



Lisa Brady

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Treatment of courageous Lynsey is a sad stain on our nation

THE young woman who stood before expectant media outside the High Court on Wednesday looked picture perfect. Her blonde hair was carefully braided to the side and her make-up was immaculate.

She looked far younger than her 32 years, more like a daughter than a mother. In fact, Lynsey Bennett, pictured below, is both. And her youthful beauty belies her terrible truth. In fact, looking at her, it's hard to believe that she is sick at all.

But she is of course, desperately so. She is terminally ill, through no fault of her own. Watching this beautiful young woman, who is being robbed of her life, sobbing in front of the nation was almost too much to bear.

Four years ago, I watched one of my dearest friends fade away to the despicable disease that is cervical cancer. Like Lynsey, Emma was also young - just 40 when she died - and beautiful. It was equally difficult to imagine how unwell she really was.

She was exhausted. She was terrified. But she put on that same brave, beautiful face for as long as she could, trying so hard to immerse herself in the life she had left. We saw her, pale but never complaining, spending time with her two beloved young children, holding them, cuddling them on her couch until she was too weak to do so.

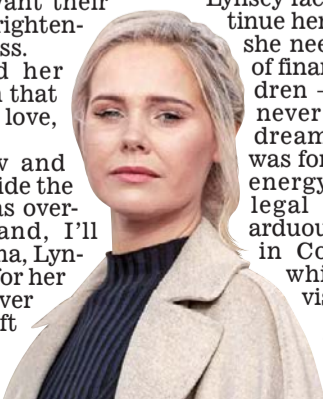
That's the thing with a terminal disease. It's very difficult to savour the time you have left when the very life of you is ebbing away and it's a struggle to simply breathe. Pursuing bucket lists is not a realistic expectation.

For the final few weeks of Emma's life, she didn't even have the strength to hug her precious children, who were three and five at the time. She was simply too sick. She didn't want their final memory of her to be frightening - of disease and darkness.

Instead, she whispered her goodbyes into their hair on that couch: a place of comfort, love, cuddles and happiness.

That's why, when I saw and heard Lynsey Bennett outside the High Court this week, I was overcome with heartbreak and, I'll admit, pure rage. Like Emma, Lynsey is trying to do the best for her daughters, and has but a sliver of precious quality time left to spend with them.

Yet look what this Government is doing to her.



BEWARE! The snow is coming from Siberia! What's next, a plague of locusts? Look, we've been dealing with apocalypse-like conditions for some time now, so a sprinkling of fluffy white stuff is nothing concerning. Last week, in torrential rain, I threw waterproof gear on myself and the kids and whooshed us out the door. They found the biggest puddle known to man and spent a good hour knee-deep in it. I've never seen them so happy. Snow bother at all.

It's contemptible enough that they refuse to admit liability for the failures in the CervicalCheck screening programme that led to her death sentence. But forcing these dying women through the courts, in what the late Ruth Morrissey's solicitor, Cian O'Carroll, described as 'deathbed litigation', is nothing short of heinous.

Leo Varadkar's promise that pending court cases relating to CervicalCheck would be resolved through mediation, avoiding the courts, turned out to be fruitless words. And Lynsey is just another number on their long list of cases to be addressed. One of up to 200 more women who will face the same plight, if - as Labour leader Alan Kelly spoke of in the Dáil this week - laws around civil liability aren't changed.

'Why is she being dragged through the High Court, fighting?' Kelly asked the Dáil on Thursday, stating that she should be spending her time with her two daughters.

And, for that matter, why did our Chief Medical Officer Tony Holohan express sympathy but not apologise when commenting this week? Because that would be an admission of liability. We couldn't possibly have that.

Lynsey faced extra pressure to continue her fight. As a single mother, she needed to secure some sort of financial stability for her children - the daughters she will never get to see pursue their dreams. But, to do that, she was forced to expire her limited energy and precious time in legal argument, making the arduous journey from her home in Co. Longford to Dublin, while undergoing hospital visits and treatment.

