

Memorial service testimony to her Father Andy in who ascended on May 25, 2020

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Hello everybody. I'm Ruth Johnson — Ruth Lida Johnson, actually. My husband is here, my baby is here, and so are my mum and my eldest brother. Most of you will have known my dad, Andy, who passed away on the 25th of May 2020. I'm sure those of you who have lost someone close know that grief can feel simultaneously like yesterday ... and like an age ago.

I was actually quite nervous to speak today, because everyone is on their own journey with grief, and there is no right or wrong way to deal with it. I wanted to be sensitive, but also honest. There was a lot of weight to what I wanted to share. In the buildup, I argued with my friend, and had a bit of a tantrum last night. It always seems to happen before something like this. I haven't spoken publicly for a while, so I feel on edge — but hopefully there is something you can pull from what I'm sharing.

Around the time of my dad's passing, I was working as a nanny for a really wealthy family. It was the kind of wealth I'd never seen in my life. I had always been curious about the rich and famous, and imagined what that life would be like. In some ways, I had resented my family for not having money. My dad would even apologize to me: "I'm sorry I'm not a rich man." He said that to me quite frequently.

But the children I worked for wanted for nothing materially. I was working at the height of COVID, and the dad asked them: "where do you want to go when all of this is over?" Bear in mind, they had been traveling anyway. We were all on lockdown, but they were traveling freely. They said: "we want to go to the Amazon rainforest." "Okay, we'll go." It was that kind of life — private jets, helicopters, ten-thousand-pound parties for a 10-year-old. I was even asked to wrap up a Christmas gift of Lego, but it had to be wrapped already built, because it would cause him stress to build it. It was a world I had never witnessed before. You could make a sitcom out of it — but I had to sign a non-disclosure, so I can't.

This father had the means to give them anything they wanted, but he was really unable to love. Everybody in his vicinity hid from him. It was like an Upstairs Downstairs scenario — the servants hiding in the basement. He didn't live with the mother of the children, and there was a girlfriend, plus many other women in and out of the house. One time the dog had pooped outside his bedroom door, and I knew if he came out and stepped in it, all hell would break loose. I was scurrying around trying to nanny these ADHD kids, and ran down to the housekeepers: "there's a poo outside the door, you've got to clean it." They slammed the door in my face, so I was the one scooping it up. It was a crazy whirlwind.

On the outside these children had everything, but I felt deeply sorry for them. They were love orphans. I made a determined effort while I was there. The nannies dipped in and out; there were four of us doing rota shifts, because the job was so taxing. I decided: "for the time I'm here, until I can secure a mortgage, I'll make sure these kids feel loved in some small way. Hopefully when they're older, if they ever travel on a bus and see me, they'll think: oh, I remember her, she was meaningful to me."

Living in Sutton, with all the grammar schools, parents get fixated on extracurriculars — piano, ballet, the right holidays. We can become obsessed with what we want to give our children. But my eyes were really

opened. If there's a void of love, it really is a hell situation. It was a Scrooge scenario. There's that scene where Scrooge sees everyone in his home discussing who will take what from his bedroom after his death. I remember the children discussing who would take which house when their dad died, because he had several properties. Twelve-year-old kids saying: "oh, I'll get the one in Miami." Maybe they were joking — but still, to talk about your dad's passing like that, was eye-opening.

I would call my dad every night on my way home from work, when I wasn't sleeping in the house, and cry to him: "Dad, this is really hard." It was quite hellish. I had stuff thrown at me, I had to eat my food next to the dog kennel. It was humbling, and trying. I also had to nanny in ways I didn't agree with morally, because there was so much deceit. The mum would sneak sweets in, because the dad hated sweets. He had another son with another woman who had a nut allergy, so he made a rule that no nuts were allowed in any of his houses. But the mum would sneak peanuts in. One time, the cry went up: "he's coming!" Everyone was in a blind panic. The housekeepers shoved all the peanuts into a bin liner, and someone ran down the stairs to hide the stash, because God forbid he find peanuts.



When I found out Dad was really ill, I was on one of their estates. I remember falling to my knees, surrounded by pruned hedges and immaculate gardens. I was in some kind of utopia ... and yet in my own hell. They drove me in their Range Rover to the hospital. After I later got the keys to my own house, I remember just crying, because Dad had been there at the start of that journey, but he wasn't here to see this moment. Now that I'm a mum, life keeps transporting me into new phases, and a new wave of grief overcomes me. My dad used to tell me how he rocked me and walked up and down the stairs at Lancaster Gate, to put me to sleep. Those images come to me often when I'm nursing her, and I feel very sad that he's not here — even though I know he is here, because I feel it.

