

‘But I’m Not a Therapist’

How Teachers can Help Bereaved
Children Just by Being Human Beings



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Helping Children to Manage Loss

Positive Strategies for
Renewal and Growth

Brenda Mallon



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Humpty Dumpty



Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall
All the king's horses and all the king's men
Couldn't put Humpty Dumpty together again



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- Human – orig. from Late Middle English '*humaine*'
- Humane – having or showing compassion or benevolence
- Therapy – from the Greek *therapeia* 'healing'



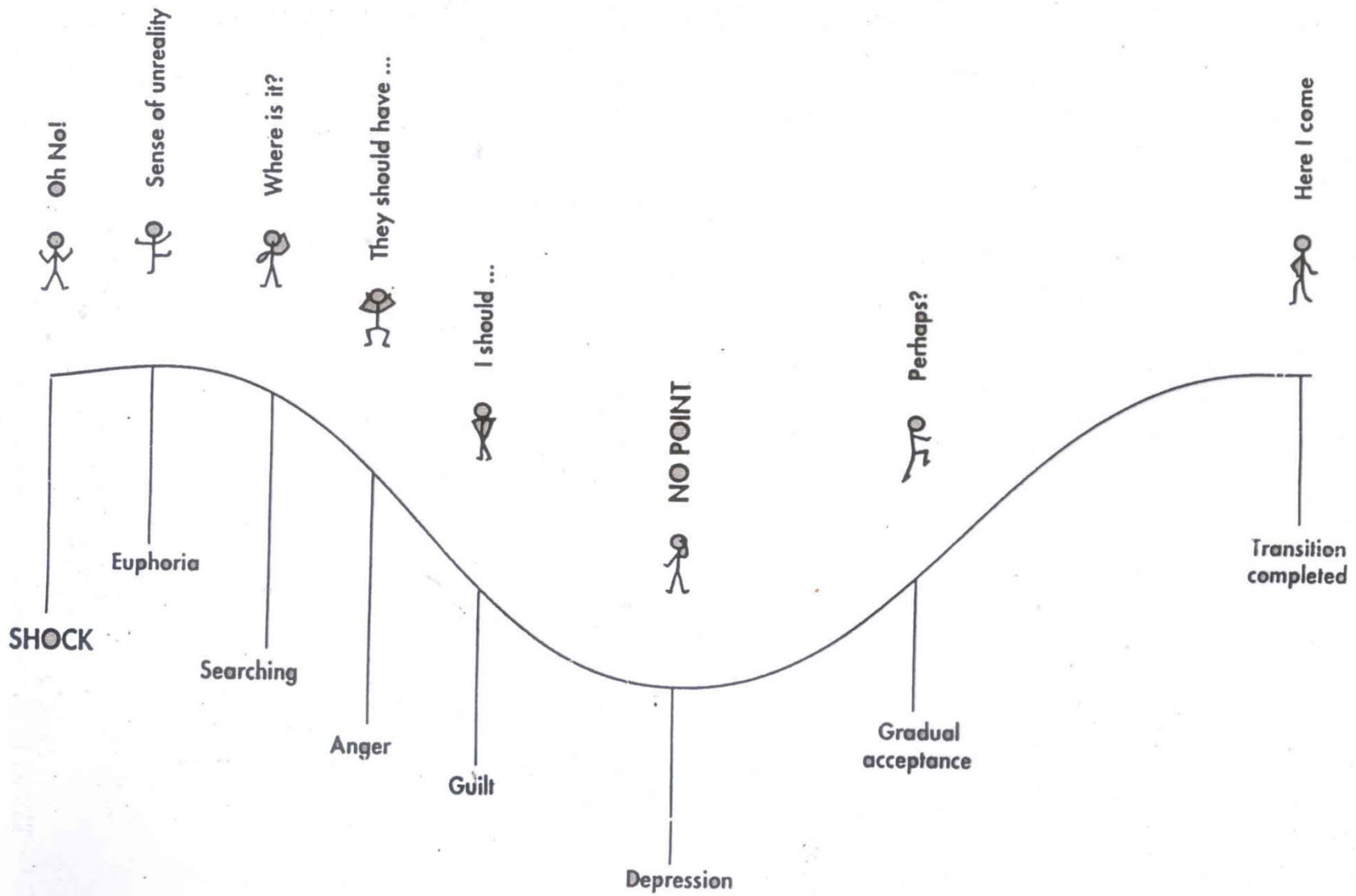


Fear of Emotions

‘Grief is the price we pay for love.

Without attachment there would be no sense of loss’







This is me being sad.
Maybe you think I'm being happy in this picture.
Really I'm being sad but pretending I'm being happy.
I'm doing that because I think people won't
like me if I look sad.



