



Meerkat Mail

Issue 11

Rowans
Hospice

Mail-up Meerkats, get ready for a magazine loaded with your brilliantness...

We are already pinging our way through the start of 2017, spring and some happy sunshine is hopefully on its way (we miss ice cream!) but even more importantly, here is the first of this year's Meerkat Mail!

Our Meerkat Christmas Party is one of our most favourite events! Last year's party was extra fun as Chris and Ami from CJR Photography brought their amazing photo booth along for us all to enjoy!

Inside, one of our Meerkat Mentors, Georgia tells her story of the very special relationship she shared with her Gran and how since she died, Georgia has learnt to manage this loss. Amy has written a beautiful song and Hannah talks us through her experience of when her Dad was ill, up until he died.



Often, even years after someone has died, the really tough feelings of missing that person, don't simply disappear but instead, adults and children find ways to cope with what has happened. Lots of you will remember our pinbadge, which was designed by Katie and Millie Sole. The badge is a rainbow, breaking through clouds, with a really important message: **'Remember there is hope and you can learn to live life differently.'**

Grief (this is the word we use to describe a person's different feelings and thoughts when someone they love has died), is a tricky and complicated thing to understand but please know you're not on your own and whatever you're feeling is really normal. Check out our five 'Top Tips' that we hope will help you to make some sense of what you're going through.

Top-up your knowledge about Rowans Hospice with a few 'Did you know...' facts on the back page and learn more about your friends with the game 'Would you Rather...' - their answers might surprise you!

Look after your little selves,
Meerkat Mail, issue 12 will be out later this year!

Rowans Meerkat Team

Rowans Meerkat Service supports children and young people. The children we work with have a special adult (like a parent or a grandparent) with a serious illness or have experienced the death of someone close to them.



Grief: Everyone's Different



The word 'Gran', means something different to everyone, to some people it brings memories of a lovely warm woman who bakes cookies and makes sure they never leave the house hungry, for others it means a loving, friendly woman who they see on Christmas Day and birthdays. But for me ... 'Gran' was the woman who was an extremely intrinsic part

of my life; she acted as a second mother to me and a best friend. She was a confidant, someone who was always on my side and someone who would never fail to make me smile. She was an eccentric woman who had a unique way of doing everything; she had a very different outlook on life and provided advice and guidance like no one else.

Around 6 years ago, my Gran was diagnosed with stage 4 Ovarian Cancer, meaning she was so ill there was no cure, but they could make her comfortable. At the time of diagnosis, she was estimated to only have a few months to live. When I was told of this, there was this lump in my throat, I felt a rush of different emotions all at once. I was sad, terrified, worried, and overwhelmingly confused; I couldn't stop thinking how this isn't supposed to happen to me, how you hear of things like this happening to other people but it shouldn't be happening to me.

We were lucky enough to have just over another year with my Gran after her diagnosis, where she had good days and bad. That year was one of the most emotional years of my life, it holds cherished memories of laughter, emotional talks and just silently enjoying each other's company. Whilst, also holding some of the most heart-wrenching experiences; sitting in the Hospice and losing one of the best women I knew.

On the 22nd August 2011, in the early hours of the morning I lost one of my best friends.

I was woken in the night by my mum to say that Gran had let go and after a hard year she was gone. So as a family we went to the Hospice to say our goodbyes. That night my emotions were all over the place, even after a year of

trying to come to terms with what was going to happen, the pain was as raw as if I'd had no warning. I felt numb, I was distraught but also couldn't cry, the pain was deeper than tears, yet I felt guilty for not crying whilst family members surrounded me, openly expressing their pain.

The time immediately after we lost my Gran was a mixture of emotions; I was distraught, confused, relieved she wasn't in pain anymore, guilty for feeling relieved, angry that she had been taken from me and numb. It truly felt as if I was never going to get past these feelings. **It felt as if it would never get better.**

But over 5 years on, here I am as an 18-year-old who just started university. I still miss my Gran more than words will ever express. You never get over losing someone that special to you, but you do learn how to cope with it. There have been times over the years where I would have given anything to be able to tell or show Gran things; I would have loved to have her at my prom, have her see me finish school or have her there to celebrate A level results and beginning university. But I found ways to deal with missing her, my Gran inspired my love for music and taught me how to play the piano. So, whenever I miss her I sit and play and it's as if she's there with me. I also surrounded myself with people I could talk to and this eventually helped me to express and deal with my emotions. But my biggest message to anyone who is grieving, is to **remember everyone is different in grief, there is no right or wrong way to feel or behave, everyone deals with it in a unique way.**

Moreover, to remember you are never on your own, however impossible it feels you can always make it through and there is always someone you can talk to.

