

I didn't realise how depressed he was...

Male suicide in the UK has reached its highest level for over a decade. Eleanor Ford, 42, tells *Bella* about losing her husband...



Male suicides rise by 23% in just one year

Male suicide...silent killer



'I've been so stressed at work'

www.widowedandyoung.org.uk Words: Rachel Mostyn, Laura Hinton

As Glynn and I shared our first wedding dance, I couldn't stop laughing. 'You're hilarious,' I giggled as we head-banged along to *Bohemian Rhapsody* by Queen. Glynn was eccentric and that's what I loved about him. A real gent with a great sense of humour, he'd always have a glass of champagne to hand. And he loved rock music, choosing a Queen number for our wedding song. It was 30 December 2008 and we'd met 10 years before, while working at a theatre in Manchester. Our son George was born in June 2005, then Eva two years later, and we had another on the way. After our wedding, I started to retrain as a physiotherapist, while Glynn worked as a production

manager at a music college. But his job was becoming more stressful. 'They're restructuring at work,' he sighed one night. 'But you're great at your job,' I reassured him. In July 2009, Antonia was born and with three little kids life was even busier. Despite working long hours, Glynn loved being a dad, taking the kids to the park or cooking pancakes with George at the weekend. On our first anniversary, Glynn offered to cook a romantic dinner while Mum babysat the kids. As I travelled home that evening I imagined I'd find my favourite

dinner of beef casserole with roast potatoes waiting for me. That was the kind of thing Glynn would do. Instead, I found him slumped on the sofa, drunk. 'What's wrong?' I asked, gently. 'Go away!' he shouted, a half-empty brandy bottle beside him. But I insisted on talking about it. Glynn's job was demanding and he put pressure on himself too. To the outside world he oozed confidence, but in reality he lacked self-esteem. As he ranted about work it was as if I wasn't there, and after two hours he passed out on the sofa. Upset but worried, I left him

there and went for an early night. Next day, Glynn was mortified. 'I'm so sorry,' he said. 'I've been so stressed at work.' 'That's okay,' I said, hugging him. I brushed it off and the following evening we celebrated our anniversary at a hotel, complete with champagne and a hot tub. For six months things were fine, but gradually Glynn began to get anxious about work again. He was so worried, he'd often throw up in the mornings. He'd always been a frequent drinker but his consumption increased and he'd collapse on the sofa at night, too tired to make any sense. Finally, in June 2010, his GP diagnosed him with generalised anxiety disorder (GAD). 'I'm going to start seeing a

counsellor and I've been prescribed antidepressants,' he told me. 'I'm glad you've got help,' I said. Despite the medication, Glynn still suffered from depression over the next few months. He changed the medication a couple of times and was told it might take a while to find one that worked for him. I prayed things would improve. On Christmas Day 2010, Glynn offered to cook dinner, so my mum Kathleen and I went out for a walk with the children. 'Can I help?' I asked, sensing his anxiety on our return. 'No,' he snapped. I saw the potatoes in the oven were overcooked, so I quickly ushered Mum and the

kids into the front room, fearing Glynn was about to lose his temper. 'I've burnt it!' he yelled as he pulled the tray out of the oven. Then he opened the back door and flung the contents on the lawn. 'Why don't you go and lie down?' I said, and he thundered upstairs. I felt like crying, but I couldn't get upset in front of the kids on Christmas Day. So I cooked the vegetables again and pretended everything was fine. Then we all sat down for dinner without Glynn – who didn't reappear that day. 'Daddy's poorly,' I said. 'He'll be better tomorrow.' I was upset with him but by morning I'd softened. He was devastated and kept apologising. 'You need to



speak to your doctor again,' I said. Over the next few months Glynn sank even lower. He was still on medication and having weekly counselling but it was as if he was shutting down, refusing to talk to me. I loved Glynn but I felt I'd lost the man I'd married. 'Unless you get better, we can't be together,' I told him. It was harsh but I hoped it would prompt him to get more help.

Then on 26 March 2012, I'd just put the kids to bed at 7.30pm when I noticed a text from Glynn, sent an hour before. He was meant to be at his counselling session. 'Please don't judge me. Kiss my babies goodnight,' it read. A horrible feeling washed over me. I called and texted him, then, frantically, I rang his counsellor and friends to see if they'd heard from him. Nobody had. I even rang a local Travelodge to see if he'd booked in, but he hadn't. Then at 11.30pm there was a knock on the door. It was two officers from the Transport Police. 'There's been an incident involving your husband,' one began, as we sat down inside. 'I'm sorry, he was hit by a train.'

'Oh no,' I gasped, starting to cry. I knew immediately Glynn had killed himself. In a blur of tears, I rang Mum and soon after she arrived, the police officers left. 'What am I going to tell the kids?' I wept, as she held me close. They were six, four and two. 'You could tell them it was a terrible accident,' she said. But I couldn't bear the idea of them finding out the truth from someone else. After a sleepless night, the next day I sat the kids down with Mum. 'Daddy loved you very much,' I said gently. 'But he didn't love himself, so he's in heaven now.'

We all had a cuddle, but I don't think they really understood. George went to play, but later came back and had a little cry with me. Glynn's funeral a week later felt surreal. As I gave

a reading and spoke of all the things that reminded us of him – pancakes, kisses, play fights and cuddles – my heart broke. How would we cope now he'd gone?

At his inquest in March 2013, the coroner concluded that Glynn, 45, took his own life after experiencing depression. His death was no one's fault, but the feeling wouldn't go away – could I have done more to save him? I guess I'll never know.

'Kiss my babies goodnight'

Over the next few months, I took life a day at a time, focusing on the kids. Whenever they cried for Daddy I explained that he was in heaven, until it slowly started to sink in. Now I take George, nine, Eva, seven, and Antonia, five, to visit Glynn's grave on birthdays and the anniversary of his death. We miss him hugely but life does go on. Last March I met Issa, 36, after we got chatting at our local swimming pool. We're taking things slowly, but he's a huge support. I can't feel angry with Glynn for leaving us – I know he couldn't help being ill. All I can do now is try to give our children the happy life he'd have wanted for them but struggled to find for himself.

WARNING SIGNS...

- A person at risk of suicide may:
- Talk of wanting to die or self-harm
 - Use suicide-promoting websites
 - Complain of feeling hopeless or having no purpose
 - Lose interest in most things, including themselves
 - Have sudden outbursts of anger
 - Talk of feeling withdrawn or isolated
 - Increase their use of drugs/alcohol
 - Act anxiously or behave recklessly
 - Say they feel a burden to others
 - Sleep too little or too much
 - Display extreme mood swings
 - Lose self-esteem

If you're experiencing distress or despair, or are having suicidal thoughts, call the Samaritans on 0845 790 9090.