



Take The Love With You

This book is a journey through grief, towards love. The experiences and stories inside these pages are shared with care and courage.

There is no correct way to read this book. You may only feel able to dip in and out of it, during the more manageable moments.

Be it a line, or an image. Be it one page, or every single word. We hope it provides insight, understanding, and comfort.

We hope it finds the people who need it.

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Introduction

Gill Golden & Jim Hall

As my baby Zachary died in my arms, I made him a promise. To tell the story of him. I would bring his courage and resilience to the page. Hopeful that it would help. Someone? Anyone.

I had no idea how.

An online poetry course introduced me to a virtual tutor. A person unknown and unseen. Jim Hall.

With each week Jim challenged me. Sensitive. Kindly. To tell the whole story. He was a safe space.

Slowly, I began to relate. Everything. The loss of Zachary. The trauma. The grief. The utter devastation. That comes when your child dies.

Jim and I have been privileged to meet a very special group of people. Mums. Who, like me, and maybe like you, have lost a child. We have written together. We have grieved together.

Our hope? That a piece/phrase/sentence/single word might help you.

Picking up this book is, in itself, one of the bravest things you may do.

So, this book is for Zachary. For Ellis. For Craig. For Erin. For your child.

It is a book of loss. Of unedited honesty. Of grief. Of sadness. Of hopelessness. And hopefulness.

But above all. It is a book of love.

Gill Golden

Some people enter your life and proceed to change it forever.

Introducing Gill: a once-participant on my six-week poetry email course, now truest of friends.

Through an unwavering devotion to honour her child, Zachary, she introduced me to other mums who have lost children - each with their own untold story.

To ask what brought us from that moment to this is like asking for a sneak peek into a collective journey so private, precious. Profound.

The Zoom sessions. The courageous responses to my writing exercises and prompts. The WhatsApp group chat that felt like a space to break and be pieced back together.

The belly-laughs. The tears. The *wholeness* of it all.

These women have done so much more than merely share their experience. They have risked offering it to the world as a gift.

This book is a hand on your shoulder. A beam of flashlight in the darkest dark. A pillow to howl into through the night. A promise that whatever happens to us, something else can.

The words contained within these pages sing. Startle. Are so open, precise, and unapologetic.

It has been a profound experience to get to know these women, and through doing so, their children.

However you experience this book. Whatever it gives you. Faith. Solace. Understanding. Comfort. Belief. Love.

Just remember one thing: take it with you.

Jim Hall



JANET DAWBER



Introducing Zachary

Gill Golden

Here. Is. Zachary.

With his stop-people-in-the-street beauty and full pink cheeks.

Those cheeks! And rosebud lips. The perfect cupid's bow sort.

Like they have been drawn on by another child.

Here. Is. Zachary. With a spectacular shock of burnished hair. So curly. Coarse. Wild!

Here. Is. Zachary. Tiny. Warm and plump. Nestling. In the palm of my hand.

Here. Is. Zachary. With a calm, courageous resilience.

Fighting spirit. A hero.

Who has lost his cloak.

And Here. Is Zachary. With a catastrophic brain injury.

But dear reader. That.

Is not the part I want you to remember.

What Brought Me Here

Gill Golden

My tiny twins Zachary and Joshua fought for their premature lives for seven months. Both with very different challenges. Each with a courage and resilience so magnificent that my heart swells. Every single day.

Ahead, a pathway unimaginably dark. Knowing that Zachary would die. Knowing Joshua might.

I, an almost-prisoner. A relationship turned abusive. Violent. Secretive. Hidden.

All three of us betrayed. At the time it mattered most.

I made promises. To myself. To my sons. We would be heard.

A needlepoint of light came through that darkness.

Writing. A way to honour the beauty. The bravery of my
sons.

A selfish need to write. In the hope I might help you.

It is you. Who has helped me.

Your child dies.

The next day you must carry on.

Get out of bed. Drink. Eat.

Don't ever underestimate how much bravery that has
taken.

I think these brave words - whilst difficult to read - could help so many others.

These are the things people are afraid to talk about.

Those early days and

the not knowing.

Failure is an option.

When you have done everything else you can.

I would not wish on any other.

The

Loneliness.

That is

Shopping.

A city centre Baby department.

I choose

A suit that is the gentlest ice-white

Hug.

And know.

I hold you.

Dress you.

