go in there's mum. A little butterfly going past. I don't know, I just think, I love nature, there's a connection with nature and the spiritual world. I've never gone to churches or sought it out formally, it's just a feeling in me.

Wictor

40s, Scottish-Polish, Male

I knew something was up. When you get a phone call about 5:45 in the morning, it's never good... 18 months ago my mom passed away a week before Christmas. She had had dementia for about four years beforehand, for 4 1/2 years. Which is a sort of family thing. Her mum and her grandmother also had dementia, as well as her grandfather. So, in a in a strange way, it was relief she was no longer in pain. But still, it's a big shock and it's never an easy time to lose a loved one.

Thankfully, my brother was living nearer to my dad than I did, so my brother thankfully had organised a taxi for me to take me straight down to where they're living. And the ambulance people were still there because it was a legal obligation, because it was a sudden death and the police had to get involved as well. Just to make sure that [there wasn't] something suspicious.

[The] police came and was asking a whole bunch of questions and, and because mum was half... was half Polish. It's like trying to explain our brothers were abroad, and trying to remember how to spell her maiden name, which was a Polish name. Polish father and Scottish mother so... Anytime I don't need to remember how to spell our main name, I can do it. But yeah, when you have to do it [with the police], 'How do you spell...?' And phoned up our older brother in Canada. Was like 12:45 in the morning there and it's not the kind of thing you want to do... They had to do so... My brother's married. So, his wife was also there. And for when I got in, she's the first one who gave me a big cuddle, so it was quite a surreal experience and, and family and friends knowing all of them are abroad. So, you're supposed to take into consideration like time differences and. Yeah, just get on with it.

She died on the Monday. The next day... her brother, sister, and dad and went to local funeral directors and organised that because it's just before Christmas, we can't... We did [the funeral] until the New Year or something like the 8th of January when we had our service. And my dad, brother and I all got up and said something [at the service]. And I think the way I was talking with was a tad, [I put] a bit of humour into, so I just got up and thanked everyone for being there and said: 'Thanks ladies and gentlemen,

for being here. I think that includes most of you.’ And I had everybody in stitches, which helped me relax. I was up to tell you about a story about my mum –so, I've actually got a picture in my home of my mum, my granny, my great-granny, my great-great-granny, and my great-great-great granny – 5 generations. All, the same name, Susan. Five generations. I mean, I think when my mum was born, her granny... so my great grandma was only at 42, so quite young. And my mum wasn't the first grandchild, so I think my great granny was in her late 30s when she became my granny for the first time. So, it's quite it's all quite compressed. We'd got together a whole bunch of photos for the order of service. In one – my mum worked with people with MND and MS neural disorders – and one of the pictures was her and the Scottish Rugby player Buddy Weir – I hadn't realised he was so tall. He's in two metres high!

We couldn't get it done as quickly as we would have liked. So, but the work he knows local funeral director and she was able to get things moving quite quickly as well. You know, one of the things I had to do with Dad was with the death certificate, because my grandfather –my mum's father– wasn't in our lives, had to supply information about him and it's like: ‘What did he do again?’ And I had to provide all that information. So just in fact, for some reason, I couldn't retain information. [In the first six months of the bereavement] I struggled. I mean when I was living at the time, there's a few parks I would get out every day, go and have a walk in nature. Thankfully, people I know were doing like a bereavement course, which was near [where I lived] at the time. So that was like six or seven weeks. I think altogether it was eight weeks, 8 weeks, but I missed the first week because I had an issue with my house. So, I was able to talk about how I was feeling... with other people that were going through a similar position, I think with Cruse there was a more intense, well, not more intense, but more in depth, which I find was quite useful. There were two ladies [giving] the course and six of us [in total], three guys, three females – thankfully! I was concerned that I would be going into a room full of women and I wouldn't know how to react to that. But then, there was other guys there and we're all given the chance to speak and discuss how we're feeling. So it was it was good from that point of view... guys can withhold in their motions, but there's other guys there, then it helps us to release. It helps. It helped me anyway to talk more because I was kind of like, carefully put on the spot, and I was able to constructively say how I was feeling in that

moment. And there's quite a few exercises that were done with the group. It was just like artwork colours. It was like they had like a... they made like a wee fountain... like a river and so forth and something... another word. But... I get confused. Some types of words, but it was like a ... 'a waterfall' is the word I was looking for. And it's like being able to describe where I was, where I felt I was at that time. So, I found that really beneficial.

I mean, I had to make myself vulnerable, but it was done in in a safe manner because obviously you're talking about really quick raw emotions. And I... I struggle [with] my emotions at the best of times, so I felt it was a safe place, and I was able to discuss what was going on, which was good. I think [what made it safe was] because one thing they said towards the beginning was about the confidentiality of the group, so I knew because I'd done... because I'd worked in sort of accounts before, and reception, because I knew that, that would be taken quite seriously. So, I felt: 'This is a safe place to offload and build up relationships'. The one of the good thing is, afterwards, we had... we joined a WhatsApp group. So, I'm still in contact with quite a few of the people... it's not every day or every week, but it's like [asking] how we're doing sort of thing... so that's good. One of the people mentioned a wee garden just off the Veterans House, on the Royal Mile which I didn't know existed, Dunbar's [close garden]. And I passed it often enough, but never intentionally. So, she just said: '[Do you want] to check it out?' It would be March time... And so, when I got there the next Friday, the first thing I said to the person was: 'Thanks very much for telling me. I went down, really enjoyed it', and actually the person was quite appreciative that I thanked her and seen the garden. I find it quite peaceful. I think that's one thing I've looked with Edinburgh is there is a lot of wee hiding gems, which if you if you venture and have a look, it's amazing what you can find. And finding these places is so peaceful.