As anyone who has had to spend time in a courtroom will attest, it is a strained and uncomfortable environment. It's designed to intimidate, with its Byzantine language and period drama-type costume. It's an experience that those in robust health often find overwhelming and exhausting. It's hardly the place for a dying person - and an innocent one at that.



Spinning around? Kylie Minogue has denied engagement rumours

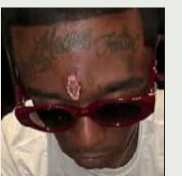
It's in your eyes, Kylie - you're all loved up!

THESE days, I'm jumping at any good news. So I was delighted to note pop princess Kylie Minogue's engagement to her Welsh boyfriend Paul Solomons. That is, until the 52-year-old pop legend denied it. Apparently it was Solomons's stepmother who started the rumour mill, but Minogue's spokeswoman has quashed the gossip, stating that the pair are 'happy as they are'. Hmm. I'm not convinced - no smoke without fire, etc. Whatever the case, it still warms my heart to hear that this icon has found her perfect match. I'm sure Paul knows just how lucky (lucky, lucky, lucky) he is...

FOR someone who prides themselves on their ability to binge watch popular TV series, I'm embarrassed to admit that *Normal People* passed me by completely. And now it has become the first Irish-set and produced TV show to receive a Golden Globe nomination, I'm feeling the FOMO big time. So perhaps is *Maynooth's finest Paul Mescal* - one half of the series' golden couple - who didn't get a nod for his role, while leading lady *Daisy Edgar-Jones* is up for a gong. Netflix, can you please start streaming this so I can see what all the fuss is about?

Seems diamonds are a rapper's best friend

SO you may not have heard of the rapper Lil Uzi Vert, right - even though he has almost 14million Instagram followers - but that really doesn't matter. This story is too good not to share. Uzi, whose real name is Symere Woods, shocked fans by uploading a video of him getting a pink diamond - which apparently cost him \$24million - implanted in his forehead, with the telling caption: 'Beauty is pain.' Yes, you read that entire sentence correctly. A diamond. Worth \$24million. In the noggin. At least potential burglars won't be looking to steal the eye out of his head anyway. What an absolute gem.



YET again - can you get the story straight, lads? Just when it seems that mandatory quarantine is happening, there's high confusion over the specifics of it. Our Health Minister Stephen Donnelly is of the belief that people should self-isolate in their bedrooms, while Tánaiste Leo Varadkar disagrees, stating that people who have travelled should just quarantine at home. Meanwhile, Taoiseach Micheál Martin is still trying to get mandatory hotel quarantining up and running. It's coming, it's coming - we just need to come up with some legislation first. If only we had someone who could have sorted this out months ago, or who has the power to enforce it immediately, given the national emergency we find ourselves in. But we couldn't skip the palaver part, could we?

Manson's fall from 'grace'

HORROR OF THE WEEK: WAS anyone actually shocked at the abuse allegations from several women regarding Marilyn Manson, right, this week? Actress Evan Rachel Wood started the ball rolling when she publicly named the singer on Instagram as a person who began 'grooming' her when she was a teenager and 'horrifically abused me for years'. Manson has said these claims are 'a horrible distortion of reality'. This is rich coming from a man who spews hate for a living. If you ask me, it sounds as if his 'art' was imitating reality all along - and his grotesque disguise was in fact his true self.





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My head is throbbing and I feel disorientated. Super – the mother of all hangovers, and on a workday too. I check my phone – 7.45am – still a bit of time before I have to pull myself out of bed and... wait. Something is wrong. Something has happened, something bad – and I'm not sure what, until my blood runs cold when I do.

My body is stock still, my mind trying to pick apart a blackness, an unconsciousness that is impossible to this day to decipher. Too many drinks, a party in an apartment, needing to lie down, a man following me. Then – nothingness.

I have been sexually assaulted. I know this, but I have zero recollection of the attack – so what was I going to do? My absence of memory on the night in question has proved bittersweet. On the one hand, I am eternally grateful for not knowing, even though in reality it meant for me, and for so many others, justice would never be served.

Almost 15 years after my attack, there's still such stigma, shame and indignity burdened by the female, all reinforced by the stereotypical views we continue to hold about sexual assault.