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‘Angry things kept buzzing in my mind. When you’re a teenager, just when everything’s starting to happen in your life then it is reduced to cinders suddenly. I felt guilty because of this anger, and just continue and manage these big things at the same time. Then I felt I must protect my mother and brother because they needed me.’

Sarah, 15. Her father died in a car crash



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‘I didn’t feel anything for the first three months. For the next 6 to 8 months I couldn’t really handle myself or my feelings. Then after that it took me a long time and a lot of tears but I managed to calm down. Ever since then it’s been like a long road up a hill.’

Helen, 14



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Who is sad?
Sad is anyone.
It comes along and finds you.



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Teacher Responses

- ‘Some teachers were good and some couldn’t care less’
- ‘The teachers helped her so much, not by making her special but by watching out for her and giving her time.’
- I was told off for losing a book. I started crying and thinking about Chloe and the teacher goes, ‘oh, you don’t have to be that sad just because you’ve lost someone’



How can you help?

- Listen, listen and listen some more
- Stay with the questions that have no answers.
- Be there.
- Allow the pain, confusion, grief and anger
- Reassure that the feelings are normal and will eventually pass



- Be non – judgemental. Children need to have their feelings received without judgement or criticism
- Continue to be available, not just immediately afterwards but for as long as it takes.
- Recognise that grieving doesn't have time boundaries, it takes as long as it takes.
- Ask the pupil to tell you if they feel alone or update and agree some form of support e.g.. Quiet time in the library or reading corner



What about you?

- Recognise your own experiences of loss may be reawakened.
- Seek support from colleagues if you are unsure about what to do.



- Understand that at times you will feel inadequate or hopeless but remember you're not a magician who can make things better with the flick of a wand. You are a human being who can be there to offer whatever you can of your own positive self