So, a good thing I have been doing as well as going to the gym quite a lot. The physical work [really] helps. I find that as therapeutic as well because I'm out seeing folk interacting and you've got seeing the same people and build up relationships and that always helps. [Before Cruse] another health professional had referred me to [an Edinburgh Leisure] gym... 16-week course fit for health... you go in for an hour a week and just do basically exercises with paid membership, and with staff and volunteers so they will ensure you have to sort of do things safely. Did that for several weeks... [and] they put me in for another nine weeks and then I got a

discounted membership for the gym. So, I'm there most days and the staff have been quite good; take me around, show me how to use the different things safely and how to adjust things as well, because obviously, they want people to enjoy it without hurting themselves, so I'll just go in and I'm not sure I'll ask and then it's a good way, just checking in with someone and them checking-in with me. I find that actually really helpful for the journey of bereavement... because it's building relationships... I'm also part of a walking group which that's good, because it often goes into areas of nature and there's something I've benefited from... I am really active. I've lost wee bit of weight as well; 50, about 50 kilogrammes. So yeah, because I should look after myself... So, I just want to try and live life the best I can...

...And I had a holiday last month for the first time in a long time, went abroad and that was really, really good. [I went to] Poland. Southern Poland. I've got a friend who... he's from the UK, but he, he spent a lot of time over in Poland. He speaks the language, and I met him over there and he's able to sort of guide me to things I wanted to see. So, it's all really good. I was in Krakow and my family's is near the Warsaw area. Sort of really central Poland. My granddad came over here, then moved to Canada and his parents and sisters, I believe, landed up in West Germany, so I don't know if there's any family left in Poland, but if there is, then they're kind of like this relations. So, but it's good just to sort of walk down the street and thinking: 'Well, this is part of my back story.' Yeah. History. I really I do like history. And I think Krakow has a lot of kind of there's a lot of history there. So, before I went, I made a list of things I wanted to see, and I saw everything I wanted to see. I've started looking to go back to Poland, where my

Mum's father was from so, but because of the house move, I don't think I'll be able to go this year, but something to look forward to. So, it's made me sort of appreciate my roots. Yeah, I hope more... Hence the supportive t-shirt (Victor is wearing a t-shirt with a print written in Polish). Even I was there for five days. [When I came back] I was like: 'I need my bed now!' So, got a flight home late on Friday night, got home about 1:00 on Saturday morning. So, I've got things I needed out and just collapsed my bed a second night. But then the next again day I was up early heading to the gym and it's like: 'Let's keep going.' Well, the last time I went away from, I remember, for holiday was 2010 and that was down to Wales. Last time I was abroad was 2003, so it's like 22 years...

[This is a picture] by [the] Castle [in Poland]. That is my friend Chandler who speaks fluent Polish. There is not much hair, but....[jokingly laughing]... it was just the castle. The castle on the background and there is one more [photo]. That's with my monkey's T-shirt on and I was just... pulling faces...[happy laugh] putting a sticker...[laughing] on my head, yeah... It's something I do, it's just for my own amusement... sometimes I just do it for my friends, get them to relax and laugh. [This photo] is before I went to.... I was just with my mate Chandler in the Salt Mines. I had to take one of me when I was actually in Krakow, next to the main square but...I don't only take photographs of myself... I take photographs of all my friends...

Eva

30s, Scottish, Female

It was my mother-in-law. And before that, my father-in-law had passed away. Me and my husband were looking after her for a wee... But... and... then she passed away. 2023. He'd already passed away a few years before that in 2018. Sorry, 2018. There was a lot of similar things that we did after she died. Even... we had the funeral in the same crematorium up in Aberdeen, and it did have an echo of my father-in-law's passing. And you know, you're literally sat in the same room. And my husband, standing up again, speaking about another parent up there. I just remember thinking: 'I can't believe this has happened again'. You know, so that's kind of compounded it in that way, I guess. And. Yeah, and it does feel, definitely to me, felt like one death in a way led to another ... even if it's in a small way. So, it does feel, yeah, entwined.

I think that the initial grief of my father-in-law really impacted as a family because he passed away very suddenly. He went from having a little bit of a cough to passing away within 5 weeks, and then within that time didn't quite figure out what was going on until it was, you know, pretty much the last few days. At first, they thought it was heart failure, and then they realised he's got lung cancer. Not curable by that point, but they kind of still were of the thought of: 'we'll get some treatments on the go and people can live quite a long time. We'll get them home'. So, they were getting ready to send them home on the Thursday. Then he died on the Monday or the Tuesday. That was quite shocking for everyone, and we were well, what would we were, in our 20s type thing. So, it was quite young to... for my partner to have lost his dad. And so, my mother-in-law really stepped into that role of caring for everyone. She was always there anyway, but in particular at that time... I think she really struggled with her own grief. My mother-in-law passed away of a kidney stone. It was all quite a confusing journey and quite sudden. Lots of complications along with that, but something that felt like shouldn't be something that someone dies from. She went into hospital in July and she was there for six or seven weeks, and then she came out and stayed with us for a while. By the time they managed to give her the operation, she was just so unwell and didn't survive it. We looked after her when she was not well and able to look after

herself. It's just shock really. You can't ...you feel it very much felt like a dreaming away or like just being kind of taken along for the ride of not really knowing how things were gonna pan out because you thought it was gonna go the direction that... she was gonna get better and it didn't pan out that way. Quite numb feeling, just in shock for a couple of months and then... I had some physical sensations as well, I had tinnitus from the day that she passed away. When she passed away, it was almost numbness, kind of no reaction from either of us actually. After the doctor told us, and they left us in the room... I was very emotional. But when she actually passed away, I thought that might happen again, but it didn't. It just felt very strange and even going through to see her. And she just looked quite peaceful, just like she was sleeping. And I did get upset again, but not to the level of when the doctor had said, like, this is all we can do. It was almost like the grief had hit hardest before she'd actually passed away because it was getting told, you know, this is it.