I wasn't pulled into a dark alleyway by

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OF COURSE
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a sex-crazed deviant sociopath. It does indeed happen, but it didn't to me.

I had no physical injuries. In fact, if you looked at me, you wouldn't have noticed anything particularly wrong at all. Those bloodshot eyes were as a result of too much partying, right?

Right. And that shake in my voice? Definitely the fear. That's what you get for going out on a school night!

I wasn't carted into the sexual assault treatment unit in Dublin's Rotunda Hospital, all black eyes and broken ribs. I drove myself, outwardly composed as a nausea rose in my stomach that had nothing to do with a hangover, into a Well Woman clinic. I was advised to report the incident to the guards.

I didn't. Of course I didn't. I went into work, my hangover now superseded with a far more sinister presentiment, which would linger indefinitely.

During those early days I would continually try to remember, question, doubt and wonder. And when I did, I felt repulsed. I wasn't going there.

My mind had blacked out for self-preservation, I reasoned.

Of course this was a lie.

I battled. I asked my friends: what should I do? One would say I should report the incident. Another would disagree.

'Why would you put yourself through that?' they would ask, and my most vulnerable self would nod. The legal system doesn't exactly protect sexual assault complainants when they are in court. 'You'll be the one on trial. It will be so traumatising.'

I couldn't bring myself to do it. It would be easier to compartmentalise, tuck it away, get on with life. Stay silent, keep on trucking.

This took time and practice, especially since I knew what my attacker looked like; where he lived. I was terrified of meeting

him. What would I say? What would I do?

Would he attack me again, in the cold, sober light of day? I wondered how he felt. Was he remorseful, or does that emotion exist in the mind of a predator? Did he even realise what he had actually done? Had he attacked before? Has he done it since?

In holding my silence, this last part is the most difficult to reconcile. I felt I wasn't brave enough to stand up and say that this happened. As a result, this person was free to inflict something similar on another woman, on other women. For that, I felt like a coward.

I also didn't want to be seen as a victim. I was a strong, empowered female, with opinions and a voice

and a life; a positive, good reputation. I didn't want to be pitied, or worst of all, blamed.

Because when a sexual assault happens, whether it's a slap on the bum or a non-consensual penetrative act, blame colours everything – and egged by society with a legal system designed to protect the defendant, it's the female who will take this hit.

I wondered, for so long, was I complicit. I wore a red dress that night. It wasn't short, but it was figure hugging.

I had drank far too much. That was my fault – I hadn't listened to the ads. I wasn't responsible. I should have minded myself more; then I may have remained safe. In my gut, I knew the truth. But, as

in the lines of the Eurythmics song Sexcrime (Nineteen Eighty-Four), quoted by Minister Josepha Madigan this week in the Dáil, I chose to 'face the wall, turn my back against it all.'

Tragically, I'm far from the exception. This article will resonate with countless women, who have, like me, been in similar situations, and yet kept silent.

Perhaps they even thought their abuse wasn't serious enough to complain about – a grope on the breast or a slap on the backside – but it is. We have come to excuse and normalise this behaviour – but it's far from normal. It's intrinsically wrong.

We have stayed quiet through fear and shame and stigma,

dogged by the stereotypes and misconceptions we continue to hold as a society about sexual assault, the fear of judgment, the lack of support. Sexual assault continues to be, as Josepha said, the one crime that goes unreported. Is it a coincidence that it happens to be much more prevalent an issue for women? Hardly. In fact, when Josepha revealed that this week that she was a survivor of sexual assault, I could hardly believe my ears.

Not that I didn't think it could happen – as the minister clearly stated, most women at her age, and mine at 42, will have suffered the trauma of sexual abuse in some form – but I was stunned that a politician verbalised the issue at all, especially her personal experience of it.

When Josepha says that it is a lot more common than many believe, she is correct. And when she states that sexual assault is not always the random monster lurking in the middle of the night, once again, she is bang on.

