



THE NEW 'NORMAL'

Lenore Miller was flying high. She had a successful business, a great family life, plenty of business mojo and was wondering could life get any better when the unimaginable happened. Hayley Solich shares Lenore's resilience in the face of great tragedy...

Lenore Miller experienced the call many parents of an asthmatic child receive... the call to come and pick up their child because they are not feeling well.

On August 4th, 2007, Lenore's 19 year old son, Ryan, had played soccer in the afternoon and then gone off to a mates place for a party, asking Lenore to pick him up later because he had a work conference the next day and he was keen to go.

In the meantime, Lenore had gone home to relax and wait for the allotted pick up time. She downloaded some music and was reflecting on how grateful she was about her life... how great her partner was, how great her business was going, how great her kids were and how everything was going so well.

So you can imagine how calm she felt when she got the text message from Ryan telling her he was not feeling well. Well used to Ryan's asthma condition, Lenore mentally went through all the routine things a mother does... mentally rehearsed the advice she would give him, if he was bad she would take him to the hospital, then wait for him to stabilise and then bring him home for a good nights sleep.

Picking up Ryan and his girlfriend, Alice, Lenore convinced

Ryan to let her take him past the hospital on the way home as the asthma medication was not working and she wanted to be on the safe side. Dropping them off, she asked Alice to call her when he was stable and she'd come and pick them up, as she was used to the routine and had no idea what was about to transpire.

During the following hours, Alice called her twice. The first time to tell her he had been on the nebuliser and that his condition was stabilising, and then a very panicked Alice called again saying that his condition had deteriorated and they were taking him to intensive care and begging her to come quickly.

"We had an asthma plan like every other asthma family. Ryan carried it in his wallet. It was on the way to the hospital I learned that he had run out of preventer three weeks prior and had not renewed it, probably because it is expensive", shares Lenore.

"They were working on Ryan and they took me into 'that room', the one where they tell you the bad news and advise you to call everyone that counts so they can come and say goodbye. It really hit me that I was about to lose my son and it

“YOU NEVER IMAGINE THAT YOU WILL OUT-LIVE YOUR KIDS. I LOST MY DAD THROUGH SUICIDE IN MY FINAL YEAR OF SCHOOL AND I THOUGHT THAT WAS HARD BUT THIS WAS SO MUCH HARDER TO BEAR,” EXPLAINS LENORE.

was devastating. They didn't realise until they tried to bring him out of the induced coma just how severe the brain damage was and it was like this rollercoaster ride of hope and despair. Until they started talking about nursing bed options and the type of care he would need if he survived I had no idea just how bad the prognosis was."

Three and a half weeks later, her strong, robust young son who was on the cusp of manhood passed from this world as a result of the severe brain damage that occurred due to the lack of oxygen during the asthma attack.

"That without doubt has been the roughest life lesson to date," shares Lenore. "I just didn't know how, at that point, I was going to keep putting one foot in front of the other. All I knew was that I needed to. I still had a 15 year old son, Bryce, and he was struggling. I just knew I had to do it for him. *As a parent losing your baby you feel like you could just cut up and fade away too. You could seriously just care for yourself, but when there is another child you can't just give up. I also had this inner belief that there is always a way and I decided that there had to be a way to get through this too.*"

In the beginning Lenore recalls that she was just determined to start with having a routine for the day. She got up and helped get her son off to school. There were routine tasks that needed to be carried out for her business, like paying the bills and staff, but she also said she spent a lot of time just flopped on the lounge reading, eating chocolate and drinking coffee.

"I gave myself permission for that to be okay for now. As time passed the one thing that I found so helpful was finding another mum who had also been through the loss, having lost her two boys in a car accident."

Lenore shares how she had been given a brochure by the funeral home from an Association for parents who had lost children and so she had emailed the Founder.

"We became best friends, beyond just being parents who had lost children, and I used to send her emails when I couldn't sleep so that I could make sure what I was experiencing was normal," shares Lenore candidly.

"I also was looking for a role model. I went on a search for someone who had come through this dark place and had found the way to move on. I was looking for a 'new normal' because I knew there had to be a life that was different from a life of misery. I knew that I could choose to make this a life that would count and a life that would honour my son.

"The thought that moved me most was the question, *"If I spend my whole time grieving my dead son then how would my other son have interpreted that? Would he think that I didn't love him as much as his brother or that he didn't count?"*

"Sadly, I found it really hard to find any good role models. It seemed that all the books out there were either about the grief ►



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▲ cycle or parents who were stuck in their pain. I really wanted someone to tell me how I could become a whole human being again.