My husband had lost both his parents at that point. Both his parents passed away before one of their own parents. And actually, they each passed away not long after that as well. As a daughter-in-law as well... you kind of were trying to figure out what your place was within that. I think maybe it's because they were my mother and father-in-law. They weren't my parents. And that was another thing that I was thinking: 'Oh my God, if I'm like this with them, what...when my own parents go? What am I going to be like? Or, if a friend passes away, what am I going to be like?' I was worried about how I would handle future bereavements, and that's still a worry as well. I've had grandparents pass away before that, but I think that the, again, the family kind of dynamic and structure is, you know, my mum was there and she kind of did the managerial role, let's say of all the doctor things and protecting everyone else, and of course we were all there to support her and support my grandmother, but there's still that kind of almost hierarchical thing with the family which does save you a bit from some of the more... yeah, raw, or, like, visibly seeing people so unwell or visibly heard, like audibly hearing from a doctor tell you what's happening. And I remember one of the days. My dad had called me to see how my mother-in-law was doing when she was in the ICU and had said, like, obviously not great, and was quite upset on the phone and he said, you know, what do you need? Maybe I should just come down. I think you need an adult there. And I was like: 'Dad, we are the adult. We are the next of kin,

that is actually our role'. And in the end he did actually come down, but he didn't go up. He wasn't saying that he would come in and speak to the doctors, but he just felt like, I guess he felt like I was his daughter, a child. You do feel like a complete child.



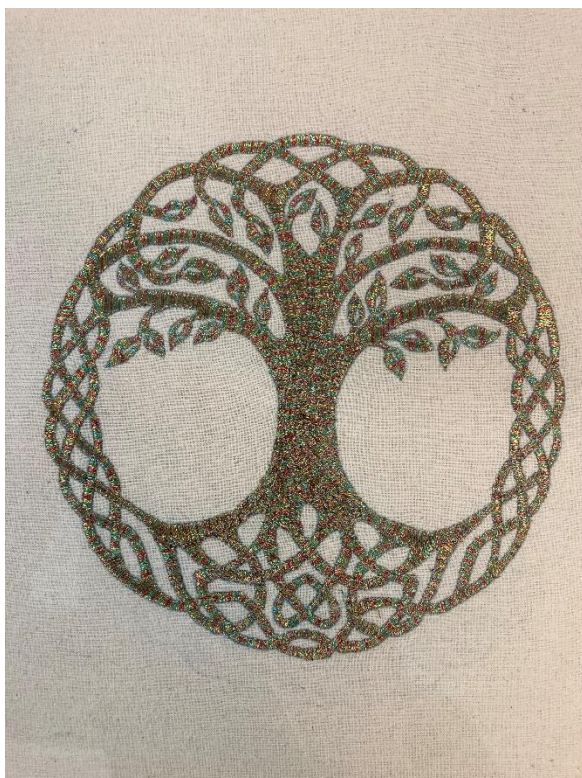
This is a snow globe, which we got for her when we went on holiday to Prague. So, it was the first kind of quality time spent together that we all got to know each other. We did stuff together every single day, but one of the mornings, my husband and I just went out a walk and he saw this and said my Mum loves Christmas and she loves snow globes and all that. So, he got this snow globe and brought it back as a wee gift. And I just remember seeing her face when she opened it up and was like, have you got me a gift? I can't believe it, you didn't need to do that. You didn't need

to do that. And she was really touched that he'd just thought of her and got her a nice. So, this went out at Christmas every year at her home and then again when she passed away. It felt like something quite nice to have for ourselves, and especially at Christmas time because she really loved Christmas. It's quite a challenging time. It just reminds me of really good times together. And of just seeing her face when she opens it up... She just was somebody that she always loved to give gifts to other people, and she never expected them back. And I think that as I say when Kevin just saw it and just thought of her, I think that she liked that so much. And that was just a real joy to see and to see how. Yeah. How much they loved each other. And that was so clear. And just to be welcomed into a nice family. That's what it felt like to me.

I think it's also one of those things, isn't it, in society that people kind of go ... mother-in-law. Such a pain and, like, have a strange like perception of what that relationship is and that everyone hates their mother-in-law and for me, that wasn't my experience. And so, when I think that people don't maybe think it's that much of a connection or something. That was a strange one too... to navigate.

[Her death] meant family changing. It means like a lot of things for the future that she's not gonna see or do. My brother-in-law, he didn't have a girlfriend, and now he has a girlfriend. If we were to have children... they're missing that side of their grandparents ... I think it just totally changes the family dynamic.

My husband's family, they all lived abroad when they were growing up, and then they moved back here. They had a shipping container of all of their furniture that they had from their house abroad. When my father-in-law passed away my mother-in-law just wasn't in a position or she didn't feel she could make the decision of where to set down roots and this was an ongoing kind of worry for the family. [The container] sat there for, like, 4 years just full. Bit by bit myself, my husband, my brother-in-law worked through that and they kept some bits, they gave bits away ... It was over a year. It took us over a year. Yeah. It was like a tangible, like physical, yeah, manifestation of grief ... It brought a lot of sadness because it almost like represented the life that they were going to have. And then they didn't. We would go home maybe later that night and have a dinner and talk about it. But when you're standing in a freezing cold shipping container, you don't really feel like emotionally comfortable to be like, upset or whatever it is bringing up... it was really difficult and lonely and cold. It felt like something hanging over us that nobody could move on until this was done. That's



what I felt. Not that I felt like I wanted to forget or, but it was more like let's keep the things that want to remind us of things and what not, and let's do the thing that my mother-in-law wanted to do in the first place, which was make sure things went to good homes.

