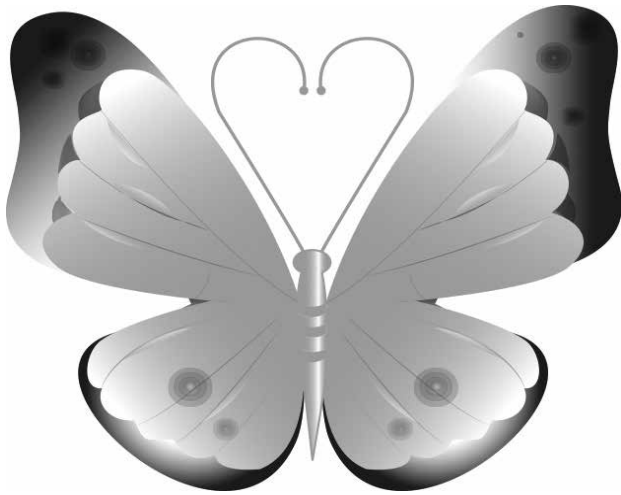


Out of the Mouths of Bereaved Parents

Grieving the death of a child in an open and healthy way



by

DEBORAH KENNEDY BARTON

Dedication

Christopher Kennedy Barton

C

Nancy Margaret Lyons

C

Margaret Joan Barton

C

My amazing first born son, Topher has held my hand and my heart and has shown incredible strength and fortitude after losing his precious only sister and nephew.

He was too young to have memories of his little brother, Andrew but I do remember it had at the time caused him great distress.

His loving wife, Nancy was there for me through several of my most difficult hours in South Africa on the night we arrived for Pippa and Kieran's funeral and has continued to be thoughtful throughout this journey as she, herself grieves this loss.

And how precious is the gift of their sweet daughter Maggie? The gratitude I feel for the joy she's brought into our lives is immeasurable. She is the beacon that guides us forward to the future.

Preface

This book is about death, grief, hope, faith and renewal. You will read stories of young lives that ended far too soon and the grief journeys of their parents /grandparents who have learned to survive somehow against the odds and to become accustomed to a life without their beloved children/grandchildren. Many of us have travelled to a place of peace, love and even at times, great joy whilst others still struggle to find this peace as they start out on this most treacherous and difficult journey.

My Story

Andrew:

I am writing this on the eve of the 41st anniversary of the birth of my second son Andrew Frederick James Barton on September 9,1975 at St. Mary's Hospital in Portsmouth, England.

He was truly a 'perfect' baby in every way. Labour was short and the birth comfortable and he was a sweet, smiling and unusually fit infant in that he could lift himself up on his arms before he was six weeks old. Andrew had an awareness that was quite unique for such a young child.

Then when he was seven weeks old, to the day, I went to pick him up for his evening feed feeling concerned he'd slept an hour longer than usual and I felt he was cold.

A primal dread came over me - one I had never before experienced. I called his father, Jeremy saying, 'Please come and have a look at Andrew! Something's not right!!'

Jeremy came charging into the room and as he picked him up I could see our precious wee Andrew was dead: a grotesque vision forever frozen in my memory.

He would later say that he knew from the tone of my voice that Andrew was dead before he was even close enough to pick him up.

The Death Certificate stated ‘Perfectly healthy, well cared for infant. No apparent cause of death. Sudden Infant Death Syndrome’.

At this point I would like to share a poem I’d written approximately 20 years ago about this devastating experience.

*“My innocence was
interred in that
dainty blue casket.”*





Andrew Frederick James Barton

September 9, 1975 - October 28, 1975

SIDS

*I saw him lift the rigid little body
and the words "He's dead Darling"
fell from his lips like the final
sorrowful chords of a Requiem.*

*As if a high powered cable
had been attached to my feet,
the searing shock
surged through my body,
scorching my heart,
scrambling my thoughts
as it reached my brain....
leaving me prostrate.*

*My innocence was interred
with that dainty blue casket.*

*His passing led to the creation
of the little Princess who,
together with our first born son,
completed our family.*

*Then with the merciful passage of time,
grotesque visions of that cold lifeless form
were replaced with memories of a warm,
yielding, squirming boy whose face would
distort disarmingly in readiness for a lusty yell
...and I could smile again.*

-DEBORAH KENNEDY BARTON

Mine and the children's Dad/Pa, Jeremy Barton's history:

I was born on Bell Island, in the small Atlantic island province of Newfoundland in Canada, on April 9, 1953 . When I was 18 I moved to England in December 1971 to study nursing.