Our final time.

For tomorrow.

Is

Your

Funeral.

In my place:

someone I do not recognise. Someone who is

less tolerant. More understanding. Yet

irrevocably broken.

A shell of me.

I found some of the things people said to be incredibly
hurtful.

Ignorant.

It felt (and still feels) like standing on the edge of the darkest chasm. You stand there alone and the rest of the world walks past. It carries on, as if nothing has happened?

How can that be?

Get through today. Is what I would say to someone who has just lost their child.

Don't think about anything other than trying to get to the end of this day.

Don't think about anything other than trying to get to the end of this day.

Don't think about anything other than trying to get to the end of this day.

Don't *ever* feel you need to apologise for what you have said about your child.

It will always be perfect.

It is so very difficult to keep my child close. In some ways I have pushed him away. It is so painful to think of him. It gives me an actual physical wrench in my heart.

I don't know how you get past that? It may never pass?

All I can do is live with it.

You have no choice.

You are not being strong.

You are just existing.

The people who are closest to you.

Are often the furthest away.

They laid his little body on a bed.

As if I could pretend he was asleep!

The woman told me he looked beautiful.

I remember thinking: what is wrong with you?

He is dead!

This is the worst thing I will see in my entire life.

You are.

A pearlised box with one remaining curl

You are.

A ring I cannot bring myself to wear.

You are

You are

You are

EVERYTHING.

Seizing the day.

Is insufficient.

Each ticking hour, minute, second.

Moment.

An opportunity.

Lost.

Drink-in. Savour. Devour.

Each and every gentle touch/glance.

Kiss.

For it may be.

The.

Last.

The power of loss but also the triumph of love.

I allowed myself to spend some time with my child. Really thinking about him.

Thinking about the love I will always have.

And finding there comes a time when I can do this with a smile first.

And a tear later.





Introducing Ellis

Hayley Graham

Ellis is the baby I never thought I could have. He was my miracle beautiful baby boy. Ellis was born with a heart condition.

Ellis had the most beautiful big blue eyes, and the smiliest face. He had a cheeky side to him.

He used to stick his tongue out at people.

People used to say: look at his blonde hair and big blue eyes!

What a little beauty he is!

He went through so much in his short time on this earth, but he never stopped smiling.

Ellis made me whole. He was our jigsaw piece.

Then at 9-months-old his little body couldn't fight anymore,
and he became an angel.

What Brought Me Here

Hayley Graham

My beautiful son, Ellis.

He lost his fight on the 21st of March 2009, at the age of just under ten-months-old, from a heart condition.

Ellis had six cardiac arrests, and on the 6th, his Daddy had to do the worst thing imaginable: he gave them the nod to tell them to stop.

I screamed, telling them to carry on. *Please don't stop.*

But my baby had gone, he couldn't fight anymore.

My heart shattered into a million pieces.

I didn't know how I would carry on.

It's fifteen years on, and I did carry on, I learnt how to cope. And you will too.

Even though Ellis isn't here with me anymore, he is still in my heart.

I have all the memories which no-one will ever be able to take from me.

That will be the same for you, when you are at the point in your own journey.

Dear Me

I am Hayley. I am also a bereaved parent to a beautiful little boy called Ellis.

The pain you are feeling at this moment is the worst pain you will ever feel in your life.

A piece of your jigsaw is missing and can never be made complete again.

You are the bravest mummy, and at the same time the proudest mummy.

You can't imagine your life ever being the same again.

On your journey you will laugh again and smile.

All the memories you have will never be taken away.

Losing my son has made me a stronger person.

Looking at pictures and remembering things from where the picture was taken.

I still sleep with his blue personalised Winnie the Pooh blanket.

There is no right or wrong way as to how you should feel.

In time you will notice how far you have actually come.

You will laugh again, and smile.

You will be able to listen to certain music without getting
upset.

You will be able to talk about your son without crying.

I remember everything like it was yesterday.

Ellis passed away at 10.30AM on the 21st of March, 2009. I remember just after he had passed away, a man on the ICU came up and put his arms around me. He told me how sorry he was. To keep strong.

All I wanted to do was scream and tell him I couldn't be strong.

My baby had just died.

I remember taking his clothes to the undertakers and asking them to be gentle when getting him dressed.

I remember Ellis's first ever holiday. We went to Devon for a week with my family and Ellis woke up every day at 6:30AM. The only thing we could get on the TV was The Full Monty.