This last part can't be repeated enough. The majority of women know their assailants, so can we once and for all understand that it's not always the masked madman in the dark, forcibly holding down their victim, a knife at their

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throat? It could be a husband, relative, a neighbour, an acquaintance or a supposed friend. And the pandemic will have exacerbated the trauma caused by these heinous actions.

And when Josepha says that sexual assault remains a corrosive blight on female safety and morale, once again, this is the truth. In an age of virtue signalling and empty rhetoric, her words this week could herald a real opportunity to change the script.

Ireland has waited and watched as the rest of the world has spoken out about sexual violence against women, as the MeToo and Reclaim The Streets movements called for change. As a country, we have a shameful track record of how society has treated women.

It's still shoddy. But in using her voice, Josepha Madigan has provided a catalyst for change, to finish 'the unfinished democracy that is Ireland when it comes to the representation and treatment of women'. Her personal revelations have begun to chip away at long-ingrained beliefs and stigmas. Now, we must take action.

We desperately need a judicial system that supports and empowers women. We need legal reform so women can trust and feel supported when reporting these crimes. Let's become a country that encourages the female voice to speak, without judgement, without shame, and without fear.

Josepha has started the conversation, and in doing so, she's given a voice to the rest of us – to break the silence, to share these stories, as difficult as they may be to tell, and uncomfortable to listen to.

The question is, are we finally going to be heard?



We're finally talking about sex attacks – but will we be heard?

TOP SECRET

IT SEEMS it has taken a global pandemic to open up a conversation of which we have become accustomed to avoiding. No, I'm not talking about death – we are well-versed in that, even obsessed with the minutiae of a departure from this world, whether we dare to admit it or not. The pomp and ceremony of an Irish pre-Covid funeral is something quite spectacular, swathes of the living coming together in warmth and conviviality to bid a final farewell to a person they loved.

Grief is the subject we remain deeply uncomfortable with. More insidious than the preceding emotion of shock, it tends to make its presence known when the funeral is over, the first carefully placed bouquets start to spoil and the messages of condolence cease.

It creeps from your heart into the pit of your stomach, gripping your body and clutching your breath, suffocating any joy. It's as if something is trying to squeeze the very life out of you, such is its ferocity. In its early stages, it does not quell, and you may feel like you are drowning in tears. It is so huge, so overwhelming, so frightening – and we simply don't know what to do with it, which adds to the torment.

Now Covid has put paid to not just the lavish, traditional funerals we mark, passing, but also the presence of people, and it is people you need, to help get you through it. You need to reach out, accept help, and as a society we need to welcome it, and stop brushing it away.

Grief is a deeply isolating experience as it is, and this year, that state of aloneness can only be intensified.

So there's no better time to pay attention to it, and learn to get more comfortable with loss.

I'm including myself in this by the way, as although I've had personal experience with earth-shattering grief, it still makes me want to recoil in terror.

THIRTEEN years ago, my heart was broken. It was a devastation so great, I feared I would never recover from it. It was a beautiful day on that Friday in September. Myself and my fiancé Edwin, or Ed as everyone called him, were on a motorbike, high in the French Alps. We were due to enter the Italian border that evening, and in this particular spot, close to Val d'Aere, all you could see were verdant valleys, cerulean lakes and majestic mountains. At times I felt like you could touch the clouds.

We had plans. For that day, for the rest of our lives, but there were bigger ones in place. For this breathtaking vista would be the final one Ed would see.

The memories are there, 13 years later wild and strong when released from a hidden place in my heart.

I'm still fragile when it comes to uncovering them. Even though so many years have passed, I was spared the horror of witnessing his death, as I had dismounted the bike to answer the call of nature. He promised he would return in five minutes, and went to buy a bottle of wine for a 'burr', making the most of those halpin bends.

It was the last words to me, to anyone.

I waited, and waited some more, for him to return. But he never did.

Ed was involved in a high speed collision, and his life was extinguished in seconds. The accident also claimed the life of another man. As I stood, seuffing my boots in frustration at the delay, I was oblivious to the magnitude of the horror that was taking place a mere kilometre away.

I realise there were bigger plans in place.

