

Grief Kind Podcast Transcript - Episode 3, Pearl Lowe

Clover Stroud: Hello, and welcome to *Grief Kind*, a podcast by Sue Ryder, which helps you to support friends and loved ones going through one of the toughest times of their lives. I'm Clover Stroud, and in each episode, I'll be talking to someone who, like me, has experienced grief firsthand and who can talk about the support they've received. Hopefully, each conversation will empower you to be grief kind, to avoid clamming up, and give your friends and family the love, compassion and support that they need.

In this episode, I'm joined by fashion designer, Pearl Lowe. Pearl's dad, Eddie, died from a heart attack four years ago shortly after he had been diagnosed with lung cancer. In this interview, Pearl says she misses the way her dad brought the family together and how, even if she didn't respond, she appreciated her friends checking in on her even months after her father died. I hope you enjoy this conversation.

Pearl, welcome to *Grief Kind*. It's really, really lovely to be talking to you, and I'm looking forward to our conversation. Do you want to start off by just telling me a little bit about your dad, Eddie, and what was he like?

Pearl Lowe: Oh, God, he was such an incredible character. It's four years since he passed, and I can now talk about him without crying. It's that time that I've had that I can now think of him and smile and have these lovely memories of him.

He grew up in the East End. He had so many unbelievable stories about when he was a child, he was the mascot for The Krays and then as he got older, he started to be a bouncer at the Whisky-A-Go-Go and how he lived with all these fantastic actors and musicians. He was an amazing father, and he had... I have two older brothers, and he would always bring all of us and all our children, him and my Mum had 10 grandchildren, so he would always make us all meet up together and have these big lunches and dinners. I was a teenager when I had Daisy, and he would - my daughter who's now 32 - but he would come and pick her up from school every day and take her to school. He loved being a very present grandfather, so for her, it was a really big thing when he left.

Clover: He sounds like a huge, huge presence all the way through your life, and the fact that he was close to your children as well and was a really strong grandparent is such a beautiful thing, and losing him must have been absolutely devastating. Are you happy to tell us a little bit about the details of his death? How did he die?

Pearl: He was diagnosed with lung cancer, and he had this, well, this incredible doctor who said, "Actually, medicine has improved so much that we can actually give you a pill every day, and it can basically prolong your life. You won't die as quickly." He said, "You just have to be careful." Anyway, he was incredibly allergic to this drug, and so he ended

up having to come off it and then had chemo, and so for two years... no...yes...I think it was just under two years, he had all this horrible chemo.

Then he seemed like he was okay. He was kind of plateauing. I had just been away and I came back, I was on the train to go and see him, and my Mum called and said that he'd passed away, so I didn't actually get to meet him, but I was on the train to London. I just went to the Royal Free, and he was gone. I thought that I would have a couple of years to process the whole thing.

You think, "Okay, I'm getting used to the fact that he might not be here," because you're given that time, but nothing, ever, can actually prepare you for that kind of thing. Especially when someone's such a big part of your life, it was a big shock and a big... yes, I think I was numb for weeks and weeks.

Clover: The shock because it was very sudden clearly, it was a very sudden death. The shock, that feeling of... When my sister died, she also had cancer, but she died very suddenly of liver failure actually, and I felt as though it was almost as if she had been killed in an accident or something like that. You know that sort of sense of the suddenness and the shock of it, even though she had been very ill.

He was diagnosed two years before he died. What was that time like? After his diagnosis, how did you adapt to it as a family?

Pearl: I guess I did prepare, because obviously, there were times when he was very ill, and he was in the hospital for... It was just so tragic, and it was so undignified as well. Often, you'd go there and he would say, "Look, I just can't believe you're seeing me like this."

I remember once I left because he'd told me to leave because, I don't know, something had happened and he just sent me this amazing message saying, "I just don't want you to see me like this, it's just heartbreaking." In a way, I think that even though he had the two years of diagnosis, I still thought it wouldn't happen.

Clover: Yes, it's really difficult that, isn't it? Because even when you're totally faced with the death of somebody that you really love, sort of facing it before they die is kind of inconceivable, really, isn't it?

Did you have any conversations with him about death or the afterlife? Did you kind of prepare each other at all?

Pearl: No. No, because he was kind of old school and I think that, I believe in the afterlife and I think that's what's really helped me since he passed. I see a counsellor. She's

helped me, I mean, I wouldn't have been able to get through it without her and she's always at the end of the phone if I need to speak to her.

