

My discovery of Cathy Rentzenbrink has been nothing short of serendipitous.

Some months ago, an author published an article in The Sunday Times that referenced "A Manual for Heartache". A friend of mine also saw this and sent it to me. At this time, I knew nothing about Cathy or Matty or their story. Very recently, I started a career I set out to begin 10 years ago, my supervisor then led me to TCF, which consequently led me to Cathy and her talk.

After doing some initial research following my discovery, I found that Cathy was also a bereaved sibling, and not only did she have the above-mentioned book, but she also had a book called "The last act of love". The title grabbed me immediately. Certain parts of my beloved brother's passing, one in particular made me feel as there was only one last thing I could do for him, constituting my own last act of love.

I don't try to compare grief, I don't think I could possibly understand what another is going through in its entirety. However, In my journey I discovered that I have looked for things that can help me through, help me find my purpose in what happened, or understand the event that has destroyed my world and changed me.

In reading Cathy's book, I felt it would either annihilate me, or help me with no in between. Both happened, but the primary thing this book and subsequent talk gave me was the comfort in making me feel not quite so alone whilst going through something that is undeniably isolating.

Having listened to Cathy's talk this week, I hung on to every word she said. Some of the sentiments echoed so deeply with me.

As Cathy said, you hope that if you play by the rules that everything will be ok, and you hope that if you love someone enough you can bring them back. I've lived by these rules my whole life, and I didn't know other people did too. I sat beside my brother for weeks pouring every gram of love I had in my body into him hoping he would come back to me, but he didn't. I felt relief listening to Cathy's words that some of these misconceptions didn't just belong to me.

I listened and learnt in these dark times that compassion to yourself is the most important thing you can access.

Cathy also said that "death is the end of a life not the end of a relationship", this helped me acknowledge that I can keep my brother alive even without his physical body being present. All those years my brother and I spent together did still happen, they were real and it doesn't have to end there. I am grateful for Cathy's insight and undeniable honesty.

This was also my first experience with TCF. Thank you so much for welcoming me, I felt part of a community that as a bereaved sibling doesn't happen too often. You have created an enduring safe space for grief and bereavement in everyday life and I couldn't be more grateful.

Lily Cook, October 2020