While living in Portsmouth I had met the children's father, Jeremy Barton, who was born in Johannesburg, South Africa, on August 25, 1949. Jeremy's family moved to Bulawayo in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) when he was an infant. He moved to England, his parents' country of origin in 1967.

Jeremy's mother, Joan Pauline Berryman Barton had been planning a wedding for us in Great Bookham, Surrey in the lovely large country home called 'Fairfield House' they shared with their uncle, Lord Frederick James Tucker.

On December 27 1972 tragedy struck when Joan, at 53 years of age died suddenly of a massive stroke. It was a terrible blow to all as she had been a fit and energetic woman with no signs of illness up to the time of her death.

Jeremy's sister, Judy (Licia to her friends in Ireland) and her family who lived in Dublin, Ireland had offered to plan and host the wedding for us as a way of dealing with their grief and loss at that time.

We were married in Dublin on January 11, 1973.

It was a small but lovely wedding, a bit of joy amongst all the heartache. My parents, Riv and Clara Kennedy travelled from Newfoundland and my dear friend, Dolores Callender travelled from England to share this wonderful occasion with us.

The Irish do know how to provide some good craic!

Christopher (Topher):

We brought our first son, Christopher Kenndy Barton into the world on August 3, 1973, at St. Mary's Hospital, Portsmouth, Hampshire,

Topher (our family name for him) was a quiet child but he was also a very clever, bright and sweet boy. He was an extraordinarily attractive newborn as was stated by many who came to visit in his first days. Topher was full of fun and very creative at a very early age. His charm and wit has endured into his adulthood.

Sadly, after Andrew`s death he was left on the outskirts of our grief at the tender age of two years, but thankfully family and close friends surrounded us to help us through the worst imaginable experience in our young lives.

In retrospect I feel for Topher as a small boy and remember some touching moments with him after he lost his baby brother. We cannot rewind our lives, but given half a chance I`d have been there for him and his little breaking heart in a far more engaged manner.

My mother came to spend time with us from Newfoundland and we shared some of the most intimate and important moments of our mother/daughter relationship. She was also a wonderful Grandmother to Topher in his hour of need.

I will be covering the impact our loss can have on surviving siblings in Chapte X

Our move to South Africa:

There seemed to have been no such thing as ‘Grief Support’ in the predominant air of stoicism in England at that time. More the ‘stiff upper lip’ attitude and we were actually advised by a friend, ‘You must have another baby’ and just after the funeral I was even told ‘You must move on now.’: all the wrong things to say to a grieving parent.

But I do believe our youth and resilience helped a great deal at that time and in November 1976 we discovered we were expecting our third child,. The timing was quite incredible as we were planning to move to South Africa in February, 1977.

I found it quite daunting to imagine travelling all that way to such a troubled country and even had nightmares about terrorists breaking into our home and attacking us in our beds.

As time went on I realized these so called terrorists were people who were desperately fighting for freedom from the tyranny of Apartheid.

I was just beginning to deal with a deep depression and I had a difficult time moving beyond my own door step, never mind travelling to such a foreign and unknown land.

On New Year's Even 1977 I had a threatened miscarriage and had to spend a couple of days in bed. Thankfully it was a good move as my pregnancy was intact when we embarked on our adventure to South Africa in February of that year.

I was 5½ months pregnant when we stepped off the plane under bright sunny skies in Johannesburg, South Africa and I was immediately taken with the extraordinary beauty of this exotic land.

The excitement of settling in and starting a new life in this magnificent country was definitely a great help in my healing process and the joyful prospect of welcoming a new child into our lives was a bright light in our dark world at that time.

Pippa:

Our only daughter, Philippa Joan Barton was born at the Florence Nightingale Hospital in Johannesburg on June 17, 1977. Her father had been born in that same hospital in 1949, so this was a special milestone for him. I was concerned I'd be a nervous new Mom after losing Andrew but I think somehow I'd adopted the philosophy of 'que sera, sera' in a subconscious way because I was very comfortable with our sweet baby girl.

