

Introducing - The Baxter Family

Jody Baxter, 18yrs, tells the story of how Nelson's Journey helped him and his sisters Tilly and Poppy, following the death of their sister Maisie. The 18th of February 2012 changed so many lives and put so many things into perspective for so many people.

Maisie was 13 at the time. She was a popular, witty, intelligent girl with an amazing voice and personality (even if I would never have admitted it in a million years at the time). She was also however, as is expected of girls that age, temperamental and rather dramatic to say the least! Being the ages we were at the time, we often argued and fell out over the most stupid things. That is not to say however that we didn't have a good relationship because we did. In our earlier years me and Maisie got up to all sorts of trouble with Tilly and Poppy. Now I come to think of it, getting up to mischief with her makes up for about 50% of my memories with her! On the morning of the 18th, mum was going to Great Yarmouth to get the husky we'd all been begging for over the years. Mum wanted it to be a surprise so told the girls she was going to book us a holiday. Within seconds all three of them were running around trying to guess where we were going, that was until an argument over the most silliest of things ended in Maisie sending herself to her room in a strop. Mum went up to speak to her and told her she should stay in her room and finish tidying it so to prevent another bicker whilst she was gone.

A few hours past whilst mum and Phil were gone. Me, Tilly and Poppy were downstairs, directly beneath Maisie's room, playing on the Xbox and singing along to music at the top of our voices getting all excited over the 'holiday'. Maisie was still upstairs tidying her bedroom. Mum came back at about 6pm and I ran to the door. Mum came in and told Tilly to run upstairs to get Maisie, but she came down saying she wouldn't answer. I then went up, assuming she was in a mood and told her that the dog was here, expecting a reply, however I didn't get one either, not even a 'get lost Jody!'. It's weird, but in an instant I knew something bad had happened, my whole body felt electric and I instinctively opened the door but something was in the way. I went downstairs, trying to act calm and told mum. Mum ran upstairs and instinctively knew something wasn't right too. She smashed her way through the door. To our absolute shock and horror, it was my little sister Maisie blocking the door. For reasons we shall never understand she had chosen to take her own life using a belt and the door. The rest of the night is a bit of a blur; dad came round as well as grandma and a few of mum's friends that live nearby. The house was full of paramedics and police as we all waited nervously, in floods of tears, for good news. Of course the good news never came. In one hour our whole lives had been turned upside down. It's impossible to put into words how I felt, how we all felt.

The weeks that came to pass seem to merge into one, we had a family counsellor come round but we decided she wasn't for us. That's when we heard of Nelson's Journey. It was my girlfriend's mum who told us about them. Dubious at first because of the previous counsellor I agreed to meet Ryan at our house along with the rest of my family. Although I like to think our family is particularly close and capable of talking openly about our emotions,

Maisie's suicide left me with such a complicated array of emotions. I began to internalise my feelings, and it was Ryan who managed to drag them out of me. Ryan came round and instantly I felt at ease with him, as did my sisters, mum and Phil. After seeing him a few times he told us of an activity weekend we could all attend. To be honest I wanted nothing to do with it, I felt like I was too old but of course I didn't say that to him. Because of exams and holidays, I had to have my weekend postponed. Tilly and Poppy went first and came back completely different people. They were so much happier and livelier; it was amazing to see how much Nelsons Journey had done for them. At this point I was like great, it helps little kids but what in the world can it do for me? Still not really wanting to go I continued seeing Ryan and in this time, my girlfriend Helena went on her weekend. She too came back and said she had an amazing time and met all these amazing people. Helena's a year older than me so slowly she changed my mind, even though on the outside I made it look like I was raring to go.

Eventually my weekend came up, normally I don't get nervous, but the journey there was one of the most nerve racking things of my life. I couldn't make up my mind on whether I wanted to go, but in the end I bit the bullet and got out the car. How bad could it be? After making my way to the entrance (late) I was greeted by Lorna and everyone and got given my very own hoody! I was led into the main room to meet the rest of my group and all my leaders. Thankfully Ryan was my group leader and helping him was Tam and Gill who were volunteers. Talking to people of a similar age, in a similar situation is the best possible help anyone in my situation could have had. I felt totally at ease with the other members of my group (2 boys and 2 girls). All 5 of us got on really well and spoke about everything. Helping other people to unravel their own grief and troubled emotions, talking helps in so many ways, especially for someone like me who doesn't like to talk about personal things.

The weekend's set out so that there are icebreaking activities to start with. Our group however didn't need them. Within half an hour, we were already talking about why we were there and sharing stories of the people we'd come to remember. Getting to know everyone was so nice, there were so many different personalities. We were all completely different people yet the same in terms of what we were going through. It was this 'bond' that meant we all got on so well. I found myself telling almost complete strangers my deepest feelings and feeling 100 times better for it. The fun activities were great, especially the giant swing, but for me the best and most memorable part has to be the candle lit ceremony. As hard hitting as it was, it was so nice to be able to be with everyone and have the chance to say goodbye to our loved ones.

The work Nelson's Journey does is amazing; they help so many people in so many ways. The work they do has inspired me so much that I'm hoping to be a volunteer myself; so that I can help people get through the same thing I had to. From one to one sessions, the weekends, the NJ clubs, and everything else, they help so many people in so many ways and I feel so lucky to have met them all. They've allowed me to get on with my life, taught me ways to deal with anger, sadness, anxiety, helped me to be able to express my feelings, but most of all, they've made me realise that talking about how I feel is the best way to feel better.