

FOOTPRINTS IN THE SAND

A Symphony of Grief

Laura Tomei

2012

Footprints in the Sand

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To Alex
From seed you came
To seed you will return
Only to be born again

Mamma

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Foreword – Finding Alex

Many of us fear many things which may seem small or large to others – darkness, caves, aeroplanes, heights, bankruptcy or redundancy.

But those who have had the privilege of bringing a child into the world know that all else must surely pale when compared to the unspeakable idea that there might be a time when you are here and they are not.

So to imagine being the mother of an 18-year-old who dies well before his time is unbearable.

To compound such fathomless grief, imagine that your son's death occurs when he throws himself from a bridge over a freeway. How can such a burden be borne? How can a mere mortal comprehend her beloved only son is gone, by his own actions, just a short walk from their family home?

Shock, anger, grief and denial are the designated reactions.

But surely losing everything in one moment is more than a predicted timeline of sorrow?

How can she breathe? I ask when the friend who calls to tell me that Alex is gone and Laura is not.

How can she breathe sufficiently to stay alive? How can she sleep? How can she wake? How can she bear to look at someone whose child is alive when hers is not?

And yet she can and she does.

Laura gets up, makes coffee, cares for Alex's grandmother Anita, her partner Jeff, and those around them. She cleans the home, tidies the garden, phones people, pays bills, makes meals. She also makes a point of asking after other peoples' children and showing genuine delight in their achievements.

How can she do this? I wonder, when every action is imbued with a deep, aching sadness for the son who is not there.

And yet, he is. For Laura sees him in the house, in the garden, on the stairwell. Laura sees her son in the morning light and the afternoon sun. His presence is seen, felt and encouraged. She photographs, writes and paints her son back into being. She reaches out to those children whose troubles threaten to overwhelm, and gently pulls them back from edges of darkness. Laura sees Alex through the confusion, disorganisation and pettiness of everyday life.

With an outstanding display of raw courage, she continues to carry her red cross of grief, but always seeks the next step.

Throughout *Footprints in the Sand* Laura reminds us of the importance of the now – and what love really is.

I can think of no better tribute to Alex than this beautiful book, borne from his mother's determination to seek the truth in life and death.

Kaye Fallick *Author and Publisher*

Preface

This is not a book about hauntings, ghosts, or anything pertaining to the scary or spooky. It is not a book inviting any thrill sensations some like to experience for the fun of it. This is a book about the reciprocal unending love bond between a mother and her child.

I feel driven to share my experiences of the incredible sacred insights I have been blessed with since the suicide of my child Alexander at age 18, in the hope that others who are traversing the same shattering experience of losing a child can benefit by finding some comfort in knowing what I now believe to be true; that death, like birth, is the passage into an existence. It is a very natural process we will all be experiencing; it is not final. Death, like birth is the transition between one reality and another.

I am a changed person, in many ways a better person.

I have learnt about things that I never imagined were possible.

I have a need to help kids who are lost.

I have a need to meet and comfort people who are going through what I am.

I have a need to not let Alex's life have been in vain. One day at a time, a light at the end of the tunnel ... in between a journey filled with learning, teaching, love and understanding. The rest of my roller-coaster life on earth ... and then rebirth into my next existence, where Alexander will "grab my hand and pull me through." It is from the innermost depth of my heart, with the utmost sincerity and integrity that I write this book.



I stand amongst the turmoil of my present emotions
My rollercoaster ride ...
The grief of having lost my child to suicide
I hear a symphony
The music clearly speaks
From crescendo to forte, allargando to piano
It is my son's transition from this world to the next
I am still ...
In awe of the power of the universe
Revealing its secrets



Beautiful Boy

I want to tell you something, but I don't know how to begin, so I'll just go with whatever comes to me.

This is the story of a boy ... my boy, Alexander. Alex suicided on March 26, 2007. He was my only child. As his mother, I can only describe the details of what happened and why as seen and felt through my eyes and heart, details that will slowly evolve as I write, because at this stage I can only put into words what is in me, and to some degree it feels right to just let it flow.