This is a picture that she actually made, it's cross stitch, it's thread on fabric and she made this. I think it's the tree of life. Having something that she actually made, I think is really special. She was just randomly working on it, and then my father-in-law fell unwell. And he passed away.

And she just kind of felt like it is a reminder of life. I guess it's like a circle of life, isn't it as well, in the shape. I remember the day that he passed away, she said: 'Oh my goodness. And I was working on this as well'.

It was like a real...she wasn't one for really believing in signs and that sort of thing, but. There were a couple of things that she was like, that is strange, and that is a strange coincidence, and it did kind of hold something for her that was comforting. Just little things she'd mentioned, like feeling his presence was there. So, for her it was a just quite significant that she'd been working on this piece when he passed away. She hadn't finished it, but she wanted to finish it. I think I enjoy it. I think it's nice to have something that does connect you to each other. Like a symbol of some sort. That's your family's thing. That's something that makes me feel connected, still, to them. It's unique. No one else has this. It's for us. It's for our family. We can keep this as long as we want. Well, we will always keep it, but we can display it wherever we want. We can speak to people about it. I think that is one of the things as well. Is that you are reminded of her and then it brings her up again. And I think that that's always, I find a really nice thing to do. Any chance we get to speak of her, you know.

I think the memories for me are more upsetting than the physical, like seeing an object. I think that it was nice to have it up on the wall and to like see it every day, walk past it every day. I think because the way it hangs, the way that the light hits it, all the kind of threads things out and stuff. And even our hallway is a similar colour to that green which was like that before we'd even put it up so. It's all kind of these nice circumstances that it just looked so good up there and just looked like it should be there the whole time.

I think [grief] is always there and it would come up at strange times. Like in the shower when you're not busy doing something. And I think that's another reason that I reached out to the grief Counselling. Because I felt like it was a bit out of control. Out of the blue sometimes when I feel like I was OK and then I'd be crying the next minute and I'd be like, what is going on? And it would sometimes be at like in inappropriate places or times like in a coffee shop or at work. Six months, I think 6. I got in touch with them and then I was on the waiting list for nearly a year, on the waiting list. Actually, do you know what was another thing... I had a really stressful time at work in February and there was a session that we had in work that I was

crying and, and, I was like, this is not OK because I'm also, was, the manager and that work role and I'm like, I can't be in crying to the people.

It was, just, felt so relentless, and it really felt like you were in a big sea with massive waves, and you've got a tiny little rubber ring, dingy, to hold on to it, and you're just getting smashed every day and having to just keep going again and again. And people would say, oh, you're so resilient. Ohh. And I really came to hate that word because it basically like, what's the alternate? You know what? You're so resilient basically means to me. You can take a lot of crap and not perish from it. You know, like, I felt that that was people were trying to sympathise and trying to boost you up. But when you just felt so like you had to just get up again. And again and again, it was so like. Unbelievable feelings.

It definitely feels like a journey for me, and it definitely feels like one of almost. Like a bit of fog to begin with because we didn't know that my mother in law wasn't well, and then, when it came to light, it then felt like we were in an ocean of. Maybe Rocky seas to begin with. And then it just got wilder and Wilder and Wilder. And then when my mother in law died, it felt like right now you've been chunked onto the desert or rocks or something. And you're trying to pick up the pieces. Yeah, it felt like, being in a sea that was just battering you about for a long time and you had to just get up and keep going again and again. The immediate moment when my mother in law passed away ... it felt very numb. It was like the sea had just stopped. And it's like right now. What's left, and where do we go from here? So now it feels a bit more like and having figured that out and kind of on dry land again. Just calm more calm

Jordan

40s, Thai, Male

I care for terminally ill patients... lately my...has shifted towards dementia. When this happens in your family of course it feels different. Yeah, it's in your face, really. And it gets worse, because I know what will happen, I know the trajectory, I know what it will be in the future, and when that happens to my family that just like, intensifies what I know, I guess. My late grandmother. She died three months ago. She lived in Thailand. She was 104 years old and had Alzheimer for almost three decades. It could be described as disenfranchised grief. It's complicated because ... living with dementia is a very complex grief for the family because we could see that person actively, slowly dying every day. But she did die physically three months ago. The impact, all the emotional strain, wasn't to me as heavy compared to other experiences I've had. It just feels like: 'Ok, that's it, she died'. That's how I felt at the time. I heard the news from my... from my dad.

I tend to go to Thailand once a year. The last time I saw her was early January, and when I saw her, I could tell she wouldn't last long, because she had declined compared to the last year. You could see the decline, whenever you go, you could see that she changes all the time. the family can never have a full closure because that person is actively dying all the time, until the physical body expires, but by then it will be just like an...an empty shell. So, when it comes to grief, I'm not sure that when the person dies there would be a heavy grief spike period. Here is just like a forgetting... declining grief. The physical death is the last thing on the list of my concerns. Compared to the loss of ability to articulate your thoughts, the ability to socialise.

I visited perhaps every few months. It was intense at the time and couldn't make sense fully of the world anymore. When she became bed-bounded, it stabilised. It became a gradual decline. Nothing intensified at the time. And throughout that journey, I cannot pinpoint when that happened, but I had my goodbye at the time. But I cannot pinpoint precisely when that moment happened, but it happened along the way, in that journey. In a way, that is why I don't feel the urgency to be physically there in the funeral, because I already had my own goodbye, I had my

closure along the way. It's one of the tipping points, but no, I cannot define when it happened. But it's there somewhere along the way.