"You never imagine that you will out-live your kids. I lost my dad through suicide in my final year of school and I thought that was hard but this was so much harder to bear," explains Lenore.

The turning point in her grief occurred when she was back working at the gym she owned. Lenore was quite a private person and didn't wear her grief on her sleeve, everything was very much business as usual, so many of her clients had no idea that she had lost her son.

"I found it increasingly difficult to tolerate people's pettiness. I'd be working and there would be a group of women standing there talking about their latest broken nail drama and I wanted to shake them and say, "You haven't lost your son!

"Then one day a woman came into the gym and she was telling me about how bad her life was and she had this long list of her miseries and at the end of that list she told me it was all because she had lost a son, 11 years before. I instantly realised that I didn't want that to be that woman in 11 years. I didn't want to be trapped in my grief.

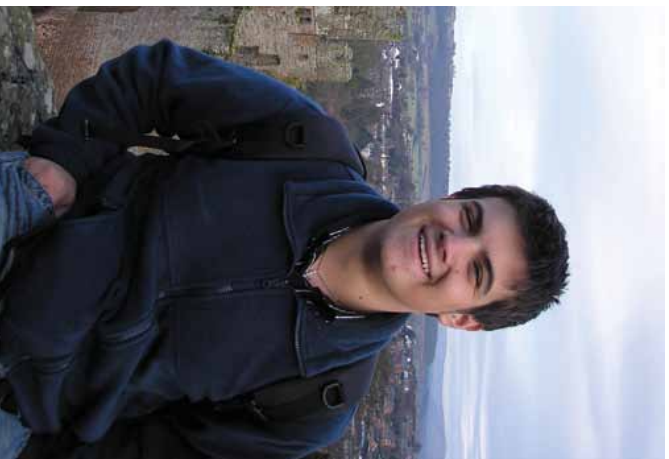
"I lost my get up and go and so we decided to sell the business, which fitted with our initial 3-5 year plan. At Ryan's funeral we had decided to collect money for the Asthma Foundation instead of having people send flowers. We'd already received so many flowers while Ryan was in hospital. So this began our journey with the Asthma Foundation who were and are fantastic. They would ring me up to see how I was going. They eventually asked if they could interview me about our experience. The interview was transcribed and they asked permission to publish it in their promotions. I was then asked to appear in a series of community service announcements. This led to my role as an Ambassador for the Foundation and our story has been distributed throughout Australia. I now speak on their behalf," shares Lenore.

"Although we had an asthma plan, no-one really ever told me that my child could die. In fact, Ryan eventually died from the brain injury resulting from lack of oxygen at the time of the serious attack. I was totally unprepared for that. A lot of people are complacent about their asthma. You can have an asthma plan but if you don't stick to it then it won't help you."

In her campaign to honour her son, Lenore has participated in a very public campaign promoting awareness of Asthma including World Asthma Day where she dressed in her pyjamas and took a tour of the city on a motorcycle, speaking at the Opera House, appearing in advertisements and she has also had a very public campaign on her Facebook profile, inviting her entrepreneurial buddies to wear their PJs for the Wear Pyjamas for Asthma cause to help raise awareness and funds for research.

"My drive and joy is in creating awareness," shares Lenore. "When I get messages that say that a parent has been encouraged to review their child's Asthma Plan I am very satisfied. Many people have told me that they have been inspired by me to take action in their lives and that really fills me with joy."

Lenore has also since become an outstanding and



inspirational business woman, adding public speaking, coaching and mentoring to her already brilliant career which included owning her own vendor finance company that saw 30 families who had previously been refused finance get into their own homes.

Lenore's message to all parents of children with Asthma is simple, "Be diligent. It's not nagging to remind someone you love to stick to the plan. It could save their life. And if you have lost a child, find your own new normal." Like I did, seek out positive role models who you can share your grief with so you can start to live again and honour your child throughout your life. I highly recommend the book, 'Rise' by Ingrid Polson, which I found after I had already created my new normal. It talks about resilience and that really helped to affirm the steps I had already taken on my own pathway forward." 🙌

TOP ASTHMA TIPS:

1. See your GP to get an asthma review and a written Asthma Action Plan. It will help you recognise when your asthma is getting worse, and what to do about it.
2. Take your medications as prescribed. Find out how they work and when you need to take them so that they work for you.
3. Check your inhaler technique - did you know that up to 90% of people don't use their inhalers properly? Your GP, pharmacist or Asthma Foundation website can help.
4. Learn asthma first aid - it could save a life.
5. Find out more about your asthma. Visit www.asthmafoundation.org.au or call 1800 645 130 to get your questions answered.

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