This was the only holiday Ellis ever had.

Remember: they are always with you.

Wherever you go.

If I'm ever feeling low

I look up to the sky

and know he is there.

When I lost Ellis I listened to a lot of music. It was just something to concentrate on.

How can I stay strong?

I can't.

What right do you have to laugh in the street when I've just lost the most precious thing?

It hurt me too much to go back to the hospital. Everything would come flooding back.

I used to go to the cemetery at two in the morning because I didn't want him to be on his own.

Don't hold everything in. It will eat you up. Talk to people. Even if you feel like you're just jabbering. If someone's willing to listen to you, it's because they want to listen to you.

I didn't want to believe it.

If you're talking about it, you make it true.

A million and one emotions come flooding out.

How can you talk to someone who hasn't lost a child?

I am not strong. I put on a front. I am breaking
inside. I feel like my heart

has been ripped out and the pain I am feeling
is hurting so much.

After Ellis's funeral, I remember saying to my parents that I
wanted to take my mattress off my bed and sleep with him,
as I couldn't bear to think of him being up there on his own
in the dark.

I needed to be with him.

Fourteen years on and I still sleep with his blanket. When I go away. I take it with me.

On his birthday we have a little tea party. Put his picture on the table and the food and his cake around the picture.

Honestly? I don't care for myself, I always put myself last.

I forget about myself. I think after I lost Ellis, I didn't care about myself.

The energy of just getting up in the morning and having a wash or even just making yourself a brew.

A Room For Ellis

In this room there are four sky-blue painted walls with hand drawn Winnie the Pooh characters, a cream roller blind, and blue Winnie the Pooh curtains.

A hand-made wicker basket for the base of a hot air balloon, and cream fabric for the balloon.

Winnie, Piglet and Tigger are all in the basket.

The ceiling is painted as though it has white fluffy clouds.

The carpet is dark blue, and the cot is wooden with a bear carved into the wood at the top.

A cream Winnie the Pooh cot mobile that plays soothing music. Bertie the butterfly toy at the bottom of the cot.

In the corner there is a small white wardrobe.

Next to that: a white changing table and a chest of drawers.

In the other corner there is a big comfy chair with a foot stool.

A plug-in night light that changes colour.

On the windowsill? A range of different toys.

What I would say to a newly bereaved parent is: you have got this.

Cry if you need to. Scream if it helps.

All our stories are
so different
but all have
the same ending.

You are strong.

You are brave.

You are proud.

I've found it hard to go back to my dark place. But at the same time, I feel very proud of myself. My speaking out.

Talking to you all has helped. I know we are all here for the same reason.

Don't think of it as goodbye.

Think of it as goodnight.





Introducing Craig

Gaynor Hall

Craig! Handsome, beautiful boy.

His huge, blue eyes could stop you in your tracks. He loved unreservedly and was never shy to tell you he loved you.

Such a sensitive, sweet boy, who looked after all the other children.

In school, he was everyone's friend.

In the hospital, he looked after and sat with the other children on the wards.

Wherever he went he could light up a room. Make you laugh, cheer you up, or just simply say *Elephant Juice*.

You felt his love. It was tangible.

This was. No, *is* Craig.

My gift.

My heart of my heart.

Elephant Juice.

What Brought Me Here

Gaynor Hall

I hope you, the reader, finds some help from us. We have each lived the same trauma.

You are no doubt now in immeasurable pain. We recognise that pain. We feel your pain.

My beautiful son, Craig Michael, lost his battle against cancer on the 18th of September 2004. He was eight. As his heart stopped. Mine shattered into a million pieces.

The universe shifted somehow, and the world as I knew it was altered forever.

Craig was such a happy, outgoing, sensitive, and most loving mischievous little boy.

Craig loved his family, and never tired of telling each of us how much he loved all of us. *I love you Mummy*, were the last words he said to me before he lost consciousness.

It has taken many years of grieving Craig to realise the lasting and most important thing for me is the love that Craig gave. But especially to us. His family.

I take that love everywhere now. It never leaves me.

So, Craig never leaves me.

Elephant juice, my son.

Forever your Mummy.

Xxxx

When Craig died.

When his heart stopped beating.

My heart shattered into a million pieces.

The bottom of my world fell out.

And the rollercoaster began.