I often feel him and I often feel like...we have a joke in our family. It's like, we just go on, "Grandpa Eddie, get us this parking space." We just ask him for things, like, I don't know, "Grandpa's there. Grandpa's helping," but it's that thing...I think that's what's really helped, but he wasn't like that. Like, he wasn't into that kind of thing. I never discussed it with him.

Clover: In the immediate aftermath of his death, can you remember it very well? You must have been so shocked. I think the brain sometimes cuts out that kind of time, that sort of really just...

Pearl: I honestly don't remember much. I just remember feeling such intense pain and nothing else mattered. It was kind of like I don't care about anything. Do you know what I mean? It's that kind of, so intense, but I blocked it out.

Clover: Was there anybody during that time that you specifically could turn to who was kind of especially supportive or especially helpful?

Pearl: Yes, I've got my best friend, Zoey, who's just incredible. She loved my dad too because she grew up with him too and so she was grieving as well but she was so incredible. All my friends were. They all rallied round and I live in this very small community in Somerset and just everyone was so lovely, bringing stuff around and looking after me. Obviously, I've got my husband, Danny, but then he was so close to my dad.

It's really hard, isn't it? Because when you've got all these people around that support you in your everyday life, but then when something like that happens, and you're all grieving together, that's when it's quite difficult, I think, because Danny was so close to my dad. He loved him. He almost looked up to him, so that was hard for him too.

Clover: Yeah and obviously, as his daughter, I do think that you would have been the one who was feeling it the most. That sort of physiological connection, he was your dad, but you've still got your kids and your husband. You've still got people around you that need your support as well. That's a really, really hard thing to go through. What about his funeral? What kind of funeral did he have?

Pearl: It was crazy. People couldn't get in, there were so many people. I mean, again, I don't remember much. I spoke, and my brothers spoke, and the grandchildren spoke, and it was beautiful.

Clover: It's an important part of it, the funeral though, isn't it? That kind of ritualised grief and being together as a family? My sister's funeral was incredible and I spoke and my dad did and various people. I did the pallbearing and the coffin bearing coming out of the... it was in Gloucester Cathedral. Then with her friends and my cousin, we carried her coffin out, but I don't really have, I find it hard to really remember it, as you say, because your brain goes into a different space, doesn't it?

Pearl: It's so weird. It's like you just, like I've never experienced that before. It's the strangest. But in a way, you're right. It's everyone's together and there is a sense of comfort in that. I think they're really important because I spoke to my really great friend of mine whose mother passed when he was 21 and he didn't go to the funeral because he was in so much pain, which is so nuts.

I was just thinking, "No, I was pleased I did," because even then, everyone was talking about him in such a fond way. Although it was a bit too soon, but it was so lovely to hear lots of stories. For that moment, you just hang on to anything at that point.

Clover: What about the.. because that bit after the funeral is very hard, isn't it? When there's been the buildup to the funeral, you've all been together, and then so-called normal life has to start again. Can you remember what that next bit was like and how the grief manifested itself for you in the year after his death?

Pearl: I threw myself into work. I think I'm lucky because my work is quite intense. It's quite full on. I think I just became such a workaholic and just worked all day and all night. I think that's how I dealt with it. You never forget the pain. You'll still remember every single day, but it will get easier. I just thought at the time, "It's not going to get easier. I'm just going to feel like this the whole time."

There's a massive void in our lives and my family's life because my dad was the one that would plan all the holidays. He would plan all the dinners. He was always on the phone just saying, "Should we do this?" He was just full of life, and I think that there's a part of that that's gone now. We don't meet up as much. I hardly see my brothers, as much as I did when we were one with my dad.

The pain has, after four years, it's definitely start... I think of him every single day, but like I said, I can now look at a photo. I couldn't even look at a photo of him because it hurts so much. I just would cry. It would just be too painful, but now, I've looked at him and I can talk about him and I can talk about his... but this is four and a half years later, so it's definitely just starting to release and not be as intense as it was.

Clover: It's a long process, isn't it? Actually, just hearing you talk about this makes me feel very emotional actually. That thing of looking at photographs, because I still find...

Nell died in December 2019. That was 18 months ago, really. Relatively early, still, definitely. That thing of looking at a photograph, the physical disbelief, you feel like she's not alive on the planet somewhere and I think it's really important, isn't it, to allow people time to... because we want to rush people through grief, I think.

But when you're in the early stage, I just remember thinking, "Oh, my life is practically over," but knowing that that time does heal things I think is a really, really important message.

How does your grief manifest itself now?