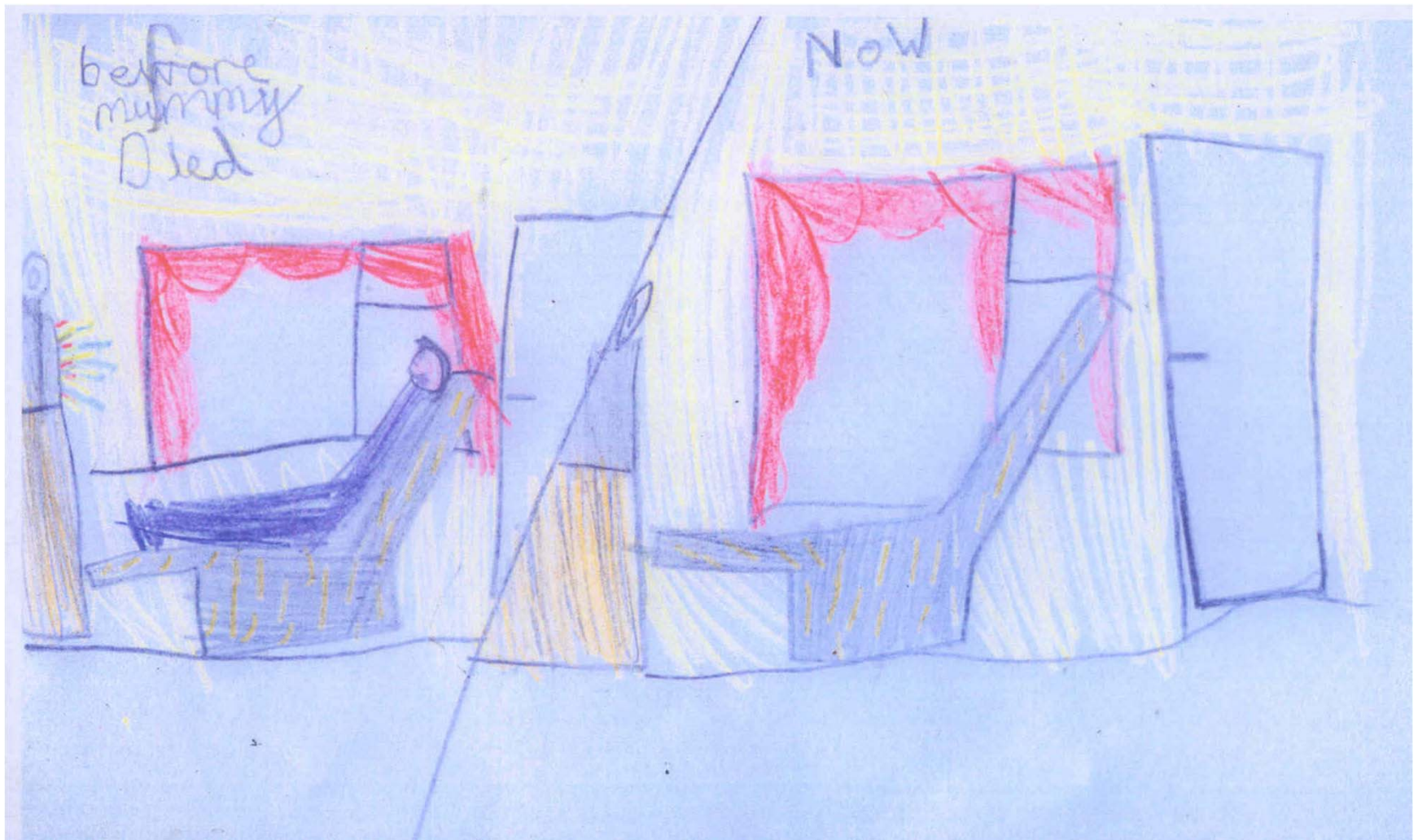


Respect the child

‘ Until the child has established new roots in the present – we need to protect and value these roots in the past, however deformed they may be – for without roots the child will surely die....’

Fahlberg 1979, ‘The Child who is Stuck – in attachment and Separation, Michigan Dept. of Social services



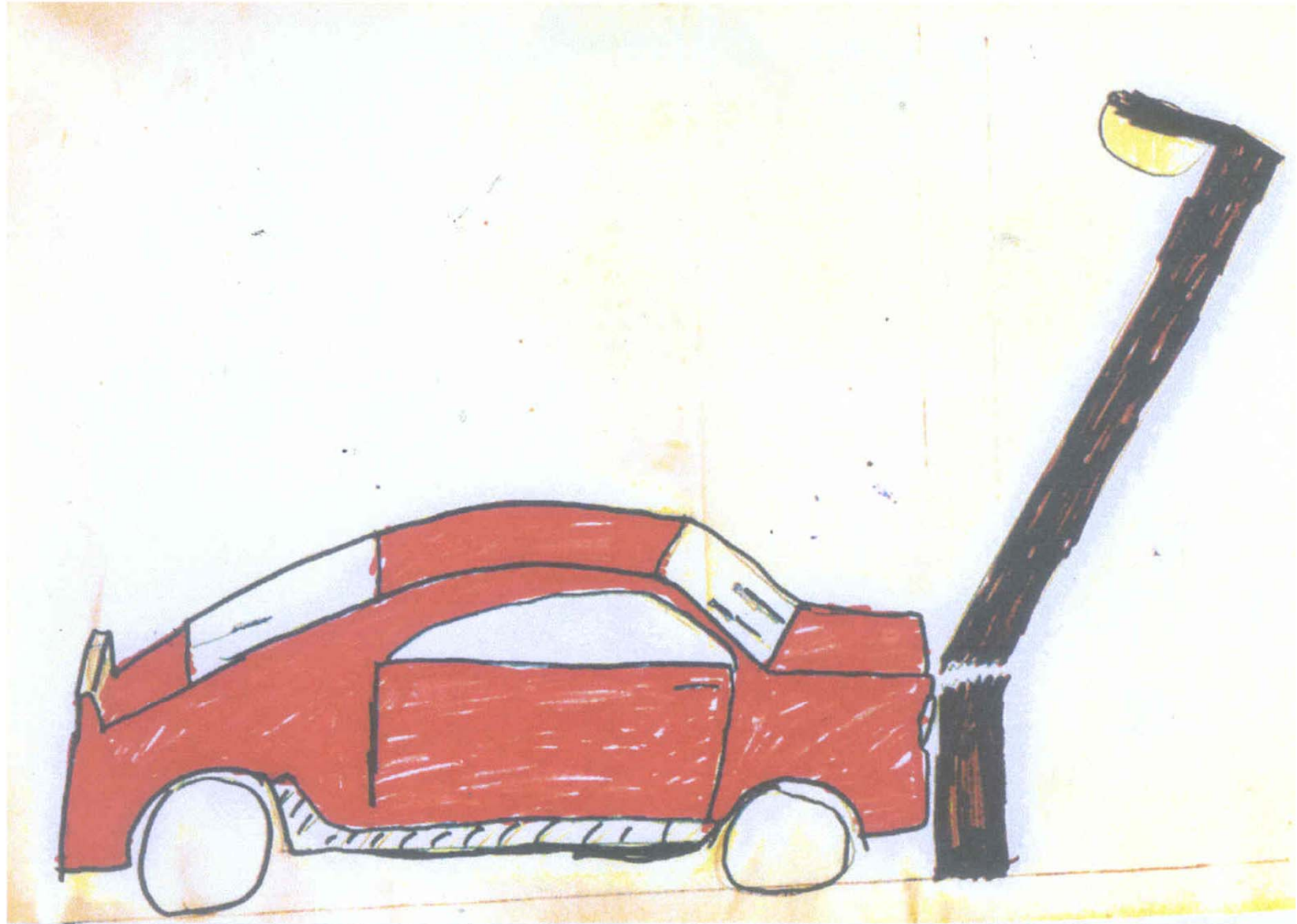


Respect Children's Dreams – dreaming is what all humans share

St. Vincent Millay's exquisite verse expresses how our waking loss finds its way into our sleeping consciousness:

' Where you used to be, there is a
hole in the world,
Which I find myself walking round in the daytime,
And falling into at night.'

