

# A spectrum of emotions

Over the years the LMA has produced many life story books for people. These have often been the record of a long life and recollections and memories have stretched back over many years. *The LMA* editor Rosalind Gibb has published a book, *Show Me Colour*, which features memories of a specific period in her life and tackles the subject of grief. We decided to turn the tables: here, LMA staff member Miles Tubb (MT) interviews Rosalind (RG) about her book.

**MT:** Where does the title *Show Me Colour* come from?

**RG:** The book is in two parts. The first part is about the sudden, unexpected death of my partner. It was a heart attack, he was 45 years old. Part one is about finding yourself in a place where your life has changed completely. It is about grief and loss.

Part two is set about 18 months later, when I wanted to live life again. I had got to the point where I had processed a lot of the grief and dealt with a lot of

different feelings. Now I felt I was just going through the motions with life. I was okay, I was functioning, but life had lost its sparkle, it didn't have much colour. I also felt that, when a massive thing like that happens to you, it's such a



huge experience on so many levels it can be hard to go back to the life that you knew. Also, when you lose someone suddenly it's a very stark lesson that you don't know what is around the corner.

So for all those reasons I decided to go to try somewhere new and chose Italy. Hence the title. I was ready to start living again and I wanted Italy and the world to show me colour. It was a transformative trip in many ways. I worked and lived with Italian families (and their dogs!) during harvest time, and it was wonderful meeting new people, hearing a different language and eating

delicious food fresh from the farms. I was keen to record some of my memories from this time; the beautiful landscapes, warm hospitality and the kindness shown by both hosts and strangers.

**MT:** Was the process of writing the book a tough one?

**RG:** It was tough because I was writing about it very truthfully and I used a lot of notes from a journal I kept at the time. So these were very honest thoughts and I suppose by writing about Andrew's death and the days after, I was reliving it. But I also found it very useful because with a shocking experience like that you need to process it all, and writing can be a great way of doing that. For the most part it felt cathartic and healthy.

**MT:** What would be your key pieces of advice be to someone in the early stages of grief?

**RG:** I would tell them that they will get through it. At that stage it can seem impossible. But you will get through it because the human spirit is a very powerful thing. I would also say to go with your feelings and unfortunately that will include feeling utterly dreadful. They are horrendous feelings – the emptiness, melancholia and

fear – but they are part of grieving. If you allow yourself to feel them, you are moving with your grief, which is healthy and means you will, eventually, come out the other side.

**MT:** And if someone has a friend or relative who is grieving, what would you say is the best way to support them?

**RG:** I would say just be there for the person. That doesn't mean you have to always know the right things to say. But even just acknowledging a person's bereavement is a good way of connecting with them – it's like offering a hand to hold. Ask them if they want to talk about things or not – in all likelihood they will be honest about whether they do at that moment. Practical help is good too; just being there to go grocery shopping for instance or taking round a meal.

I think there can be a tendency for people to back away, an assumption that the grieving person doesn't want to see anyone. And sometimes, of course, they may well not want to see people, but it is incredibly comforting to know there are people out there, when you feel up to it. I would like to emphasize that grieving is a personal process and I understand it also depends on someone's circumstances. I had some good friends, was in a job with understanding employers



and don't have children, so I had the time and space to deal with the grief and all these new emotions. I cannot speak for people who have kids and have lost a partner, for example; I guess they need to keep functioning. And perhaps some people won't want to talk about it, I suppose it depends on the person.

I just always felt it was such an enormous thing that had happened, I needed to talk. And, in time, I wanted to write about it too.



**MT:** What do you hope people will get out of the book?

**RG:** We live in a culture where death and grief are still largely taboo subjects. I wrote *Show Me Colour* to get people thinking about things, to perhaps feel less afraid of starting conversations about these subjects. If it helps even a few people – those going through a bereavement, or those who don't know how to approach the subject – it will have been worth it.

And I hope people enjoy the colourful descriptions of travelling in Italy and rediscovering the beauty of life.

*Show Me Colour* by Rosalind Gibb is £8 (50p donation from each sale to Cruse Bereavement Care). Available from the LMA unit in Ocean Terminal; Blackwell's bookshop, South Bridge; or from [www.rosalindgibb.com](http://www.rosalindgibb.com)