For me, it seemed, it was to continue on this path of life. And

Lisa Brady's fiancée was killed in a dreadful accident 13 years ago, thrusting her into a spiral of sorrow. In this deeply personal account, she has one message: There is hope

SATURDAY ESSAY by Lisa Brady



Initially, I didn't want to. The guilt I felt, that this decision I made to get off that bike, was almost unbearable. Surely, if I hadn't done that, he wouldn't have gone back up? Why was it his time to die when I didn't even have a scratch? As time went on, I came to look at my time in a different way. For whatever reason, it was not my time to depart. There was more for me to live. Today, I am married to a wonderful man, Owen, who acknowledged and understood my situation when we met. Readers of this paper may know that we have two beautiful daughters, who fill our days with joy (and drive me scatty too). I am happy and I feel blessed, and incredibly lucky to have this wonderful life.

But there were times I didn't think I would make it. Especially in those early days, when everything seemed too loud, too bright, and by the same account, ominously quiet and dark. Grief is so intense, so utterly overwhelming, that it can be truly terrifying, and initially,

all I wanted to do was run, to escape it.

I went to grief counselling about four weeks after Ed died – which is far too early to begin this part of the process, as you remain in shock for a long time after the death of a partner – but I honestly just wanted to hurry things up, so the pain would stop. Grief however cannot be rushed, and in this world of instant gratification, where discomfort is to be circumvented at all costs, this realisation was like a hammer blow. Was Ed's death not enough? What had I done to deserve this?

I wanted to shed my skin. I couldn't sit still. I was exhausted, but wired. I eat little, but drank too much. I shopped incessantly, for things I didn't need or even want. Strangely, I became afraid of the dark, and of being alone in a room. These are normal reactions, but at the time it felt like I was possessed by a malevolent force.

I didn't know who I was anymore. Every part of my life was linked

to Ed – our home, our friends, our families.

How did I even begin to learn to live again? I felt I wasn't really there, just simply looking in on the world, balancing precariously between the living and the dead.

I would wake up in the mornings and for the first few minutes I'd forget. Then I'd remember, and the tears would start. And oh, the crying. From guttural sobs to a slow, silent trickle – it was a constant. It didn't matter where I was – at my desk in work, on a plane, in a restaurant. The tears flowed freely on a whim. My face became a mourning mask. I was a pained, red-nosed, miserable version of my former self. Grief is not fun, and neither is it pretty.

WHEN you're grieving, you're totally exposed and vulnerable, and it's almost painful to be seen. I felt every memory and emotion that came through I didn't need or even want. Strangely, I became afraid of the dark, and of being alone in a room. These are normal reactions, but at the time it felt like I was possessed by a malevolent force.

I didn't know who I was anymore. Every part of my life was linked

with grief, especially in the first year, is like wading through quicksand.

What doesn't help is society's deep discomfortableness with grief, especially the prolonged sadness. We are used to quick fixes, to constant positivity, to whoosing away anything disagreeable. It's okay not to feel okay, but try and be quick about it. Grief is dismal, dark and depressing. It's not that palatable on a long-term basis.

I remember an acquaintance crossing the road to avoid me, and another blanking me in a bar. Some people would well up, or offer such stilted conversation, picking and choosing their words so carefully, that I found it impossible to speak to them. There were times that I believed, ended up consoling those who hardly knew Ed. I didn't want to be alone, but the thought of having to make conversation that made sense was exhausting. I grieved to detox the looks of pity, they were probably worse than being ignored. I was the very sad elephant in the room. I felt if one more person helpfully said 'Time is a great healer' I would scream – I probably did – it was the last thing I wanted to hear. I didn't have the patience for that.

Could they not understand I just wanted to be seen as Lisa, not some tragic figure?



Bringing grief out from the shadows: Lisa Brady's painful account brings hope



Pain of tragic loss: Lisa with her late fiancé Ed

Over time, Ed retreated from the forefront of my mind, and now the time we spent together and the memories of our relationship, reside in my heart. When you notice this shift happening, that's a sign you're progressing on this incredibly difficult journey, and it comes with a sense of guilt. That goes too, eventually.