We were also blessed with the tender, loving aid of Onica, a tall graceful African woman who would carry Pippa around on her back when she suffered from colic. It was amazing how this soothed her greatly. This lady was such a blessing to have around and was not only helpful with domestic chores but was also a good companion during the time she was with us.

It was so sweet to watch Topher gaze upon and interact with his little sister. A memory I will always treasure : the first day I brought her home from the hospital, Topher sat on the arm of my chair, stroking Pippa's little fuzzy head as I held her and eventually he asked 'Mommy, why does she have a head like a chicken?'

Oh how they delight us, our little ones with their observations of this big, strange world they inhabit!

Our life in South Africa:

And so the years moved on, as did we. We moved into our first home in Boksburg and went on to eventually live on a 5 acre small holding near Benoni and ultimately ended up living in the lovely seaside resort town of Amanzimtoti in the province of Natal (Now Kwazulu-Natal) on the Indian ocean.

Jeremy and I divorced in February 1986. He went on to remarry and his wife Sue, the children and I have had a good relationship over the years especially as far as parenting is concerned.

In Amanzimtoti the children loved life. The climate was sub-tropical and the Indian ocean provided warm water to swim in (provided there were shark nets) and the scenes of dolphins and whales surging and diving in the waves was a common sight. It was also lots of fun being awakened in the morning by the vervet monkeys dancing on the tin roof of our cottage then watching their little faces peering through our bedroom windows. Breathing in the scent of frangipani

was soothing as we awakened to a new day, which in summer could be as early as 4:30 am due to the absence of daylight savings time.

Pippa wanted to follow suit with her brother so she also became a weekly boarder when she entered High School in Pietermaritzburg after we all returned from our magical trip to Canada in 1990.

It was a private school and we were thrilled that she had been awarded a partial scholarship based on the result of her entrance exam. One of the high points of this particular school at that time was that it was multi racial whereas all the public schools were segregated. They both achieved an excellent degree of success in school which made us very proud.

My return to Canada:

I eventually chose to return to Canada to spend time with my terminally ill mother. She was diagnosed with metastatic Colon Cancer in 1990 and had been given approximately 2 years to live. By the time I returned to Canada she was nearing the end of her life and my sisters and I formed a team to help care for her in what would be her last 6 months of life.

I arrived back in the country of my birth on October 17, 1991 (what would have been my parent's 54th wedding anniversary) and our precious Mom gave up the ghost on May 22, 1992 after a difficult but valiant battle with that dreaded disease.

I felt so grateful for the fact that she'd gotten to spend that precious time with the children for Christmas 1990 as it would be their last with their Nanny Kennedy.

I had decided, with the children's blessing to stay in Canada and set up a home for us, pending their finishing school and joining me here.

Topher only had one more year remaining to complete High School and it felt so awful leaving little Pips who was only 14 but they had their Dad and Step Mom living nearby and Pippa was excited that she

would now get regular trips to visit her extended family, Topher and I in Canada until she completed her schooling.

Topher arrived in Canada in July 1992 and we lived in our new apartment together until he decided to move into the residence at the University of Toronto, Erindale Campus where he was studying for his degree. We had such fun painting and putting our new home together but it was exciting to see him move out of the nest and start his new life as an adult.

Topher worked full time to support himself and pay his tuition. He graduated with his BSc Degree in 1999. In the meantime he had met his future wife, Nancy Lyons while working at a restaurant in Toronto and the rest is history.

Pippa arrived to stay in 1996 and she and I would end up working together in a pub/restaurant in Toronto for 3 years.

Kieran:

One day Pippa announced that she was pregnant and that the father would not be actively involved in the baby's life but he would be providing some financial support.

We knew it would be a challenge but were delighted when she brought Kieran Andrew Palmer Barton into the world on March 23, 2002, at the Toronto East General Hospital.

She and I had moved into a rental house and worked hard to make it clean and lovely for the baby's arrival. She was working for British Airways at the time. When she returned to work in 2003, I had just been laid off from my job and it turned out to be fortuitous as I was receiving employment insurance benefits for a full year and I could care for Kieran full time when she went back to work.

