

Grieving Dads Project

Committed to Helping Grieving Dads

www.grievingdads.com December 2012 archive

“What Others May Be Thinking”

by Graeme Skinner, UK

After a burglary I can go out and buy a new TV to replace the stolen one, with a new for old household insurance policy, leaving me mostly with a nasty feeling of being violated. Someone has had the cheek to break into my sanctuary and take what is mine. I know that if I had left the door open then I would carry at least some of the blame, even if grudgingly.

Bereavement is a form of robbery. My life has been broken into and messed up in a big way. When death robbed me, nothing could have prepared me for the unleashing of a cocktail of feelings that followed. Shaken, stirred and spilt all over the floor. This time there was no policy to cover the loss. On top of that the feelings were complicated by a so called ‘shameful death’. I can only speak from my own experience of losing our son to heroin, aged 21. There is a street in a city I once saw called “Needless Alley”, that phrase comes to mind. “Heroin, whatever took you down that road, son?” I ask, for the first I knew of heroin in his life was to receive the night-time phone call to say he had died. “He died of shame”, we were told by a caring friend, and she was right. Jim had been found in possession of heroin by the police, and it seems he took it to cope with the shame. It took his life.

Suddenly I thought that others may be thinking bad of me as a parent in the same way I had, at least subconsciously, thought of similar families before heroin had kicked my door down and became a squatter in my life. Even if others were kind enough to reassure me that they didn’t think anything of the sort, in reality I knew what the real landscape looked like. In seminars I have led, I ask for word associations that come to mind when people think about heroin users. Phrases like, “Scum, loser, thief...” come tumbling out. Even if those who know me don’t think it, the fact is that drugs stigma and shame are thickly spread through our societies worldwide.

This feeling of stigma and shame seemed to be heightened for me as a church pastor. My response? To talk about it. We find ourselves sitting on the ‘mourning bench’ with many others who also want to hide from the associated stigma of a shameful death. My wife wrote a book about how she faced into the cold wind of the loss of a child with the associated stigma; ‘See You Soon; a mother’s story of drugs, grief and hope’ by Philippa Skinner. It’s pretty much what this dad would have written, although not so well. Our hope is that talking about the issues and sharing together will be of some comfort.