Pearl: Sometimes I feel quite angry. Sometimes I'm like, "Why aren't you here? Why aren't...?" especially when there's lovely things that happen and you just want to share. I want to ring him up and say, "This happened," and just things like that really. Sometimes I get angry and I'm like, "I'm just so angry you're not here with me. I'm so angry you're not sharing this with me." Then other times... I think my grief was very private. I don't tell anyone.

I didn't even tell my husband, Danny. I just keep it very to myself. It's my private grief.

Clover: You mentioned earlier about having a therapist. Were you seeing her before? Was she somebody who was in your life before or did you reach out to her afterwards? Did you feel as though you needed some professional help or support to manage what you were going through?

Pearl: 100%. She's someone I've seen for over 12 years, but I only used to see her once a year, once every six months or something. Then, after my dad died, literally, phoning up every month, and it's just like "Oh, I need to talk to you." Whenever I wanted to talk to her, I just say, "I need to talk to you. Can I talk to you?" I needed that support. There was no way I could do it. I also don't want to put it on... I'm one of those people, I don't like putting my stuff on people. I'm usually the one who helps people, but I find it quite hard to open up and tell everyone how I'm feeling. I'm much more private.

Clover: Right.

Pearl: It's nice to have someone away from the family, away from my friends that I can just ring up and say, "Listen, I'm feeling really bad today." This is what I feel.

Clover: Yes. And in those sessions, did you find yourself going and really unburdening? You said your grief was very private. Did it come out in therapy?

Pearl: Yes, not always, sometimes. Sometimes I even say, "I'm feeling so bad," and I'd cry. Sometimes I wouldn't. Sometimes we talk about the lovely things, and like I said, it's been only recently - and I really mean this - only recently I can talk about him. It's not saying I don't still cry about him, of course I do. I went to his grave last Friday and that was horrible, just seeing his name on, you know...

Clover: Yes, I think the thing of seeing the gravestone with the person that you love's name, there's almost a surreal quality to that, isn't there? It's as though you're in a horror film or something like that. Do you know what I mean? It's really...

Pearl: Yes.

Clover: There are so many different kind of parts of grief, aren't there, and stages that we have to go through and things that we have to face and process. It's not really a journey because then that suggests there is an end destination. I don't think there is an end destination. It's an ongoing process, isn't it?

Pearl: Yes, it's an ongoing process, but there are different stages to it. The mad thing is that at the beginning, you think you're never going to be happy ever again, and you think that, "That's it, my life is over." Then as the years go by, you realise you can live with it because that was the other thing. I used to feel bad about enjoying myself. If I ever went out, I'd stop myself and go, "Oh, no, I mustn't be having fun. This is wrong."

That kind of thing, but whereas as the years go by, you realise... you still have the PTSD, but you can kind of manoeuvre it in a different way.

Clover: Definitely. What about the people that you were supporting around you? Were you supporting your mum through her grief? She must have been finding it very hard.

Pearl: Oh, she still is. My mum has been the trickiest thing. That's been so hard. We sent her once to have counseling and she said, "Oh, I'm never going back. I just cried the whole time." We're like, "Yes, mum, that's the point. You're supposed to cry. You're supposed to cry through it. This is what's going to help you." She's like, "No, no, no, I'm never going back."

She's just so miserable still because he was her soulmate, and I completely get it, completely understand how she feels, but it's quite hard.

Clover: What about your daughter, Daisy?

Pearl: Daisy, like I said, because I was so young, my dad... It was like she was my sister and my dad brought us both up. For her, it was like losing a parent. She was much

younger than me, so that was very hard. Yes, we had a really tough time with Daisy. We had to really support her through it for a couple of years.

Clover: You had people that you love very much, that you're close to, you're also supporting. Do you think the fact that you needed to support them and be there for them, and they were going through really tough stuff as well, did it hinder your own grieving or make it harder to grieve or did it force you to get on with things? How did it affect you?

Pearl: Maybe it prolonged my grief because I used to push it aside and try and help my Mum and Daisy - Do you know what I mean? You go, "Okay. I can't be thinking about this right now. I've got to sort this person." Do you know? Maybe it prolonged it a little bit, I don't know. Like I said, I've had support so thank God for that because I don't think I could have done it without talking to somebody.

I think it's really important. I think people... anyone listening today is like, "You've got to get help." You think you're okay, but honestly, it's the best thing that you can do is go and for yourself. It's just you need that support.