He was the most outgoing, beautiful boy with enormous blue eyes. He made the hardest heart soften with one gaze. He was full of fun, clever and cheeky as all heck.

Pippa and Kieran's move to South Africa:

In 2004 Pippa decided she wanted to raise her boy in the lovely environment she had grown up in, South Africa so they moved to Port Elizabeth in July 2004, where her father and step mother lived.

It broke my heart to see them go but I knew it was a good move for them and tried my best not to show my anguish and gave them my full blessing.

The day we said our good-byes was pure agony but I knew we'd see them again: or so I thought.

Pippa's dad, Jeremy was here on a business trip and escorted them to South Africa and soon he and Sue had them settled into a nice house and she had a car and all was good in the world.

Pippa's old friend and squash buddy from High School, Steven Driscoll lived with his lovely young wife Laura in Port Elizabeth so Pippa reconnected with him and was introduced to his brother Richard. They began dating and by October 1, 2006 Richard had moved in with Pippa and Kieran.

We would chat on the phone and often the webcam on Sundays and I could hear Richard and Kieran having a wonderful time in the background so I had not doubt from my daughter's enthusiastic conversations that this was a match that was going to work well! I was thrilled for them all.

At this point in their lives Pippa had started University to study for her BComm degree, she had taken in some accounting for a couple

of clients, was playing squash and golfing regularly with Richard and best of all, raising that wonderful boy of hers.

Her Dad and Sue lived close by so Sundays were dedicated to family gatherings at their home. Kieran was pleased that he would be the 'big boy' in school next year and I do believe it would be the equivalent of Senior Kindergarten here in Canada. He was thriving and growing and he had developed the most adorable South African accent.

Topher and Nancy went to visit with the family in Port Elizabeth for Christmas 2005 and had a wonderful time and brought back some lovely gifts for me from Pippa and Kieran. Now treasures indeed.

And we were absolutely delighted that Pippa had booked Air tickets for them to be here with us in Canada for Christmas 2006!

I was beside myself with excitement. They were due to arrive here on December 11, 2006. I was booking some vacation time from work and even planned a lot of the menu and started picking up a few Christmas gifts. It would be 2 years, 5 months and 9 days since I last held them close to me and wished them adieu and now we would be holding each other again.

I would sit here on the couch imagining them walking through the door and figuring out how I'd hug them both at the same time!

Then one day a very odd thing happened. I sat here visualizing them coming through that door with my excitement mounting and I suddenly got this feeling of dread and somehow knew I shouldn't get excited. All of that joy drained out of my body. I had not imagined anything happening to them at that point: just an odd sensation of not allowing myself to get excited.

Then Pippa informed me that they were all going to a wedding in Cape Town the weekend of October 20-22. Richard's cousin

was getting married and she was so excited to be meeting his extended family and celebrating in such a lovely city!

She sent me what tragically would be her final email (below) followed by my response on Thursday, October 20, 2006

Hello!

I just went to the hairdresser to have it flat-ironed for this wedding on Saturday, and.....I HAVE GRAY HAIR!!!!!!!!!!!!!! My hairdresser found 'lots' of gray roots !!! . How old were you when you started to go gray? It's too early, surely????

Oh well, I thought I would share my distress with you!! We are leaving for CT in the morning. Will try and give you a call on Sunday night.

Love you lots

Pippa

Oh my poor little Poodle!

Hey, you're my daughter you can't go grey!

Actually Pips, I was 24 when my first few grey hairs started popping up. By the time I was your age I had started colouring my hair because it was dark. But you have your hair highlighted so it shouldn't be noticeable at all. You shouldn't have to worry too much at this point. My hair is still not 'completely' grey. About 90%. Mom was white by the time she was my age.

They say stress contributes to it but I know it's also hereditary.

You've earned those grey hairs, Pip! REJOICE!

Love You

Mom

The tragic news:

Three killed in horror collision with truck

By Guy Rogers and Cathy Dippnall

The Herald

TRAGEDY struck three families, including the well-known Eastern Cape sporting family the Driscolls, in a horror collision on the Garden Route yesterday.