I was screeching in my head.

And in my heart.

We are all reborn in our grief.

It's been so long without you, my son.

Yet it feels like yesterday.

They were only lent to us.

I don't count sheep.

I try to count how many pieces of my heart

I can put together.

A Room For Craig

In this room would be a picture of his team on the wall.

It would be largely red. Craig's favourite colour.

A pic of Michael Owen - Craig's football hero.

David Beckham. He loved him. Even though he played for the archrival.

There would be a football.

Craig's Liverpool strip, and his Spanish strip, and his English shirt with BECKHAM on back.

A basketball and a hoop as he was a huge basketball fiend.

A photo of Craig with all of us.

Another wall full of animals - his beloved guide dog, Walton.

A CD Player for any music, really. Craig liked Steps and S Club 7. Busted. Enrique Iglesias and Lionel Richie.

The main song in this room playing all the time would have to be 'You Are My Sunshine.'

I called him Sunshine all the time, it was our song.

I wish I could pour all of the love in the world into his room.

There would need to be an elephant with love hearts and kisses all over it.

The words 'Elephant Juice' would be on the big red door as you entered.

So you got the love as you went in.

No darling.

I will never get over it!

I do think we love a little differently, somehow? I want to grab as much love as I can, but I struggle to trust it.

I am terrified that I will lose that love, too.

FEEL

and let it go

Cry and scream when
you need to.

I find myself

flailing around

yet again.

The pain will always be there.

You can wear your mask and try to bury it, but it will never go away.

Learn to accept that and don't apologise for it.

Be kind to yourself. Try to stop beating yourself up.

Think about what your child would want you to be doing.

As I try to hide behind my mask.

Some people think I should be feeling better and less sad.

Please try not to expect too much of me.

Silence is better than saying everything will be okay.

You can't walk in my shoes.

Don't worry if you don't know what to say.

I've always had a good memory.

Since we lost Craig, it's a curse.

I didn't lose him. I never lost him. We don't lose our children. They pass, they cross over, they die. Say it like it is.

But I did not lose him.

I always had Craig and I still do.

I take Craig into the day with me.

He was always my sunshine. I called him my sunshine.

I sang you are my sunshine.

He made me sing that the day of the funeral.

You are my sunshine.

You are my sunshine.

He is everywhere.

Each day I die

a little more

without you.

We all shut down in our own way. The idea of facing the
day? No chance!

You will never forget the grief.

I miss you.

My heart.

My angel.

My life

ALWAYS my beautiful brave hero.

My angel.

My. Son.

What I needed to know then, that I do know now:
the love will win.

Remember to take the love with you.

Why does everybody think that first year is it? You do whatever to get through, and then that's it, you just get on with everything. Rubbish! Someone dies, and they give you a year. Is that all we're entitled to?

Never be afraid to speak your truth. Never be afraid to let people in.

Just because we cannot see your child does not mean they are diminished in any way or are not 'here' and so do not count.

People sometimes are afraid to say my son's name. Like he is an elephant in the room. My son is no elephant.

There is no time limit on love

The sound of Craig's name may bring tears to my eyes.

But it never fails to bring music to my heart and soul.

Don't stop me hearing the best music in the world.





Introducing Erin

Rachel Thomas-Rees

Perfect from the day we welcomed you into our world.

Beautiful daughter, loving sister, and my best friend.

Her blue eyes sparkled full of life.

Gorgeous bouncy curls with a life of their own, wild and free, just like her now.

Fabulous sense of humour.

Once met, never forgotten.

Infectious giggles and a smile that lit up any room.

Kind, strong, loving, caring.

Loved by all who knew her.

Her faith never waned.

She knew there was something more.

When God made Erin, he broke the mould.

There will never be another Erin. x

What Brought Me Here

Rachel Thomas-Rees

I understand the devastating pain, heartbreak, array of feelings you are going through.

No parent should ever experience this. You are lost.

But remember you are not alone.

Our daughter, Erin, was beautiful with sparkling blue eyes and gorgeous curly hair.

She was caring, loving, with a wicked sense of humour.

Erin showed me strength that I never thought humanly possible.

She was loved by all.

Once met, never forgotten.

I still hear her infectious giggles.

Erin gained her wings aged eight, after her three-year battle with cancer.

I watched her take her first breath, and now her last.

Fifteen years on, I'm still here. How?

