

## **A Sisters Story**

Before Jon died we'd planning an 'epic roadtrip' for months and I was so excited. We were going to drive all the way up the North Island right to the very top and be crazy all the way there like we always were. Then one day my entire world came crashing down on top of me. Jonathan was gone forever.

I remember that moment like it was yesterday. When the words came out of my sister's mouth I looked at her wishing for her to tell me it wasn't true and it was all a horrible mistake. When I realised he was really gone the tears started and rarely stopped for the next six months. We were never going on our roadtrip, I'd never hear his voice again, hug him, laugh with him or be able to tell him how much I loved him ever again and his son would never see his father again. I thought I would never be able to recover from losing my big brother, I loved him so much and couldn't bare the thought of going through life without him. Jonathan and I became very close in the last few years of his life. We often tried to figure out how it happened and decided it was the day he spent all day trying to cheer me up when I was sick. Coincidentally this was only two days before he went away for basic. He was so busy getting ready for all of this but still had time for his little sister. Whenever he came back to Auckland for visits we were always going on little escapades together – late night takeaway runs, random drives, going to the beach, talking in Spanish in a sombrero – we always found something to do.

In the end he became more than just my brother to me. He was my best friend and my protector. I always felt so safe like nothing bad would ever happen as long as he was around. In fact when he died, the person I needed most to pick me back up was him. I'm not going to lie...there have been many times that I have been angry at Jon for leaving, for giving up and wondering how he could ever leave us to go through life without him, especially his son who he loved most in this world. I thought that his love for us and our love for him would miraculously fix everything that was wrong.

Many times I have felt guilty for not doing enough to help him or for being angry at him and spent countless hours replaying everything I said and did wishing I had done more to help him, wondering if I did enough. I agonised for months over a phone call we had just before he died where we had a bit of a frosty conversation. I couldn't remember if it was our last conversation and whether I had told him I loved him like I did every time I ended a phone call with him. I couldn't bare the thought of him thinking I didn't care and that being his last memory of me. We knew Jon had been fighting his depression, but he didn't like to talk about. The times he did talk to me, I had to practically force it out of him. He didn't want to burden anyone with his 'problems' and he got so good at convincing people I thought that he was ok until it was too late.

Slowly, I have learnt to accept and understand that Jon did love all of us, that he wanted to be there for his son as he grew up and that he didn't want to die. He was fighting a crippling depression and eventually he got so far into that dark place in his mind he just couldn't find his way out. One thing he said to me about his depression helped me to eventually understand that he knew we loved him but it just couldn't take those feelings away. I will be forever grateful to him for giving me that.

Depression is a terrible disease that we need to understand can't just be turned off. It is unforgiving and relentless. I hope that one day depression isn't something we hide away from and instead learn to understand and accept that it's ok to ask for help. His death has helped me to realise that and I may not have been able to prevent his death but if I can do anything to stop someone else making that decision I will always do it. Remember you are never alone.