I've come to look at grief like a scar. At the beginning there's this unsightly, gaping wound that seems to take forever to heal, no matter what you put on it. Then very slowly, it starts to become less noticeable, and you're left with this silvery silver of flesh, that is just part of you. You can never be the same again. You have changed, on a cellular level. There are huge emotions felt with grief, and once the initial intensity subsides, and you gravitate towards the land of the living again, you can see the gifts it has left for you. Empathy, compassion, resilience and fortitude are waiting, like silver linings on the blackest of clouds.

I used to think that because I went through such a traumatic loss, that I would be well-placed to say just the right words and offer unrivalled support to others who are bereaved. But

everyone's grief is their own, and even though you have been through something that's devastating, you can't assume similar feelings. Also, life can get in the way. I have two small children and am not as able to drop everything in a moment's notice when needed, much as I would like to.

THERE have been many other funerals since Ed died. One of myself and Owen's best friends passed away at the age of 40 from cancer three years ago, leaving behind two small children and a partner, and I stumbled over sympathies to her devastated parents. I felt incapable of words in the face of such an unfathomable loss, after months of suffering. Their beautiful, darling girl, gone.

Over the years, some of my close friends have lost parents, and, for me, this is an unimaginable grief, albeit one that I will face, if the natural order of life plays out. I recall trying to console them through their tears on different occasions. Every time I seemed to say sounded trite and contrived, so the last time I found myself in this situa-

tion, I did something else. I listened. I spoke little, but I heard it all. By cutting through the small talk and platitudes, you get to the real stuff. The ugly crying with tears that engulf, the ragged breath, the rawness of heartbreak. And then, sometimes, through the nonsensical broken sentences, the flicker of something – joy? – from a beautiful memory, before the tears come again. One day, those tears will be replaced by a rueful smile, in remembrance of what was, and acknowledgment of the love that remains.

But you have to sit with it, whether you're grieving or offering support. It's hard to do this as it's awkward as hell. It requires deep patience and tolerance. Sometimes, all you can do is breathe. Don't be overly concerned by meaningful phrases. Let them talk about their loss, about the person they've lost. Or just be there, ask them how they are doing, that really is enough. The times we are living in have made the tactile part of grieving difficult. The hugs, embraces, a hand to hold, someone to wipe your tears, someone to sit with you with or to raise a glass – these are limited precious commodities at the moment. My heart

Amanda Platell

When baring all on social media really is courageous



Many have questioned the wisdom of model Chrissy Teigen posting pictures to 13million Instagram followers just moments after she had lost her third child halfway through her pregnancy.

In one, the Berrett mother (above) leans forward in grief, tears trailing down her cheeks. Too much? Too private to share with the world? Quite the reverse, in my view. Yes they are public, yes they use social media to publicise themselves. But by revealing their terrible sadness at losing a child, they give succour to other people who have suffered in the same way.

In those pictures, Chrissy (right) embodies the broken dreams of millions of mothers and fathers who have lost babies. Millions have endured this agony – yet for so long miscarriage has been taboo. It was a brave gesture, and we should applaud her for breaking through this wall of silence.

CAN I be the only one in awe of the naked Instagram pictures of mother-of-two Greythorn Falzow celebrating her 48th birthday? No knickers, hardly a scrape of make-up, straggly hair as if she's just got out of bed after six hours of tantic sex, she looks fabulous – and it's all down to her own brand Goo – "inexplicably amazing new body butter". Forget loc rolls during the new lockdown – and expect spreadable butter sales to soar.

She sheds it well

HAVING gained a lost 17lb and 4in off stone during lockdown, a mortified Penny Lancaster, 47, now is to reach out and hold on. There is light waiting for us.

■ **The Irish Hospice Foundation's Bereavement Line is open** and has experienced the death of a loved one during the pandemic, Covid-related or not. The number is 1800 90 20 70, and the lines are open Monday to Friday, 10am-1pm.

As a regular on former model ITV's Loose Women, my happily married to Rod Stewart, look at a picture of her rolly-polly, tummy as an incentive to lose weight.

Although for every lady lady castigating her, millions of others will be asking: "How did you do it?"

