



As frontline workers at Family Transition Place (FTP), we see so much promise and hope in those who come to us for help. We know that very often FTP is a last resort for people who have coped with a lot of pain in many areas of their lives, so it's heartwarming when we are privileged to hear FTP's services were life changing for them. Staff are always pleased to hear how the agency which we are proud to work for is able to lead and assist as a team in providing these services, in order to be the support people are looking for. But we know that *support* is really the extent of our role—that the real work towards any positive change is

effected, in all reality, solely by the client themselves. We often stand aside, both amazed at the strength people summon from within their own selves, and honoured to be invited to be a witness in their journey.

I'd like to highlight that there are more levels to working with clients at FTP than just cheerleading. In order to encourage and support effectively, counsellors really need to put themselves in the other persons' shoes and try to understand where they are coming from, to see things from their perspective. A by-product of doing this kind of mental gymnastics is *emotional investment*, and when you are emotionally invested in something, or someone, there is a sort of a bond that forms with that thing or person. *If you have ever put yourself in someone else's shoes you will already know this I'm sure.*

This leads me to further peel back to the inner layer of what it is like to work with and empathize with those who are truly at the end of their rope. Yes, it is meaningful, fulfilling work—but what is often not spoken of is a deeper truth we all work within each of the 24-hours we operate. A raw, and frankly, darker, more insipid truth. This truth is that sadly, there are times when, for those struggling with them—the weight of pain and trauma are just so overwhelming, that in spite of all our best efforts, some of the lives that come to us are ultimately overcome by the culmination of events. And whether by accident, by their own choice, or sometimes even by the acts of another, we find ourselves being forced to deal with the impact, and acknowledge we cannot fix everything. Because of the bonds we have built with them, this can be a hard truth to process and in these times we again find ourselves grateful to our colleagues for the support we can find in each other as we each come to terms with the loss. People ask how I can do what I do, but even in times where it seems hope has ended, I believe that it is still there and that there are always diamonds being forged out of coal. For myself, part of processing difficult feelings is in writing them out, so I wrote this poem to help honour the memory of those lost, while trying to capture that glimmer of silver through the storm—the glimmer of hope that keeps us going.

March of the Shades

We -
shared the voice of a
typical preschooler
calling, anxious in the night,
"Mommy!"
And the news of your death

gripped my heart,
(and the tiny pulse beating beneath it)
While I choked back sobs.

We -
Had some long quiet chats
You were lovely, and sweet,
and broken,
Yet found humour in spite of your pain.
You held such kindness in your soul
I was sad to learn you were gone

We -
Had very little in common,
But for that moment out in public
when you caught me in my private life
Sick - and seething,
and trying lamely to hide both
You, took one look and burst into laughter,
prompting me to do the same.
I was so thankful for you that day

And we -
My friend,
We shared history, and classmates,
and laughs
but finally we shared only a loaded glance,
Not a hug, while you despaired ...
because I did not want to interrupt.

Then there's you, Whisper,
Ghost already, before you were gone
An unsettling silence arching that dark chasm
Burning the bridge you would not have us build
The embers leaving a scar on my heart

And you, Mother ... and You too
You promised
to just tie your yellow ribbon
And come right back
But you were too close to that old tree
to see the forest
And it took you in its' clutches
As soon as you were out of our sight

Oh! and You!
and You, and You

And You ...
Wandering in the deep labyrinth
of compromised synapses and poisoned veins
With aching hearts, we heard you calling out
But you were too entrenched to reach ...
And then the calling ceased.

Your passing, Dears, however
does not obliterate your existence
but rather, seals your permanency
Neither does it derail us, or negate our work
But serves to inspire us
To reach out sooner, stretch farther,
And with a strengthened grip

Your pain now swallowed by statistics, but
It's the sharp starkness of the numbers
That spurs us on,
to acts of deeper empathy and healing
So that, when you return again,
Reincarnated,
as you do
We will greet you with greater understanding
And perhaps,
Better equip your new form
to live in this world
Restored