If you tell someone about an experience with a loved one who has passed, it may not feel big enough to be meaningful to them: "oh, I saw a robin and felt my dad nearby." But these small little fragments are how you realize: he's there, she's there. I want to share an excerpt from a diary entry I wrote a year after Dad passed, on the 26th of May 2021:

"Yesterday last year was when my heart broke into a thousand tiny pieces. I have been doing my best over the past year to find those pieces and put them back together, but some fragments are too small and sharp to gather up. I have never done life without you, and I do not know what life is without you. I am not sure I want this life without you. Happy moments cannot be shared with you, and tragedy must be dealt with alone. I am doing my best to move forward, and take each day as it comes. I feel you are around me, and I know you are saddened by your family's distress. I want for you to feel free to pursue great things, and not to worry about me. The pain ebbs and flows — sometimes as a torrential downpour, and others a painful twinge that I feel at my fingertips. It is something I carry with me everywhere."

"I often wonder what invisible wounds passers-by carry in their hearts. Are the wounds fresh? Are they beginning to heal, or are they not scarred over? Who did they love, and who did they lose? The truth is that human beings encounter death every day. It is something none of us can avoid. One thing that has remained continuously apparent since that fateful day, however, is that there is one gift we can give that makes our eventual passing easier for our loved ones to manage. It isn't some trinket box with a small locket hidden inside, nor some other worldly possession. It is, of course, love. There is a sentiment that love is free. Although I would agree that the beauty of love is that one cannot buy it, I would argue that to say love is free implies that love is easy. I don't believe that to be the case. We might feel a sudden rush of

love watching the heartfelt laugh of a child, or gazing into the eyes of a lover. But real love — that persistent, unwavering love — is not easy. And yet that is what I keep reflecting on. It is the deep love I felt from you that has anchored me in a safe little nook, even after your passing. I feel protected, even though you are no longer physically with me. This love is not easy. I am not always easy to love, and yet you continued to give — even after doors were slammed in your face, even after profanity hurled as a teenager, even after I used my heart as an excuse to be hateful. You still loved me."

"When the eventual, inevitable day of our own passing comes, those who love and care about us will suddenly be plunged into sheer and utter chaos. Although we will not be with them physically to pull them out of that abyss, or to pick them up and carry them, what will remain with them is an inner strength to keep moving forward. Our love for them, and their strong conviction in this love, will fire up an engine, and help them navigate this new life with us no longer there to hold their hand. You held my hand; you held it tight while I learned to take my first steps on this earth, and you continued to encourage and support me until the very day you passed. It was with the conviction that one is loved, that one finds the strength to keep moving forward — one step in front of the other."



I've been looking at books for my baby, and stumbled upon a short children's story by Patrice Karst. The twins were asleep one calm and quiet night, when it began to rain very hard. Thunder rumbled until it woke them up. "Mommy, Mommy!" they cried, running to her. "Don't worry, it's just the storm making all that noise." "We want to stay close to you," sighed Jeremy. "We're scared." "You know we're always together, no matter what," said Mom. "But how can we be together when you're out here and we're in bed?" said Liza. Mum held something right in front of them and said: "This. I was about your age when my mummy told me about the invisible string." "I don't see a string," said Jeremy. "You don't need to see the invisible string. People who love each other are always connected by a very special string made of love." "But if we can't see it, how do we know it's there?" asked Liza. "Even though you can't see it with your eyes, you can feel it with your heart, and know that you're always connected to everyone you love. When you're at school and miss me, your love travels all the way along the string, until I feel it tug on my heart. And when you tug it right back, we feel it in our hearts."

"Does Jasper the cat have an invisible string?" "Sure he does," said Mum. "And best friends like me and Lucy?" asked Liza. "Best friends too." "How far can the string reach?" "Anywhere and everywhere." "Would it reach me even if I were in a submarine deep in the ocean? Or a mountain climber? Or a dancer in France? Or a jungle explorer? An astronaut in space?" "Yes, even there." Then Jeremy asked quietly: "Can my string reach all the way to Uncle Ben in heaven?" "Yes, even there." "Does the string go away when you're mad at us?" "Never. Love is stronger than anger, and as long as love is in your heart, the string will always be there." Within minutes they fell asleep, dreaming of all the invisible strings they had, and all the strings their friends had, until everyone in the world was connected by invisible strings. From deep inside, they now could clearly see that no one is ever alone.

I'll end with two quotes from True Father. "You must find the source of strength within yourself to move forward every day. Moreover, you cannot do these things all by yourself. You cannot succeed with your own power alone. You need the help of your friends, your teachers, and God. The material world ends at some point, as does the world of knowledge. The world of power can be destroyed in a second — but the world of heart is endless. Hence you need to act based on a world of heart." And: "We receive our lives in love, live by sharing love, and return into the midst of love. It is important that we live our lives in a way that we can leave a legacy of love behind us."