I saw someone whilst shopping yesterday. I hadn't seen this woman in many years, nor was she a great friend back then when I 'knew' her. It was the period our children were in primary school, a good 15 years back. I didn't even remember her name, but she remembered mine. Of course – I was Laura, the mother of the boy who committed suicide ...

I was courteous when she asked me how I was doing – as many do when they bump into me and don't really know what to say. They're usually very careful to not mention 'his' name in case it brings back bad memories of what happened almost five years ago now. They don't know that 'he' has never left my mind since the day he jumped off the pedestrian overpass which crosses the freeway, across the park, at the bottom of our street.

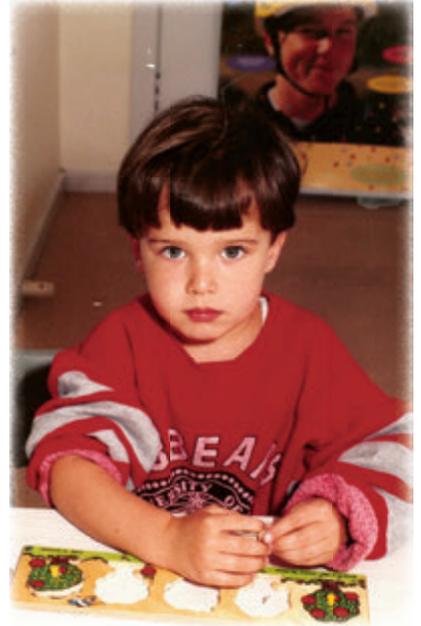
She said, "I was thinking about you just the other day, what a coincidence I should bump into you today."

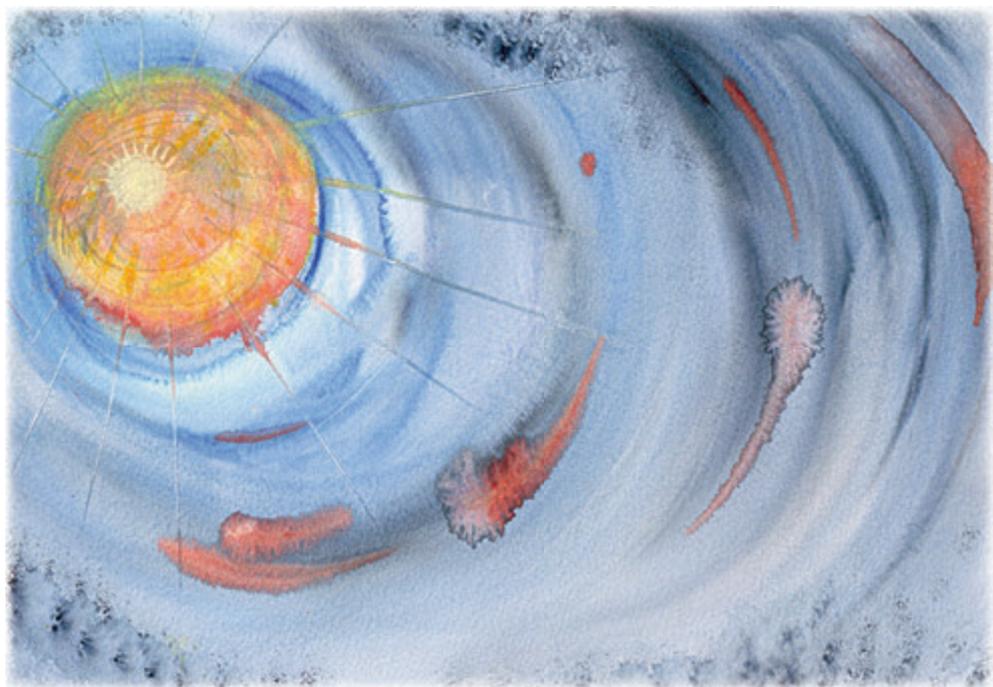
I smiled and told her I was well, as I juggled trying to choose something from the deli counter (it was my turn and the girl behind the counter was growing more and more impatient with our distractive semi-conversation), and thinking to myself; ‘there are no coincidences, and I hope she stops talking and lets me get on with my purchases. I’ll probably never bump into her again, or perhaps in another 15 years.’ But she kept talking. “You know Laura, I’ll never forget how beautiful Alex was. When I first saw him at primary school I thought to myself, what a beautiful looking child ... really!” She went on, “He was mesmerising. He looked like an angel.”