On the 2nd August, this weekend, we will have another ceremony for her because it will be 100 days after her death, so the family will gather to have some type of ceremony at the temple, just to, you know, relive her memories, and such and such. And so, I couldn't be there, of course. Maybe another feeling will come again this Sunday. Or maybe not, I'm not sure ... Distant. The thing is, all of this happened across continents, and I am here in the UK, so it feels... detached. Distant. In Thailand funerals tend to last for a few days because, culturally... mainly because it allows families and friends to travel and join the ceremony wherever they may be. So, for ours it is a fairly small one, it might be up to 70-80 people coming per day, per night, sorry. So, in total, would be five days, 300-400 people. Yeah. So, it's quite a social event. Yeah. So, coming back to me. I missed the whole thing because I couldn't be there basically. What I did is I send my money from here to support the food, the catering. That's what I did. So, yeah, it doesn't feel the same because I wasn't there. I guess I'm in between. I'm not an insider nor an outsider. In between, like nor here nor there.

I could barely remember her lucid self; just briefly, when I was young and she could walk around cooking and talking, but she just declined from there. There was this one moment when she cooks a whole batch of fish, it was catfish I believe, and she mixed up with the rice, you know, big bowl and then and then she's put it in a bowl, and used a spoon to make a noise and then call the cousins to get around, sit down. Each one has their own spoon, and we just have to [eat?] [27:31] together; that kind of image of grandma in my head, since forever. When she is, you know, the one who gets all of us around. It is unlikely that the whole family will get around every year again after this one. This will be definitely the final one that everyone will get around like this.

I talked with one of my closest friends who lives and works back there in Southern Thailand. He asked me: 'Would you go back?' And I said, 'No, I can't, I have work here and it's too sudden, I can't stop everything and go back.' And during the funeral, he checked on me how I felt at the time. And I said: 'I'm okay, I did this and that'. He said: 'I didn't ask you what you did, I asked you how you feel'. And I said, I feel fine. But he doesn't let go. There

were times after she died, I felt that it was... uhm... let me think of the word... It was hard to support my dad because he's from a generation where they don't talk about their feelings. He's, he's 73, 72, and when, you know, his mother died, after the funeral, I tried to check up on him to see how he's doing and ... that one word that he spoke before he hung up the call; he said, the house feels so empty now. He feels sad. He just doesn't say that, he doesn't express that to the world. But I could feel that he feels that, inside. If I could support him ... I can support myself emotionally as well. So, it works two ways. It is interlinked, culturally because in South-Asia, people's agency tends to interlink to your family unit. You know, when, how you feel, how you, it will link to several nodes linked together. Does that make sense to you? But when it comes to me, do I need any support? I would say, not really. I'm self-aware of my emotions. When I'm feeling down, I know how to navigate through that. It's not that, it's not that culturally I will have to reach out to counselling or anything, because I never did that at all. So, the feeling is there, but I know how to process that, it comes and, there, it's gone.

People back home... my dad and this friend of mine, we chatted with each other every weekend anyway and, after she died, he also still tries to reach me to see how I am doing, how I feel and so on. So, he is like a... you know, like a wellbeing, checker person for me. Yeah. And once he sees that I'm doing OK, then we just talk about other trivial things that we've been doing. I tend to call my dad every two weeks. Every Sunday, and every two weeks, just to check up on him. That he's not deteriorating emotionally, that kind of thing. Just... self-checking. That happened, and tended to stick, during the lockdown - 2020. I guess we can call it my ritual, calling people consistently on Sunday. Yes, consistency across time. And if there is something that is disrupting that ritual, people would know that something is not right at the time.

This is a bank note, Thai bar. I can say it's a 500 bar, roughly around 11 to 12 pounds here, which is about the cost of the minimum wage back there.



How does it relate to my grief? For me it is about the practicality of providing financial support and this, what it does, money, is a medium, you know, a medium for people to do things, including caring for my grandmother. Yeah, it may sound weird because I'm, you know, as you can see from the first interview, there are lots of issues around money for the whole, the whole thing of caring for grandma, including before her death and after her death.

What I did was to send money every month to support her, and this is what happened: the money has been misused by my own family. And it feels challenging to deal with that. I'm not sure if this is related to my grief or not, but... I feel that, what I did, my contribution and so on, has been... tarnished or corrupted, that kind of thing. Misplaced. For the ceremony, there are some discrepancies around the expenses. It's been slipping through my whole process, money. It is unpleasant and ugly. I mean, unpleasant, for this kind of thing, you know, money to interrupt the, I guess, interrupt the family dynamic.

That type of feeling of ugliness where the money has been misused. That is one of the very few ways I suppose I could continue supporting and helping her due to the again, physical distance that we have, you know, I can't be there to physically care for her... it's more of... a question of... morality. When you are in a position to help and do so. So, and not helping means that other people may have to fill in the shoes or to be more like...

[Money] is there, but people are not fully acknowledging that, but it has been there, you know, throughout and beyond. It offers you choices and agency. If you are completely very, very simply, if you are dead poor, you have no choice or even very limited choice in your life. But if you are more stable financially you can have all the things in life, what you want to do, what you can do and so on. So that's another way to look at this object here. Is an object of agency, including your grief being processed and your grief as well.

That's the Western, the Western concept for me... I was born and brought up in the East, in Thailand. So, this notion of agency and choice doesn't work similarly back there; we are more... We perceive things as more harmonious, or in tune with nature, so whatever happens, happens, you know... In a way, people are more... interdependent and as a

part of the world, not separate yourself from the world. Yeah, that's from my perspective. But you know, like I said, I'm in the 'in between'.

I didn't think I would talk about money and link it to agency in myself. Because you have choice and, in a way, power to enable certain things. By the way of providing financial support, I suppose it enables me to have my own agency to contribute to the family back there. So that's why I keep doing this, apart from my moral obligation, of course.

