

## CLEMS STORY

In front of me sits a, now yellowing, desk calendar, open at Monday 17<sup>th</sup> May, 1999. This day was an extremely happy day, with lots of laughs. Clem had stayed home to help the Electrician who was wiring up the lights in his long awaited shed, so we stayed in bed a half an hour longer than usual, then had our breakfast together, which was usually reserved for weekends. We were able to have morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea together. We really enjoyed each others company and would sit and chatter on. The Electrician wasn't able to quite complete the wiring, but did turn the lights on to show Clem how they would work. Clem was delighted.

Following our evening meal, we sat and watched the news and current affairs then adjourned to the office to do some quoting and to organise the work for tomorrow, Tuesday. Tony, our excavator driver, had been working at a site in Deep Creek Road, East Doncaster and had problems on the Monday, so Clem decided he would go to that site and help Tony and would cart away the excess soil from the site. So on the Monday night Clem spoke to Tony and they decided the start time and discussed different aspects of the job, etc.

After this Clem and I went up stairs to prepare for bed. I usually went up the stairs first, because in the past Clem had gone first and waited in the dark stairwell until I had passed then jumped out and frightened me, which we laughed and joked about, but this time he followed me up and was pinching me on the bottom. I had my shower and got into bed, Clem then got in the shower and was talking to me while he was shaving and washing. He said he didn't really want to go to this job as he had bad vibes about it, and also that the job wasn't really ready to be done but that A.V. Jennings, whose earthworks we were contracted to complete, wanted something done to appease the clients who were threatening to pull out of the deal, so he felt obliged to do the job.

Unusually on this evening Clem also commented that we must do something about making out our wills. I don't know why he bothered talking while under the shower; he couldn't have possibly heard my replies. When we were both in bed I cuddled up to him and told him how much I loved him and that I just couldn't be without him and he said the same about me. We discussed our plans for retirement the following Christmas, and he said that was the only thing keeping him going was the thought that we would soon be able to have more time together and do lots of things including travel that we just hadn't had the time to do for the past 12 or so years. It was a very cool night and I felt warm and contented in his strong arms. Little did we know that that would be our last night together and that in less than 12 hours I would be a widow?

Next morning, the 18<sup>th</sup> May 1999, Clem quietly arose around 6am showered and dressed, leaving me to sleep a little longer. He then went down to have breakfast which I had laid out for him the previous night, then he came up to me and gave me a big hug and kiss and we whispered sweet nothings to each other. I heard Clem leave the house and the truck start up, then I heard him come back into the house, maybe he had left his mobile phone inside, I very nearly got up to see him but I heard the door go as he went out again.

I sat up in bed and watched the truck and trailer drive down toward the gate. It was still not quite light and he had the lights on and I liked to check that all the tail and brake lights were working. As he drove away I felt I wanted to ring him just to hear his voice, but I knew he would be busy thinking about the job ahead. Much later I discovered that he did speak to a friend of ours and he told him he was going to do this job and he had really bad vibes about it.

Clem was killed when his empty truck and trailer, which had been towed backward onto the site by the excavator, started to roll down toward the busy road, Clem ran along a steep embankment trying to reach the cabin, but in his haste he fell and slipped under the dual wheels of the truck. Only Clem and the excavator operator know why he hadn't pulled on the parking brakes and why the excavator driver didn't check it was safe to drop the quick hitch, and I can only speculate.

I can blame the Jennings site supervisor for not making sure the driveway was ready by having arranged to have stone placed, so as to enable the truck to drive forward onto the site, I can blame the excavator operator for dropping the chain off the quick hitch before he had ensured it was safe to do so and of course I can blame Clem for not having put the brakes on, for had he done this he would still be here by my side, or could it have been a combination of circumstances.

According to the policeman who checked Clem, his eyes were open and when the Ambulance driver arrived they said his eyes were closed. That worries me. Did he know what was going on? Was he in pain? According to the coroner's report, death was instantaneous. This beautiful, loving, kind and much-loved husband of mine, for the past 17 short years, was unable to come home to me.