Clover: I totally, totally agree. It's complicated. Dealing with the death of somebody is complicated, isn't it? It's a massive, massive process. I'd like to be still having weekly therapy. There's also the issue of fitting it around your life, the expense of it. I know that Sue Ryder actually offer free grief counseling for people, which is a really, really incredible service, I think. Can you think of a piece of advice that a therapist has given you? The best piece of advice that you've had?

Pearl: I mean, definitely the time thing because I didn't think I'd ever get through it. Also, the other thing someone said to me was, there's a few stages of grief, which I didn't realise, because there's the anger that comes. There's all sorts of stages that I hadn't anticipated and you just don't want it coming out sideways. You just don't want it to...

That's why it's really important to get help because otherwise people are suffering around you.

The last thing you want is to make people suffer. If you are grieving, it's really important and especially if there's free help with Sue Ryder, I'd definitely take that.

Clover: You mentioned that you've got good friends around you, what kind of things did they do to support you and look after you and be there for you?

Pearl: Just, I was only saying this the other day, a friend of mine lost her father recently and I, having lost my father, I know what it feels like. A lot of people said to me, "Oh, we

didn't want to disturb you." Actually, the people that did, I really remember. I understand that because before I lost my father, I probably would have felt the same, but all the texts, even if I didn't reply, I processed it. It was really lovely.

It was so nice to get so many messages and people just check, "I'm just checking in to see if you're okay." That was everything to me even a month later. I think when someone's grieving, you think, "I'll leave them alone," but don't. Even if they don't reply, just keep going. "Just checking that you're okay. Do you need anything?" That's all I needed. I mean, it wasn't so much...obviously people bought things around for me. I had some friends come to the funeral from really far away, which was really touching and lovely. I felt really loved, that sort of...but it's more than that. It's sort of, just keep checking that that person's okay months later because it means a lot.

Clover: I think that's a really, really good piece of advice and people definitely worry about being in the way or turning up at an inappropriate moment when somebody is really upset or they've got family around or saying the wrong thing. Actually, it's quite rare that that really happens. Isn't it?

Pearl: Yes.

Clover: If you are in a state where you don't want to see somebody, then you can tell someone to go away. It'd be much better to be the person who turns up and it be at the wrong time than not at all, I think. As I said, it doesn't really happen that often. I think the thing as well of just checking in, of sending a text message, that's such an easy thing to do for somebody.

I think as the one who is bereaved as well, you can know that you're not under any pressure to answer any because you can get...you end up...I remember in the immediate aftermath of Nell's death, my phone was just...there were hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of messages.

You try and reply to some of them, but knowing that you don't have to reply to any of them and being the friend or the family member who sends the text message, just does the checking in, I think is really, really, really important and really, really valuable. To let that person know, as you say, that they are loved and that you're cared for is a massive thing, isn't it?

Pearl: The cards, I loved all the cards that I got. I remember I'll never forget that. I was like, "Wow, that's just so lovely." People I hadn't spoken to for years writing me cards, actually sending a letter. You know how people don't really write that much anymore, it's all about texts and stuff. The people who had taken the time to write a card and put it in

an envelope, and put a stamp on it, I know that's what people used to do years and years ago, but it was so lovely. It was so lovely to receive those cards.

Clover: What about how you live now? Do you like talking about your dad? Do you like remembering him?

Pearl: Yes, but it's only been recent. I promise you, I can look at photos and laugh because when I was growing up, he was just so crazy. He used to tell me all these stories about Barbara Windsor, and he was like, "I lived in her flat and she was in the other room and she was going out with one of my friends." We all just thought he was lying, we didn't really believe him.

Then Danny and I went to this ball with him, it was this charity thing. He came with us, and Barbara Windsor was there and she went, "Eddie," and she gave him this massive hug and we were like, "Oh, maybe his stories are right." His stories seemed so far-fetched. Now, I can laugh and now I can tell all his stories and not just freak out.

Clover: What about the other key moments in the year that you like to mark? Things like birthdays, anniversaries can be incredibly difficult. They can also be joyful. How do you manage those?

Pearl: Well, his birthday was April the 17th. Yeah, we always get together and celebrate his birthday, do a toast. I don't really want to remember the day he died because that is just really still very painful. It's all about the birthday and remembering and talking about him. The kids all loved him so much. It's a big thing that we all get together.

Clover: Are your friends and family, are they sympathetic? Are you still private in your grief, I suppose? If they are aware you are having a difficult time, are they supportive or do you like to go off and be on your own? When one of those big moments happens, which still comes even years later, I'm sure, it will do forever, what do people...?