Thalia

60s, Scottish, Female

I lost... myself and my husband lost my only daughter. That would be back...end of October 2014. She was a special young girl; had Williams syndrome. Very sort of unknown, very rare. They say it's more common in the US, and she was diagnosed when she was 4 years old, which is quite common with Williams [syndrome] children. She was checked till she was 7, and then it was over to GP. She had various, like, tummy problems, but nothing major. She went through mainstream school here in the region. Coped ok with that. I wanted to give her chance to go to the mainstream school. And after, she hadn't been well... it was 2013, she hadn't been well, and it wasn't until months, must be 6 – 7 months later, we knew, we thought there was something not quite right. Then we got told that there was something wrong, with the heart. There was a big growth around the mitral valve. And it would be tough to operate. At that point she was so very unwell, that they didn't know if it would work. We were given 50/50, and it didn't. And she has just passed [at] 21.

I had other losses in my life. I lost my mum when I was 21 –she was 47– 4 years after that, my big brother, who was 4 years older than me, suddenly... But I think my mum was obviously... they meant to go before you, but my daughter... I couldn't understand why, for such a like...it was just the understanding why at her age? And what did she do to deserve that? And she was our only daughter.

We noticed that she wasn't her usual self. Because she was very happy - if you look at anything to do with Williams syndrome - it says in the paper work; it's like a happy, it's called 'happy syndrome'. And she was nearly, I would say, 99 % happy. Always had a smile. But she was an anxious little girl inside. But when we noticed that she wasn't that happy little girl, and got a kind of constant cough, which was down to a cold or, because the doctors didn't think there was anything. I used to be angry with myself, for saying: 'Why did I not shout loud enough?!' You know, there must have been something more, because they have said if they have found with bloods early, that something bad was eating her away... at this vault in her heart. Would she be healthier to have the operation and make it through the operation? So not just, not just a, not just suffering the grief of losing

my daughter, but the way we lost her. All these years. And we never, do you ever get answers?

I went through from anger, on myself, how could I let it happen, or how could have let that happen because I knew her best. I was very lonely. Although my husband was there. Everyday. For me. But there was such a loss. I think it was like my heart was broken. For her losing her heart. How would I survive. Because she lost her life. How was I going to, going to continue? It felt just, like, me, it was just me that the worst thing that could have happened, just happened to me. And nobody else would understand. Because directly around me, I suppose I haven't thought further afield, but nobody around me had lost a child. And she was much –with the Williams syndrome– she was much younger inside than 21. Her ways, and she was still, still a little girl, really, inside. I still remember saying to my husband: 'She is not even in a children's ward'. Because she was just a little girl inside, why don't they put her in the children's ward? Because she was so gentle. That seems to be a harsh place for her to be. When they moved her into that hospital, the unknown for me, I couldn't, it was out of my hand. That's how I felt, she has been taken. She has been taken.

A big void. A huge, big, huge, big space, the question why, why her, she never did any harm, she was just goodness, so I couldn't understand why. I don't think, at the time, I could see myself listening to music. Music was one of her passions. She loved music; it gave her a lot, she said it made her happy as well. All kind of music she loved. I couldn't have played music in the car or in the house. I felt a little bit guilty if I was in the car and not listening to music. Because I used to speak to her and think: 'Why, why is mum not like listening to music?', because I knew it made her happy and gave her a lot. I didn't enjoy it because I couldn't see what would make me enjoy life again without her. She wasn't physically there. Being asked to go out, with friends, which she loved, any kind of party, birthday party, we always had birthday party when her birthday was, Christmas time, oh wow, she was just so excited to get something for dad, as a secret, as a surprise, she loved that. I was just traumatised losing, she wasn't physically there for number of years, I couldn't put up a Christmas tree, but she loved that time of the year. But I couldn't bear to put that up and have that fun. Because she didn't, she couldn't have that fun. She is not here to enjoy it so I'm not, I'm not listening to music. I suppose I was frightened what songs... I am still a wee bit... what songs come on the radio. They only

make me sadder if I hear whatever songs, you know, that she really liked. So, I won't put them, I won't put them on anyway, because that way I will be safe. Because there is a bit of what if that song... We went away my husband and I, a few years after she passed, and again I didn't want to go on holiday, to have potentially fun, or to enjoy, because she had lost that, time to enjoy things. And we have decided one time to go back up where we have been, just up North, and we would be there with her. We thought if we can do that, let's go, and see if that makes wee memories better for us. And it was weird, because I sometimes think of signs –my husband doesn't– but I sometimes think there are signs. I'm not very spiritual person, but some of my beliefs, that she was... a song that we played for her at her funeral day came on as we were in for dinner. Now, to me, I thought: 'Wow! That's, that's quite, that's quite a thing for me' –to hear that playing. We could have gone up there any day, we could have gone for our dinner any time, and that song wouldn't have been playing, but it played. And then we were, we were both in tears, but, for me, I thought, that was a sign, that maybe she was saying something to me. That, although she was not here in person, she was maybe, still in my mind, yes, very much.

I know some people at work would say, you know: 'But with time it will get better'. It doesn't get better with time. But I still believe; its different, and you learn, or I have learned to live a different life. I don't know how would have been if she was still here, I know that. But definitely you cope differently, you do things, well, I do things. Sometimes was thinking about them, when should I be doing this, how should I be feeling –I remember. But that was years on, and it was with talking to a lady I made through the compassion friends. I went to that. The compassion friends could have been, that could have been, maybe that could have been after a couple years. And I thought: 'Do I go along and meet hopefully other people, that are going to be, because it's like losing children, or a family member?' And I thought: 'Yeah, I want to see how other people maybe have coped, maybe that be better for me', because at that point there was nobody here, that I felt that would be the same. It was very emotional. Very. But I remember thinking as well, all these people, have been through... I think, I think the afternoon I went to, there must have been maybe I would have say 30. There was time that you could go for walk with them. And to feel like, like to hear other people saying they felt lost, they felt lonely. But that did something different for me, I suppose I was thinking it wasn't just me,

whereas doing like a tick box exercises... I could not, I couldn't get these feelings down onto a piece of paper, the same way as I went there and talked. And it wasn't, I wasn't scared, I was nervous when going, I remember, but it didn't feel scary, thinking that these people will understand me.

