



In loving memory of
Rayél Owen Da Silva
4 March 1999 – 17 July 2013
By his mother, Bronwyn Newman

My son Rayél was a brilliant boy, with so much love and compassion for others, so much sensitivity and brilliance. He was awarded a scholarship for the International School of Cape Town, and could not wait to complete year 13 and qualify to get into Cambridge in the UK. He wanted to be an engineer – as he put it, not just any engineer, but one who would change the world.

But now all our dreams are shattered, and you who read here, please take this to heart, and help us make a difference in order to ensure depression does not claim another young victim.

I often wondered, when watching the news, how parents survive when losing a child, having raised, fed, clothed, taught and loved that child so much.

I could not imagine such a loss, or comprehend such pain.

One knows what unconditional love and protection mean: Your flesh and blood, your creation, given as a gift from God to care for and nurture.

And then it happened to me, and my world fell apart.

One is never the same person when your child dies.

I gave birth to my son when I was 22. I was not married and was living with his father, but we soon separated, and it was just me and my son, and his father, every second weekend.

I met my husband Troy, and my son, who was almost two, bonded with him and he soon called him Daddy. Our family grew, Rayél now also had our two daughters as his little sisters.

Rayél loved spending time with his paternal grandparents and father and came home happy. I thought he was growing up and understood life.

His father got married when he was about seven. When they started a family, he started to feel unwelcome. His grandfather now became the father figure, but then he passed away. Rayél was shattered and feared the bond with his paternal family would now weaken. Yet his grandmother was his link to his family, but Rayél was anxious about losing her as well.

He often spoke to me about his fears, and I tried to reassure him about never losing his paternal family. Also with us at home he would share his fears, we would feel bonded as a family, but when he went to his grandmother he felt the loss, but also the obligation to care for her as his grandfather was no longer there.

During 2011 my son's anxiety led to self-wounding... He did not know how to deal with his emotions.

I was devastated and immediately arranged for counselling, which seemed to be helping. In 2013 he even bragged about his scars going away. "I don't feel the need to cut anymore. I am feeling so happy and I am feeling good," he said.

On Saturday, 13 July 2013, we ate out before going to the movies. On Sunday he went out with my husband, and the evening to Youth meeting as usual – he enjoyed it and said it is always so much fun.

On Monday, 15 July, the girls started school, but he still had a week's holiday. He asked whether he could spend the last week with his grandmother as he misses her and has not seen her in a long time. She fetched him that Monday evening. When I hugged and kissed him and told him to behave, he said "Always, Mom".

But ... that Wednesday evening I got a message from him saying I must tell his sisters he loves them and will see them in heaven. And: "I love you, Mom."

I replied asking what kind of messages it is. He pinged me and asked to phone him. I called immediately, and he said "Mom, I am feeling depressed".

I asked why, what happened, but he answered it is on my phone in a note – which I never got. I told him I am coming to fetch him. He replied I shouldn't, he is only joking. I then messaged his grandmother to say Rayél is sending suicide notes. I also messaged my brother, sister and mom who live four doors away. I messaged his cousin, whom he is close to, to get him on the phone and speak to him. She replied his phone was off.

I rushed through, and seeing an ambulance, I put my hazzards on. When I got there they were busy in the room. I could hear the heart machine. I collapsed and just started screaming...

I have never in my life felt such a pain in my body. I thought I was going to die.

As a family, we are broken. I have not accepted that he will not be coming back. I miss him so much.

I have continuous pain in my soul, and think about him all the time. He was my golden boy and I am angry at myself for not saving him. It feels as if I cannot function any more. I was booked off for eight weeks, and in a clinic for two weeks. Our home can never be the same again, and I live in fear of losing my daughters.

How do we carry on living without the plans we had?

The dreams we shared?

The stories and music he made?

And there are so many teenagers who are also not coping with the stress of our modern age. They now contact me, telling me about their anxiety and depression – and that they have no one to talk to. They also fear being labelled... We need an awakening of how life-threatening these feelings of helplessness are – and that it is an illness called depression. We need to educate parents and teenagers, that depression is an illness, and that one can be treated. No one needs to be afraid to speak out. There is help, there is hope.