

IN NOVEMBER WE REMEMBER OUR DEAD.....

in this article, published recently in 'Postcards from Portobello',
Jane Meagher reflects on her daughter Ellie's death in 2016.

'There was no hint that the day would turn out to be the worst of my life. It began as normal. There were no omens or signs of foreboding as I did all the things I'd done countless times before. Shower, brush my teeth or wait for the bus or get to work. When the phone call came I was completely alone in my office, everyone else out for lunch. My sister's voice, in terrible distress, barely able to speak, telling me that my daughter Ellie was being given CPR then taken to hospital. She died two hours later. Suddenly. Unexpectedly. Aged 39.

We had moved to Portobello when Ellie was nine. At the time, no-one wanted to live here and there was a faint air of pity when we told people where we were going. 'It's so far out of town,' they used to say. But the move meant we could go from our top flat to a main door house with a garden. I was pregnant with my second child and the trudge up the stairs was getting more difficult. Walking in to view what became our house, I immediately felt like it was a proper home in spite of (or perhaps because of) the cobwebs and dirty wallpaper. So we borrowed what seemed like a scary amount of money and thirty-two years later we are still here.

Then when Ellie died, the people and places in Portobello became part of what helped me and my family live through those terrible days. People came to the door; meals were prepared by dear friends; beautiful flowers filled every room; there was not enough space for all the cards. Ellie had chosen, aged 13, to become a Catholic so her huge funeral was in St John's church, her church, whose open doors mean that we can visit at any time and sit quietly and remember her. I found that I had many friends and received enormous help and comfort from strangers, now friends, who had been through similar grief and who generously gave me comfort and hope.

Sometimes my grief is so big that I feel I could burst with it. It's at times like that when I go to the beach where the sky seems vast enough to hold and ease my pain. I have stood on the seashore at night and howled into the wind. I have walked along the promenade with tears streaming down my face, hidden from view by a swathing scarf, protecting me from the biting wind. In the day's after Ellie's death I would walk slowly around Portobello, where I felt safe, a sister or friend supporting me, as if my pain was physical. Kind people would stop and talk or give me hugs and if anyone crossed the street to avoid me, I certainly wasn't aware of it.

Grief comes like the haar, sometimes suddenly and sometimes creeping up on me. It envelops me and I can't see clearly beyond it. But eventually it clears to a point where it is bearable and life goes on and pleasure, even joy, are possible again.'