

# Finding A Safe Space After Loss

by Jon Gascoigne

The Bereavement Café offers a safe and welcoming space for people to come together after loss, whether to talk, listen or simply be among others who understand.

For Jon, attending the café became an important part of life after a period of profound grief. His story shows how shared experience, support and companionship can grow in unexpected and meaningful ways.

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Grief can feel overwhelming, especially when loss comes in quick succession. For Jon, 2024 was a year that tested him in ways he never expected. "I had a bad year," he says simply. "I lost my wife, my dad, a cousin, and my dog all within six months of each other." By the time he first attended the Bereavement Café in October, he was willing to try anything that might help.

"I was trying to throw everything I could at the wall and see what would stick," Jon explains. He went along with an open mind but no real expectations. If it helped, he would come back. If it didn't, at least he had tried.

Walking into the café for the first time was not easy. "I was apprehensive. I didn't know what to expect. Am I going to get on with anybody? Am I going to break down and cry?," he recalls. There were only nine people there that day, which meant conversation was unavoidable. What helped most was the atmosphere created by the volunteers. "They made it easy. Very welcoming," he says, adding that they gently supported

*Bereavement Café*  
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people who were quieter or unsure how to begin.

As the weeks passed, the café became a constant in Jon's life. One of the biggest surprises was friendship. "I don't think that crosses your mind when you're in a dark place," he reflects. "Did I ever think I'd make friends? No. Am I glad I have? Yes." The café brings together people who might never otherwise meet, all at different stages of grief. Jon values that mix. "If someone is struggling or wondering if their



*Jon and his wife Lynne*

feelings are normal, you can bet others have been there and can listen and reassure them."

Those connections soon extended beyond the café itself. A WhatsApp group set up by one of the regulars allows people to keep in touch between sessions. "If someone goes quiet then we notice," Jon says, "and one of us will contact them." From this have come quiz nights, shared meals, trips out and theatre visits. "All this is because of connections made at the café."

Jon believes what makes the Bereavement Café special is its informality. "You don't have to talk about bereavement," he says. "That sounds odd at a bereavement café, but no subject is off the table." Conversations might be about music, rugby or films. "That isn't to say we don't talk about grief. It's just some

days we don't have to." He has seen people arrive in tears and leave smiling, supported simply by being among others who understand.

Recently, Jon has also shared his love of music with the group, using technology to help turn his lyrics into songs. Writing a piece for another café regular was a new experience. "She put the jigsaw pieces on the table and showed me the end picture," he says. "All I had to do was put it together."

For anyone unsure about attending, Jon's advice is clear. "Give it a go. It might not be for everyone, but you don't know until you try." While coffee and cake are part of the experience, he knows what really matters. "I'd rather have the friendships and support," he says. "I know I would have struggled a lot more without it."