I worked as a trainer, a coach, a credential life insurance, down the road. But at that point I couldn't, I think I remember, after 7 months, going back I have lost all knowledge of what I did. A turning point for me was leaving the job I've been in for 39 and half years. I just didn't see myself being there any longer. Although I didn't, I didn't know how I would be starting fresh in the new job. Working with young people in the high school, where she loved, that gave me a lot of...what I need. What I need is to feel that I was making a difference to somebody. You know. I am supporting others. You know, maybe in a time of need. Yeah, they need it, you know, to be there [and] listen, sometimes they get upset, can't do their work. I could help. I found that useful. I think being up in the school, I deal, I dealt differently with. I had a purpose, again. I had purpose to go and be with these young people. When I can think to myself: 'Well...it's not her that I am now helping, but I can help them in so many other ways'. I think it made me feel, now, I am doing something good again. That I could think of her up there, because that was her happy place, shall we say. She loved going to school. That made me happy. Wandering around the corridors, knowing she was happy there.



'Mum: My alarm's pinged.' She sometimes would shout. 'My alarm's pinged. I can get up now, because that's gone off'. She understood. She was, she was growing in her confidence to do things and not have me saying: 'it's time to get up'. She wanted to do a lot of things herself. And it's still... once, once it stops ticking, and the battery goes, I put another one in. So I know for me... Her wee alarm clock's still going. Definitely very much...

It meant a lot to me just to bring my little clock because when I look at that again, that's one of my bonds with Catherine. She used that. She felt good.

I suppose I could take that, or I could let the battery run down? Do I really need that little clock? No, because like, we only got our phones and tell the time. But it means something more to me to keep that little alarm clock on. I shouldn't depend on it. But maybe, maybe from my point of view.

'Catherine: it's time to get up'. 'I can do that myself' – she used to say. Is that maybe, my need for her? Because that, that's what she needed. Because she wasn't great at telling the time, and she would say that. I suppose part of me. I made that happen a bit better than it was... for Catherine to understand a bit more about the time and that she could do things herself.

I've never wanted to put it away, like some of Catherine's clothes. You know, up into a suitcase. I think: 'If I keep that ticking...' It just, it's just a little object of comfort for me. As I say, do I use it every day? No. No, I don't depend on it. I know I don't. But I depend on it enough just to know like I, I can hear that, ticking away when I go to my bed. I can hear that ticking away. And I've never thought about not having it near me or out ticking. I've never thought about it. Not being there. It's in our bedroom. Quite early on after we lost Catherine. Like maybe yeah, maybe a few months after we lost her. Yeah, that comes with me. That's not going anywhere. It's that little ticking... Like my one of my continuing bonds because that was... that was a big thing from Cruse. I was talking about. I was talking about continuing bonds, and Margaret (Cruse therapist) reminded me to think about the flowers going up every Sunday. So that's still your bonds. (Interviewer notes a sense of a ritual and continuity, a rhythm that keeps going) ... wonder that to do with... With Catherine's heart, that stopped. Is that somewhere? Yeah, but that's, yeah, that's, you can hear. I can physically hear that it's still going. It's only for me. That's a continuation. I'll put another battery in that one when that... when that's up. Another battery.

Key Messages

1. The mourner keeps actively exploring how to cope with their grief at different points in their journey, sometimes in ways that only make sense to them or that are not particularly apparent to others – Alara's, Ruth's, and Thalia's stories.
2. Processing grief can be done in multiple ways, such as supporting the family of the bereaved financially and supporting individuals who are struggling with everyday, ordinary activities – Jordan's and Scott's stories.
3. Masculinity emerges as a factor that shapes the journey of grief in a way that the person's thoughts, feelings, and body are impacted by internalised expectations of how a man 'should' respond to a bereavement, for example by suppressing feelings or 'delaying' grief – Scott's story.
4. Masculinity influences how grief can be expressed and shapes the ways in which it can be worked through – Victor's story.
5. The grieving body manifests in participants' narratives, suggesting that participants realise they use or have used their bodies in the processing of grief. - Beth's, Eva's, Ruth's, and Victor's stories.
6. Grief can come up in strange moments, when least expected, permeating life encounters and interactions in a way that disrupts a sense of future continuity (being witnessed by the deceased as life goes on). Eva's and Ruth's story.
7. Culture significantly shapes how grief is experienced and processed. People who live in Scotland but have family abroad described feeling 'in between cultures', which makes it difficult to participate in grief rituals taking place elsewhere, and makes them feel isolated when those around them do not understand the depth or significance of their losses, – Martha's and Jordan's stories.
8. Witnessing of grief of others felt important/helpful in some way. Connecting with others who are going through the bereavement of a loved one is essential in the grieving process – Victor's, Scott's, Thalia's, and Beth's stories.
9. The absence of cultural scripts for how to grieve certain family members makes the person in an ambiguous situation in which they are expected to mourn, but they do not know necessarily how or to what extent – Eva's and Ruth's story.

10. The journey of grief can be felt as permanent. For some participants, grief is experienced as long-term and permanent, as a state of being that defines the person in many areas of their lives. Grief is experienced as 'the loss of the future' and the challenge of redefining who they are without their loved one – Beth's, Thalia's, and Scott's stories.
11. The cost of dying as a taboo topic in grief. While the financial cost of caring for loved ones who are ill and paying for their funerals when they die is a topic implicit in many of participants' narratives, the mention of money was not always explicitly addressed, which leaves the researchers thinking whether this is something that is a taboo when talking about death. One of the participants spoke about how sending money for the care of the loved one who passed away was a way of supporting their family – Jordan's story.