Georgia (18)



Hannah's Story

My Dad had Cancer since I was a baby. It worsened when I was 4 but they managed to get it under control. But in March 2016 he got worse again and he lay on the sofa for a few months. He almost got better again but it didn't last. He went to the hospital twice before they transferred him to Rowans Hospice. He was there for 6 weeks and he started to get better although not fast enough that he could come home, so they moved him to the Bedhampton Nursing Home. He was there for 2 weeks but slowly he began to deteriorate until he passed away at 11:30am on Sunday 23rd October 2016. There was always hope that he would get better of course, and if he had, it would have been miraculous.

Hannah (11)

A song for Amy's Dad

Dear Dad
Thinking about you
Missing you
But I know you're a rising star
'Cause you're there
I can see you in the dark
I can feel you everywhere
You're still my Dad
Everywhere, wherever I am, you are there
In my thoughts, in my life, in my mind
I'll always know you're safe
'Cause you're there
You're a rising star
I LOVE YOU... LOVE AMY

Amy (11)



Top Tips

When someone dies, the people who loved that person are left with all sorts of feelings. These can include sadness, anger, confusion, shock, relief, guilt, fear, regret and disbelief. You may have felt all of these feelings, or none of them. There may be some days when you're feeling okay and then suddenly you're overwhelmed with wanting to cry, shout or hide away from the world.

The suggestions below will not make everything feel okay again, but we hope that at least one or two will make sense to you and will offer ways of coping with what is happening to you and your family.

- 1 When someone you love dies, this can make you worry about the health and safety of other family members. This makes sense, but bottling up these thoughts could make you worry even more. Try to share these worries with someone.
- 2 Look after yourself. Don't give yourself a hard time if you find you're having a really tough day or if you're having a better day. Share the good stuff and the not-so-good stuff with a trusted adult so they can understand the best way to support you.
- 3 Know that it's okay to have days when all you can think about is the person who died and other days when you hardly think about them at all.
- 4 Find ways of remembering the person who died. There may be places you can go, favourite songs to listen to, photographs or items that belonged to the person that hold special memories.
- 5 There will be days when you can laugh and have fun. Try not to feel guilty when this happens. Enjoying yourself doesn't mean you're 'over it' or you've 'forgotten' or 'don't care.'

George's Fundraising

We'd like to say **thank you** to one of our 'stars' of last year's October's Starlit Walk, **George Starkey**.

George has now taken part in **5 walks** around Portsmouth's Historic Dockyard, raising an incredible **£1,252**

George originally started fundraising for Rowans Hospice in memory of his teacher.

George - you're a star!



Job Title:
Director of Finance

Rowan catches up with...
Mark Van Wijk

Wow, that sounds like a very important role! What does it involve exactly?

I manage a Finance Team of 7 people at the Hospice. We are responsible for looking after the money that comes into the Hospice and keeping a check on how much the organisation is spending.

There are lots of departments in the Hospice that each need different types of equipment and resources as part of their day-to-day work. For example, the ward will need medical supplies, the kitchen team will need food and my Meerkat colleagues get through a lot of art and craft materials! So, at the beginning of each year, me and my team calculate a budget for each department.

The most amount of money is spent on paying our lovely Hospice staff their wages; it's really important that everyone who works for Rowans Hospice has the right training and skills so that we can continue to deliver the best possible care to all our patients and their families.

How long have you worked at Rowans Hospice?

Just over two years.

What's your favourite thing about working for Rowans?

I enjoy it all really (even the accountancy bits that other people might find boring!) I get to work with so many different people and learn about the work they do; there are always new projects happening within the organisation so I like working with others to hear about their ideas and help them to plan how we can manage costs to make these project happen.

It sounds like a big responsibility, being in charge of the money, how do you sleep at night?