The Driscolls were returning from a wedding in Cape Town when their vehicle was involved in a major accident with a truck near the Gouritz River Bridge.

Lyn Driscoll, of Walmer Downs, said her husband Brian had driven, but she'd flown home with her mother. With him were her three sons Richard, Steven and David, Steven's wife Laura, David's (CORRECTION: SHOULD BE RICHARD'S) girlfriend, Pippa Barton, and her four-year-old son Kieran. Laura, Pippa and little Kieran all died in the collision.

"We had only been home for five minutes when an old friend David had managed to contact arrived to tell us what had happened."

Three others in the kombi, which was apparently in collision with a pantech-nicon, were injured.

Police said the accident occurred at 2pm about 35km west of Mossel Bay.

Steven and Laura – formerly Myburgh, also from Port Elizabeth – had been married for 18 months. She worked in her sister's nail care salon in Greenacres.

The Barton family were too shocked to talk last night. The Driscoll brothers and their father were taken to hospitals in Mossel Bay and George. Richard is a former number one EP squash player.

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Sunday morning, October 22, 2006, Mike (my partner at that time of only 20 months) and I were planning to pop down to our local pub for brunch as he wanted to see a soccer match that was starting at 11 am. I decided I did not feel like going and I was sitting at my computer checking my email messages.

Mike was all dressed and saying cheerio when the phone rang. He picked it up and handed it to me and I heard Jeremy, the children's father saying in a rather strained, measured voice "Hello Debbie it's Jeremy' and I knew in my heart there was something terribly wrong. It's amazing how our brain works subliminally to process information because somehow I knew in an instant that if there was good news, Pippa would have called, not her father.

So instead of my usual, cheery, 'Hello Jeremy!' I simply said in a tense and concerned voice, "Yes Jeremy?" and as I braced myself he went on to say, "I have some tragic news. Pippa and Kieran were killed in an car accident today"

Yet again, words that no parent ever wants to say or hear.

I did not experience the same type of 'shock' I'd had when Andrew had died. Perhaps because I wasn't 'there' or because I was now a veteran bereaved parent? God only knows.

I remember I then shouted at Mike "Pippa and Kieran were killed in a car accident!"

I went on to ask Jeremy 'How? Where? and all the other frantic questions one would ask on hearing such shocking news! From what I can now vaguely remember he gave me what details he knew and said that the police had delivered the news and how impressed he was with how compassionate they were...and I leaned back, my head falling backwards and wailed 'Sweet Jesus NOOOO!!.

And my next thought was our dear Topher so I asked Jeremy if he knew yet and he informed me that his next call would be to our son. How gut wrenchingly difficult for this poor man to have to break this dreadful news to us!

We hung up and I got up from my chair. I do remember the shock setting in and my first panicked thought was 'Oh No..Poor Topher!!

and I started pacing like a mad woman and telling myself, 'OK this has happened before..it is happening again..don't sit down or lie down otherwise you will never get up again.

So I paced and paced back and forth - back and forth. knowing my baby boy was about to get the worse news of his life and I do believe it was my concern for him that kept me sane and moving at that point.

My calf muscles ached for the next two weeks as a result of the shock and strenuous pacing.

It was sadly ironic that this time around I could be more focused on his breaking heart.

And then Topher called. His voice sounded dead. He then said they were on their way to my place and I said he mustn't drive but he reassured me with "That's OK Mom, Nancy will be driving." And that was that: my boy had just received the most devastating news of his life.

It started hitting me that we needed to let family and friends know so I phoned my sister Agnes. Her hubby Jim who'd recently had surgery for a ruptured aortic aneurism answered the phone and when I asked to speak to Agnes he said she'd just gone to church. In my state of shock I blurted out that the children were dead and I could hear him draw in his breath as he gasped for air. I then thought "Oh God I hope he's ok." Jim said that he'd call Agnes and they would get back to me.

Agnes called back after a short while in an awful state and said they were on their way and that they would also let the extended family know. As is their nature they arrived with an armful of food and a heartfelt of love and comfort.

My next thought went to Pippa's best friend Colette. I didn't have her phone number so looked it up in the directory and when she heard my voice she was thrilled.