I really wanted them to bring him home for one last time, but they had to take him to the hospital to be certified then to the Coroners. The next time I saw him was the night before the funeral, and I just couldn't understand why he was just lying there, he just looked as if he were asleep.

When the police, two very young constables, came to tell me about the accident, I didn't believe them and made them tell me over and over, then I began to hyperventilate, my mouth was dry, I couldn't breathe, couldn't remember family names or phone numbers for them to call for help for me. They went through my phone book and rang one of my daughters and soon everyone began arriving.

Within an hour or so I had a call from the Tissue bank to request donation of tissue, it all seemed so unreal. The Doctor arrived and spent an hour or so talking with the girls and me and left a prescription for the girls to get some medication for me. I don't know how I could have done without that help over the next 6 months. That night I went to bed and tried to sleep, but scared to go to sleep and wake up and find Clem gone. Staying awake seemed better somehow. My hand went under Clem's pillow and I came across his PJ's, I screamed and my girls came running and took them away. My girls took it in turns to stay with me for over 6 months at which time one of my daughters and her young family moved in for the next 2 years. For the few days between the death and funeral, the celebrant, who had also married us, kept me busy, getting together Clem's life story and the story of our life together.

The number of people at the funeral was huge, because Clem was such a very well liked man, with a great sense of pride and dignity. The few years since Clem's death have been horrific, we have all suffered, his sons, my daughters and his sisters and brother. I have had to deal with the selling up of assets, solicitors and workcover and all this made even more difficult because of the lack of a legal will.

My life is rather empty now and I still look to the front gate at 5pm waiting for the truck to appear. About 6 months after that terrible day, I was diagnosed with Breast Cancer, which the Doctors feel was stress related. It was a difficult time having an operation, Chemotherapy and Radiotherapy without my man beside me in person, but Clem was in my thoughts constantly.

A few months after Clem's death I attended my first meeting with IDSA, (Industrial Deaths Support and Advocacy Inc) who offer help and support to family, friends and workmates. I came into close contact with other families who have been through the trauma of losing a loved one in a workplace accident, heard terrible stories and I felt the loving support of those around me, apart from my family.

IDSA is a non profit association and as well as giving each other practical support, the members of IDSA spend time in speaking to employees and employers stressing the importance of safe practices in the work place. Our members attend Court hearings in support of each other, advise on solicitors and offer counselling. Donations to IDSA are tax deductible. More details of IDSA can be found on: [www.idsa.com.au](http://www.idsa.com.au) or by phone on 03 9309 4453.

Dealing with all these matters is very daunting as in all these cases it is the first time we have had to deal with any of these things. Dealing with the workcover authority can be very difficult, and as in my case as a self-employed person and it is often difficult to get any answers and to find out exactly what the process involves and the time factors. This is where IDSA can be very informative. Although our name implies that we only deal with cases of industrial death, ALL workplace deaths are included in our support network.

Not all cases of death in the workplace are caused by negligent employers, there are some deaths that are pure accident and others caused by ones own careless actions, maybe just a momentary lapse of attention. We should always be vigilant and aware of our own safety and of those around us.

The other problem I would like to make everyone aware of is the necessity to make out a legal will. In these days where there are so many blended families, making out a will can be difficult, but to die and leave others to sort out and deal with solicitors is very negligent and can cause severe rifts within the family.

The courts have set rules as to how an Estate is to be divided in the case of Intestacy, but this may not necessarily be how you would wish your assets divided and may leave your loved ones at a disadvantage. In my case I was left with sorting out and selling off assets and in the process an unnecessary rift with my stepsons occurred and I now am unable to see the grandchildren who called me "Grandma".

It is difficult enough to deal with the death of a loved one without all the legalities and complications that accompany it.

Life without Clem is so very different, at times throughout the past three years, I have wondered if I really want to continue to live like this, but having seen the grief caused by the death of loved ones I know I must keep on and attempt to make some sense out of the tragedy and try to help someone else along the way.

Clem, you brought love and laughter into my life, you will always have a very special place in my heart, sleep peacefully my love. Marion