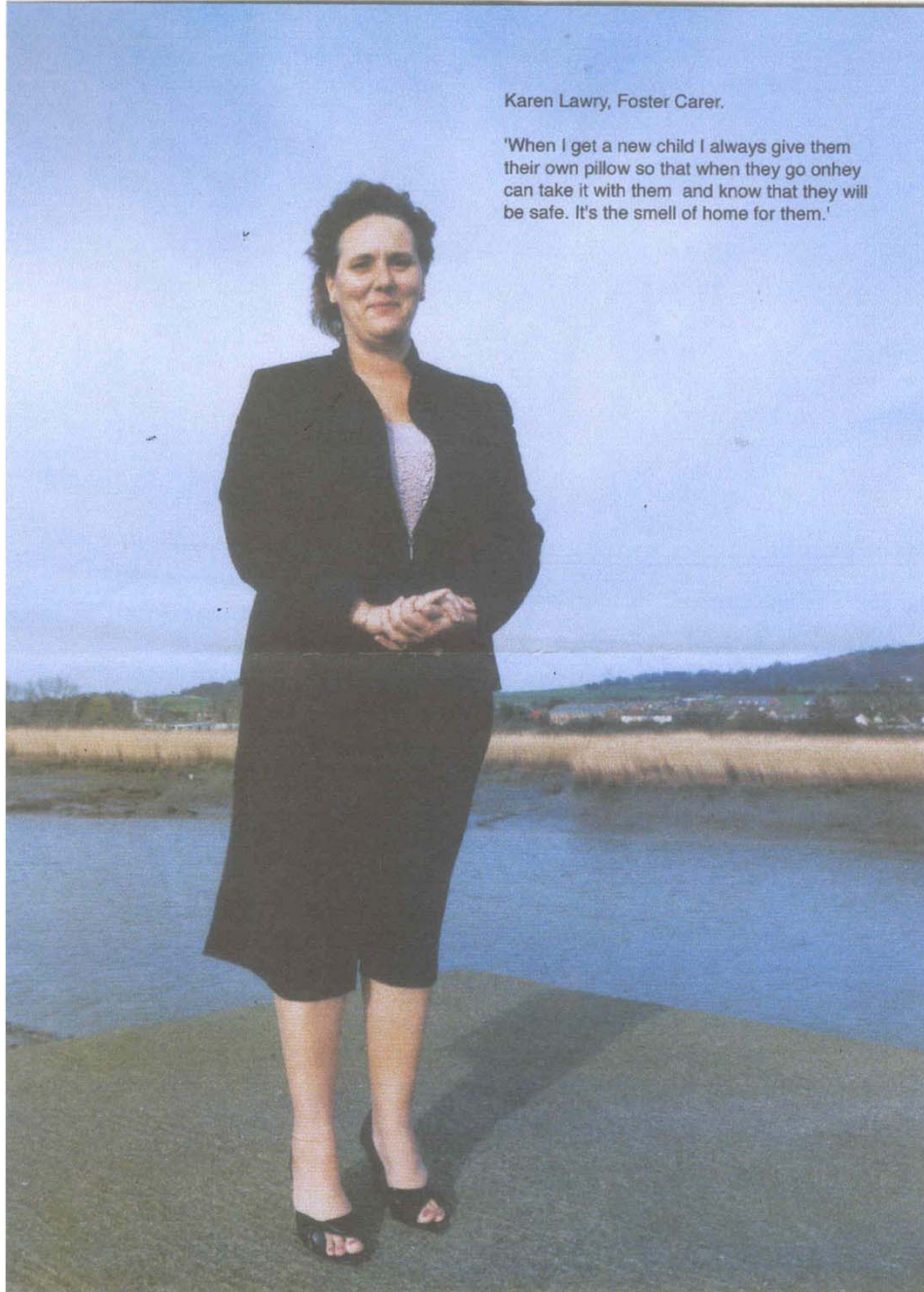




'My worst nightmare was when my mum and dad were killed in a car crash.' John 11



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Karen Lawry, Foster Carer.

'When I get a new child I always give them their own pillow so that when they go on they can take it with them and know that they will be safe. It's the smell of home for them.'



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You don't have to be a
therapist to help!



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