Of course once I gave her the devastating news I heard her gasp of breath and then, dead silence. She told me later her friend (now her husband) was there with her and that she'd collapsed on the floor after our call. She also reminded me that Kieran's Dad needed to know and she said she'd let him and all of Pippa and Kieran's large circle of loving friends here in Toronto know as well.

Then it all started: the visitors, the phone calls, the mad preparations for going to the funeral in South Africa. That evening we had 12 people gathered in our little flat. We all needed each other that night more than ever!

I was in such a state of shock I couldn't cry, just as I had felt when Andrew died but the horror of it all was very real indeed.

The family gathered at Topher and Nancy's house on October 24 for our family 'wake' and it was good to have their support. Then that long mournful journey full of fear and disbelief and with no shortage of alcoholic beverages we headed through the air across all those miles to South Africa.

I will be describing the experience of the arrival at their house the funeral and aftermath in chapters within the book.

And next month, on October 22 it will be ten years which will be a major memorial for me as I continue to write this book and make my way around England to relive the beginning of my mothering experience and see old friends.

Mike:

Mike and I had moved in together in January 2005.

He had never met Pippa and Kieran but he did get to chat with them on the phone and as I had mentioned previously, on Sundays we would often chat on the webcam.

How grateful I am now that we had access to that technology as it turned out to be my last visual contact with them in their final days and the only way Mike would get to chat with them face to face.

He had never been out of the country so the trip to South Africa was quite daunting but also an adventure which he has always considered bitter sweet as expressed in this touching poem he wrote shortly after returning to Canada.

Winds & Waves

dedicated to P&K

*A nearly sleepless journey halfway `round the world
In response to the fatal legacy of a drowsy truck driver
Three precious sleepers inll awake no more.
Two families will never dream as peacefully as before.*

*Orion stands upon his head to regard the Southern Cross.
Spirits are downed and spirits are raised
As the Irish wake the dead
Songs are sung and tales are told
Now and forever after
The Koi pond reflects our rivers of tears
And gales of our laughter*

*I heard lions roar, saw wildebeest clown
As I lived a tragic adventure
I waded in Indian green water
As was embraced by the children of Africa
A mother of a mother performs triage
On the momentoes of a short and shorter life
Who could know that soon again
he`d be asked to be a wife*

- MICHAEL MALOTT 2006

The marriage never took place and needless to say we had a rocky relationship as the years unfolded. We had finally separated a year ago and when I recently returned from my 6 week pilgrimage to England we embraced each other and opened up communication in a manner such as we had never done in the past and I am now able to, in retrospect see where my grief had a negative impact on our relationship. We are now embarking on our mutual healing and look forward to a long and lovely future together.

My hope for you, the reader:

My hope is that you find within these pages something that will help you heal and renew as you wind your way through the most treacherous and agonizing path of grief a person may ever have to travel, i.e. the death of a child or grandchild.

Before you venture onto this path with us I would like to share a quote that Lyn Driscoll wrote in a lovely photo album she shared with me containing many of the last photos ever taken of those precious young souls.

Lyn is the mother of the boys who suffered such loss and injury both physical and psychological in the fateful accident that claimed Pippa, Kieran and Laura`s lives

I know these words are beyond comprehension in the early days, but they are, as Mr. Lincoln stated the truth provided we do our work .

“In this sad world of ours sorrow comes to all and it often comes with bitter agony. Perfect relief is not possible except with time. You cannot now believe that you will ever feel better. But this is not true. You are sure to be happy again. Knowing this, truly believing it will make you less miserable now. I have had enough experience to make this statement.”

- ABRAHAM LINCOLN



Philippa Joan Barton

June 17, 1977 - October 22, 2006

Kieran Andrew Palmer Barton

March 23, 2002 - October 22, 2006

FLESH OF MY FLESH

*The air you breathed
surrounds me
and my nostrils flare
in desperate need
of your scent.*

*I bury myself in
your written words
your images
static and in motion
lest the images
in my head dim
and every last
fragment of you
decays with your flesh.*

*Then the force of your being
the impact of your life
the laughter the music the wisdom
the stiving the loving the anger
the joy the struggles
rise from within me
and I find respite
from my agonizing
for you are my flesh
and I now live
for you*

- DEBORAH KENNEDY BARTON