I will never know.

My son was my saviour.

I'm willed by Erin, to live on.

When you first start on this horrible

journey you feel like

you are on your own.

You can't remember those first days.

You're a zombie.

You survive.

How? I don't know.

You breathe automatically.

Everything is autopilot.

The minutes feel like hours.

The days merge never end.

My faith helps me. It didn't at the beginning. I absolutely hated God. I brought my children up to believe in miracles.

Where are you now?

Why did you take my daughter?

Why didn't you take me?

I do believe that I will see Erin again.

We all say 'we love our children' but you don't know *how* much you love your children. I would sell my soul for my children. In a heartbeat.

I look at some people and how they are with their children. Screaming at them in the street. And I think:

you do not know how lucky you are

I miss putting bobbles in her hair.

I miss cleaning her shoes
ready for school on Monday.

I miss laying out her uniform.

It's the tiny things.

At Christmas we had Christmas pyjamas. We used to go to the panto on Christmas Eve. We'd come home, get our new pyjamas on. Put the reindeer food out. Put the carrot out. And then they'd go to bed.

I used to buy the Lindt reindeers. I could not physically go in the shop without putting two in the basket.

After Erin passed away, I couldn't do that.

I had to change my routine.

The cemetery?

You could put a tent up and stay there.

For a long time I used to think: you should be tucking two children in, but you're tucking in one.

I knew that Ethan was safe and warm. But my other child was in a cemetery in a field.

I know she isn't there, but her body is.

I've been up there at midnight and sat with her when it's been raining, when it's been snowing.

Erin didn't like the wind.

You don't want to leave.

Ethan said: 'mummy, can we dig her up and bring her home?' I said 'we can do if you want to. But she can only sit in the chair. She can't play with us.'

I slept in a bed next to Erin and she was dead.

Some people might think that is weird.

But I wasn't ready to let her go.

You spent all your time looking after your child.

What is my purpose now?

People say time heals.

How can it?

Nothing heals

losing your child.

I think it is easier for me to write the truth down.

You don't have to hold back. You don't have to pretend.

You don't want to open up too much. You don't want to upset the person.

People can't understand it if you haven't lived it. But you don't *want* anyone to live it.

You're totally numb.

Some days you take a tiny step forward.

Some days you stay glued to the spot for a lifetime.

Some days you fall back three steps.

Time passes months go into years

before you realise

how did I get here?

I am *not* strong.

You just have to somehow get on with it.

You change

become a different you

still a mummy daddy

but you are

different.

They live on in us.

They always will.

You sit in your child's room. You smell their clothes.

Anything that gives you the slightest hint of scent.

Be normal with me.

Tell me if the washing machine has broken.

Tell me if you have had a shitty day.

Dealing with the loss is like an illness that you can't cure.

There is no tablet that will fix this. Sometimes you go three steps back, and one step forward.

It is okay to feel these things.

I used to feel awful for feeling happy. How can I feel happy,
when I have lost my child?

We were given briefly the most precious gift in the world.

Our bond is unbreakable.

Even by death.

At the school I work at, a child will say:

'Miss, my guinea pig died! It's up there in heaven.

With your Erin.'





Take The Love With You

Gill Golden, Hayley Graham, Gaynor Hall, Rachel Thomas-Rees

Take strength from our words. We uphold you.

Take today as today. Do no more.

Take the hand we extend to support you.

Take the path we will light. We have walked it before.

Take your heart. In a million pieces.

Take the thought that you can carry on.

Take the memories no-one can take from you.

Take time to notice. How far you have actually come.

Take my child's name. My gift. My heart of my heart.

Take the thought "I am always your Mum."

Take the mask that I wear to conceal it.

Take my beautiful hero. My angel. My son.

Take the love that you have for your children.

Take the thought that you don't have to pretend.

Take this bond. Unbroken. Even by death.

Take the thought "I will see her again."

Take the memories of walking alongside them.

Take the knowledge that you are not alone.

Take the challenge of one more step forward.

Take your precious child with you wherever you go.

We offer our words without judgement.

In this space you are not on your own.

Let your child live on.

Forever.

Through you.

Take the love with you.



A Note of Thanks

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Get In Touch

To find out more about who we are and what we will be doing next, or to contact us, please visit the official Take The Love With You website at the following address:

www.takethelovewithyou.com

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There is no time limit on Love