Pearl: Of course. They're really supportive, Danny's really supportive. He's still got both his parents and he's great. Of course, I still have the moments where he's like, "Why are you crying?" It's just something will trigger, like a song. My dad was so into music so one of his favourite songs or something we danced to, or something that just takes you by surprise and you just start crying, and then he is like, "Oh." Yes, he's great.

Clover: It's really lovely talking to you about this, Pearl, and it's been a really beautiful conversation. To just finish up, if somebody is listening to the podcast and they're wanting to help somebody who is grieving that they're close to, or a family member, or a friend, what words of advice would you give them in that process?

Pearl: The thing is, is that obviously, if somebody is willing to share what they're going through, then you just have to be there to listen. Obviously, I wouldn't prise it out of anybody. I think it's one of those things, I didn't realise how many people were so private with their grief until I went through that. I wouldn't prise it, but obviously, if someone wants to talk, you just have to sit there and listen to everything that they're saying, and just be there with support.

Obviously, if it's very new, like we were saying, just turn up. If they're not answering their phone, just bake them a cake or take a bunch of flowers, because honestly, those little things mean so much at that time. It's like a gut thing, you'll get a gut to do something like that, and it means so much to somebody just to know that you're there.

Clover: Yes, definitely. I think that even if that person didn't know your dad, or know my sister, or know the person who has been lost, the fact that somebody turns up with a cake or flowers or a hug or a card, basically reaffirms your faith in life, doesn't it?

Pearl: It does.

Clover: Grieving really knocks your faith in life. I guess, as a friend, somebody close to somebody who's lost somebody, helping them to reaffirm their belief and faith in life is a really important and valuable thing to do, isn't it?

Pearl: Honestly, it means everything. Honestly, lots of people have said, "We don't want to bother you," but I really want to be bothered. I just want to know that there's people that are supportive and it just means so much. I think it doesn't just go away, that's the thing. When recently, another friend of mine lost their father, and it's so nice because we can sit and talk about our fathers, just share that together. Also, because I've been through it, I can help, I can give all my advice and that means a lot that I can actually help people through my grief.

Clover: Definitely. That's so, so valuable. I was talking to a friend recently and she said, "I really think the only point of suffering is to be able to help other people who are suffering." That is so valuable, knowing you have this knowledge in a way about what this path is like is incredible and I'm sure you are a huge help to people. I love what you've just said about bother me when some people are thinking, "I don't want to bother you"... please bother me, be the one that does.

Pearl: If I seem like I don't want bothering, that's not true because I'm just giving off that vibe, but it's not true. Honestly, I remember everyone that bothered me. Generally, people who had lost people were the ones, because other people didn't understand. I didn't

understand. I'd only lost my Nana who was a great...she was like the perfect Nana and she was amazing, but she died at 78. At that age you sort of expect that I guess.

With my dad, with a parent, it's very different because it's so much closer and you know it's inevitable, you know it's going to happen, but you are just never prepared for that day. I can't imagine what it's like for you and Nell now because that must have been...I know how close you were with her and that's a whole other level of grief, isn't it?

Clover: There are many different ways that we grieve and ways that we feel grief, but that big sense of loss is the sort of unifying thing really, isn't it, and the different aspect of it. It's been really, really lovely talking to you, Pearl. Thank you very, very much and your advice is really lovely.

Pearl: Thank you. Thanks so much. The only thing I found is that time is the biggest healer and I'm definitely getting there, but it's still, "Oh, God." Like you said, takes me by surprise and I still think about him all the time, but it's nothing like it was.

Clover: No, I understand that. Well, thank you so much, Pearl.

Pearl: Thanks.

Clover: It's been lovely to speak to you.

Pearl: It's so lovely to see you. Thank you. Thanks for having me on your show.

Clover: I hope that you've enjoyed listening to our conversation. I certainly really enjoyed speaking to Pearl and I hope that there's something that you can take from it that might help you or somebody else around you who's grieving. Grief is different for everybody. There is no one size fits all approach, but you don't need a degree in counselling to help a loved one who is grieving. It's about the personal support you can offer, which should always be led by what feels right for the grieving person.

The most important thing is to ensure that no one has to live through grief alone. To get more information on how to help grieving friends and relatives go to the sueyder.org/griefkindpodcast. Don't forget to follow us on your favorite podcast app to get the next episode as soon as it's ready. I'm Clover Stroud. *Grief Kind* is a Bengo Media production for Sue Ryder.