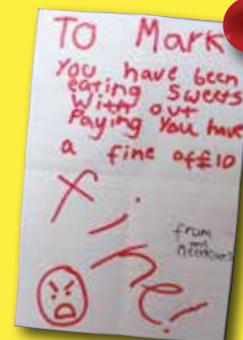
There are so many people in our local community who do all sorts of wonderful (and sometimes crazy!) things to raise money for Rowans Hospice; we're really lucky to have this brilliant support. So, you're right my job is a big responsibility because I have to make sure that we are careful to spend money on the right things but at the same time, I don't do this all on my own! I work really closely with my team and other people in the Hospice and together, we very carefully plan and calculate every penny of our spending!

I hear you are a regular visitor to Meerkat Central, just to munch their sweets, is this true?

I don't know what you mean! I just like to say hello to Sophie or Sarah and whilst I'm in their office, I might help myself to the odd packet of chewy pink Millions...

Clearly the children don't agree! It looks like you received a telling off letter for your sweet stealing, have you paid your fine?

No, but I have filled up the jar with new sweets lots of times! Honest!



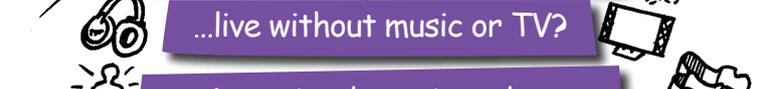
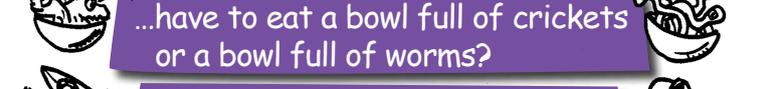
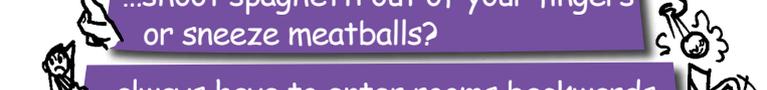
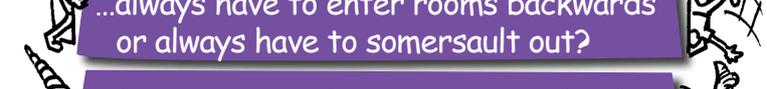
An evening full of stars at our Starlit Walk

An amazing 400 children (plus almost 400 adults!) took part in last year's Starlit Walk, walking around Portsmouth's Historic Dockyard to raise money for Rowans Hospice. So far, Starlit Walkers have raised almost **£24,000** - incredible! Money is still arriving so please don't forget to bring in your sponsorship money if it's sat waiting for us at home. No matter how much you've raised, even if it feels to you like it's just a small amount, when it's all added up together, your hard work and people's generosity really make a big difference!



Would You Rather...?

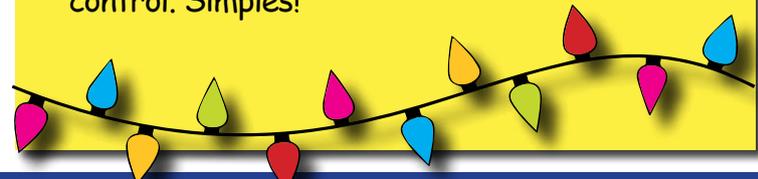
Share these funny, fictional dilemmas with your family and friends!

-  ...own your own boat or your own plane?
-  ...sweat melted cheese or always smell skunk?
-  ...be able to fly or be invisible?
-  ...live without music or TV?
-  ...win an Academy Award or an Olympic Gold Medal?
-  ...have to eat a bowl full of crickets or a bowl full of worms?
-  ...live in space or under the sea?
-  ...shoot spaghetti out of your fingers or sneeze meatballs?
-  ...always have to enter rooms backwards or always have to somersault out?
-  ...have a unicorn horn or a squirrel tail?

Did you know?

-  There are 22 Rowans Hospice shops in our community. When you donate clothes or other items to our shops, we can turn them into incredible hospice care and support to patients and their families.
-  You can volunteer in one of our shops from the age of 14 years and over.
-  The Hospice has 19 bedrooms for patients; each has its own en-suite bathroom.
-  Pets are welcome to visit the hospice - dogs, cats, rabbits and even a pony have all spent time with us!

At the end of the day, when Sarah and Sophie are ready to go home, the many, many fairy lights and lamps in Meerkat Central are turned off by pressing just two switches on a remote control. Simple!



We'd love to hear your thoughts on Meerkat Mail!

Was there anything you liked or didn't like? What would you like to see in future Meerkat Mail issues?

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