Implications for professionals – Insights for Cruse Scotland

The stories provided by the participants in *Journeys of Grief* provided valuable insights for practitioners working with bereaved individuals. Below, we offer key implications for reflecting on the bereavement support services:

1. Foster Open Communication

Encouraging open communication about death and grief is crucial, especially in cultures or families where discussing feelings is less common. Participants' stories suggest the importance of checking in with loved ones who have lost someone, and create opportunities for emotional expression of anger, guilt, fear, horror, sadness, joy, and more, verbally or nonverbally. People who are in contact with the bereaved might feel that they do not want to address the death because they do not want to 'upset' the person. However, participants expressed they needed to talk about it. In Beth's words: 'They say: 'Oh, I didn't want to upset you. I didn't want to remind you.' How silly that is. As if I would forget for a minute. It's always there, and you didn't make it sad for me because I am just always sad'. (Beth's interview).

2. Facilitate Connection and Witnessing

Connecting with others who are experiencing bereavement can be profoundly helpful. Participants in this study spoke about how important it was to talk about their grief amongst other people who have lived experience of bereavement. There is a strong suggestion that people find solace in group counselling and peer support groups to foster a sense of community and shared understanding. 'The counselling's really helped... it was group counselling that we got, six folk; there's two people that ran it and they asked questions, and they were really good. I really appreciated what they did for me: talk[ing] about my dad when other people are there. I felt other people had been having the same problems I had had, and that helped, listening to them and they were quite considerate as well.' (Scott, interview).

Structured group sessions, such as the ones offered by Cruse Scotland, were highly valued by participants like Martha, Wictor,

Scott. These sessions provided a safe space for sharing experiences, learning about grief, and connecting with others. Participants mentioned benefiting from both the psychoeducational components of the groups, as well as the opportunities for relational engagement into their support programmes.

3. Recognise the Individuality of Grief

Grief is a deeply personal and multifaceted experience that varies widely among individuals. The participants' stories offer a critique to preconceived models or scripts that propose a generalisable understanding of grief. The stories suggest that each person's journey through grief is unique, shaped by their relationship with the deceased, gender, location, cultural scripts for grieving, and personal stories with the deceased. For example, Alara and Thalia's stories highlight how mourners may engage in deeply personal rituals or hold onto objects that provide comfort and connection to their loved ones. Eva's and Ruth's story demonstrated the challenges of grieving relationships that lack clear cultural scripts, such as the loss of in-laws. Practitioners should offer guidance on navigating ambiguous grief and help individuals explore their feelings and roles in such situations.

4. Address Masculinity and Grief

Masculinity plays a significant role in shaping how men experience and express grief. Scott's and Wictor's narratives revealed how internalised expectations of 'being a man' can lead to suppressed emotions or delayed grieving. Practitioners should create safe spaces for men to express their emotions and challenge societal norms that discourage vulnerability. 'I go to the men's shed three days a week... It's a men's shed for people that had, like mental health... and not being keeping good. The doctor asked, advised me to go, and that's when I went up, and when I came back down, that's when I cried because there was a lot happening then. But I'm enjoying. It's the best thing that's happened to me since I left work... it helps you. There's other men there. Yeah. And they're good as well. They talk to you, and I talk to them. And I first went up I very rarely said anything because I was kinda, in a wee shell... But now I've known them for a wee while, it has been great for me.' (Scott's interview)

5. Support Embodied Grieving

Grief is not solely an emotional or mental process; it is also embodied and can manifest in unexpected ways, including physical symptoms. Participants like Beth and Wictor described physical manifestations of grief, such as pain, numbness, and changes in physical habits like appetite and sleep. Professional services could consider incorporating physical activities, such as walking or exercise, into grief support programmes to help individuals process their emotions through their bodies. Normalising these experiences for the participants in the different psychoeducation programmes and provide strategies for managing them can be helpful for service users.

6. Address Cultural and Social Contexts

Culture significantly influences how grief is experienced and processed. For individuals like Martha, Alara, and Jordan, who have family abroad, the inability to participate in cultural grief rituals can lead to feelings of isolation. Practitioners should be sensitive to cultural differences and provide tailored support that acknowledges these unique challenges.

7. Address the Taboo of Financial Strain

The financial cost of caring for loved ones and arranging funerals is often a hidden aspect of grief. Jordan's story revealed the emotional strain caused by financial challenges and the misuse of funds. Professional services could explore this area of grief more openly and perhaps create safe spaces for individuals to discuss financial concerns and provide resources or referrals to alleviate these burdens.

8. Reflect on the Timing of Counselling

The participants stories suggest that the first six months of bereavement were a challenge for individuals, and while many saw this as the 'natural' grieving process, something that there was no preparation for or actual intervention that could help, they also suggest that they needed a form of support. The stories prompt the question of whether a flexible assessment that considers individual needs could be considered. Some participants, like Scott, Wictor, Martha, Beth, and Alara expressed they needed early support, and

some of them indeed engaged in counselling and other support services in the immediate aftermath of the death.

9. Encourage Continuing Bonds

For some individuals, grief is a permanent state that shapes their identity and life experiences, as seen in Beth's, Thalia's, and Scott's stories. Practitioners should recognise that grief may not have a definitive endpoint and support individuals in finding ways to integrate their loss into their lives. Many participants found comfort in maintaining connections with their loved ones through objects, rituals, memories, conversations with the dead, and reconnecting with them through the activities they used to do together. Practitioners can help individuals explore and establish continuing bonds, such as keeping meaningful objects, engaging in rituals, or finding ways to honour their loved ones.

10. Support the Redefinition of Identity

Grief often involves a redefinition of identity and purpose, as individuals navigate life without their loved ones. Thalia's, Beth's, and Wictor's stories illustrated how finding new purpose, such as supporting others, can be a meaningful way to cope. Practitioners can help individuals explore ways to rebuild their sense of self and purpose.

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