I stopped and took more notice of her ... This lady was sincere. She wasn’t afraid of speaking ‘his’ name, my angelic son. “I’m sorry”, I said, “I can’t remember your name.” “It’s Chris.” We managed to continue our exchange amongst our smoked salmon slices, and – “Yes I’ll have these dry biscuits too, and the hummus ... a medium size tub, thank you.”

Chris told me how her daughter – whom I very vaguely remembered, had suffered the loss of six adolescent friends within the past two years ... all boys, and all due to suicide. I told her I was developing programs to help rebuild some of the precious self esteem a lot of these kids lack due to diverse problems and hurdles in their lives, which they are unable to process and surpass. I gave her my phone number, and asked her to please feel free to pass it on to any of the parents. I explained that part of the rebuilding of my shattered life involved helping bereaved parents by sharing what I had learned in order to survive the indescribable pain the aftermath of losing a child to suicide leaves.

We left each other with hugs, promises of staying in touch, and goose bumps – because Chris also believed in angels, and in an afterlife. We almost both blurted out at the same time that when you speak of anything pertaining to the afterlife and get goose bumps, the goose bumps are a sign that the angels are listening, and telling you you’re on the right track.





Where are you?

My energy expands

Sending a surge of maternal love into the universe

Spikes of pain radiate from my intense core

And intermingle with the love waves

My green-eyed son

I miss you

The Bridge

Nothing can prepare you for the devastating aftermath of the suicide of your child.

On 26 March 2007, my beloved only child, my 18 year old son Alex, jumped from a pedestrian overpass onto a freeway in front of an enormous refrigeration truck, and was mangled. He was not a drug user; his toxicology tests revealed there was very little alcohol in his system. He died because he could not endure the unbearable emotional pain that life was for him ... the reasons many. I remember, and I could see when it started. As a mother I fought to protect him from the pain of life right until the very end. Both he and I were helpless to change some of the structures, mentalities, cruelties, and hurdles that are part of this life as we know it, and that the majority are able to learn from. Not he; he was too sensitive, too strong in his beliefs, creative, too needy for love.

For those left behind, for me in order to survive, it is essential to release the often intolerable grief with whatever means are available. It is essential to communicate to the world what I am feeling, because at times it is so surreal that I am lost. Feelings of sinking into a hole, enveloped by an eerie silence, I could die there where I stand. Other times, like a pressure cooker about to explode, I need a safety valve, a release to stop me from exploding. There are times again, when out of nowhere I will cry or even scream out his name, this usually when I am driving on the freeway. Sometimes I miss him so much I go into his untouched room, searching for his smell, then collapse, like a tortured animal wailing.

I felt Alex's pain in a dream. In this dream I was him. I was feeling what he felt just before he died. The pain was so strong; incredible feelings of despair, fear, hopelessness. It was very dark, as you would imagine hell to be. I awoke in shock, but also with a renewed awareness of what it was like for him ... I remember thinking that no parent in their right mind would ever want their child to live like this.

Does this console me? No, and perhaps sometimes when I need a little respite, I think yes, maybe.

Often I must stop myself thinking of him as he was, because it is torture, so I force myself to think of him as he is now ... free of pain, happy.

Apart from his immediate family, his death has left a long trail of sadness and grief, a chain effect, but also a growing love, respect, and an awareness, especially amongst his peers. Some have had his name tattooed on their skin, some have written songs, and some who are too distraught have also attempted suicide.

I am finding it difficult to write this without tears flowing, because it's all about the heart, about love, passion, pride, beauty, creativity, fragility, mistakes, expression, depression ... all of these words and many more were my son Alexander.