

Central Queensland University

Amy Benn

The final letter

Biographical note:

Amy Benn, BA Hons (UOW), Grad Cert SCD (UOW), is a PhD candidate at Central Queensland University, where she is creating an illustrated historical novel on the transgenerational impacts of the Vietnam War in Australia. Using hand-pulled screen printing and photography, Amy's creative work explores issues of trauma, death, grief, survival and resilience. Amy's graphic memoirs have been published in the peer-reviewed journal *TEXT* and Canadian literary journal, *The Waggle Magazine*.

Keywords:

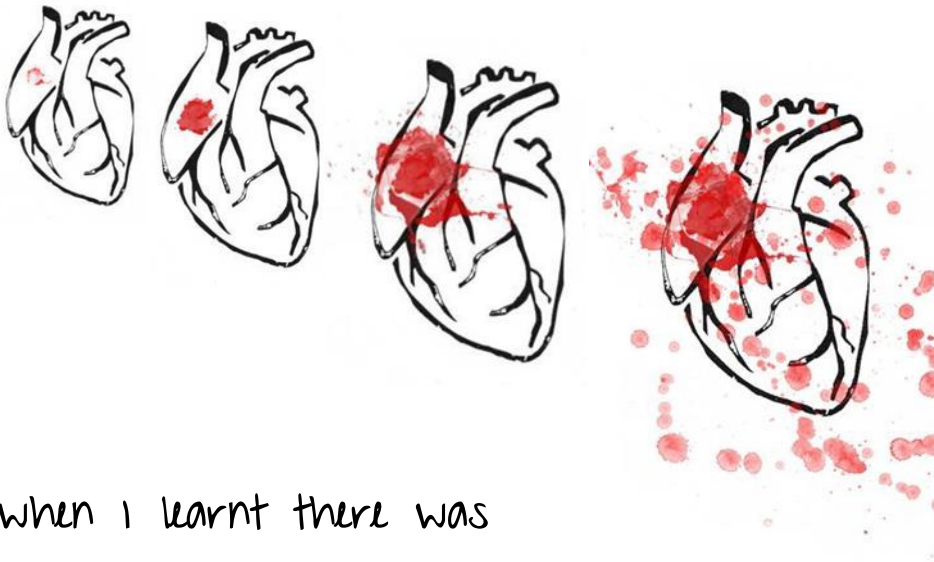
Creative writing – graphic memoir – suicide – resilience – trauma

The first line of my brother's final letter read:



Each word stabbed my heart.

I was fourteen years old



when I learnt there was
no love in my brother's
heart for me.

Because I loved him.

my brother killed himself rather than reach out to me.

He did not love me enough to stay.



Since his death, I have come to believe if my own
brother did not love me ...

How can anyone?

How can you?



Research statement

Research background

Building on previous work, ‘Two neat boxes’ (2016) and ‘The year my brother died’ (2018), this work melds poetry and comic art to further explore the experience of my brother’s suicide. This work aims to further illustrate a truthful account of grief and loss as it was, and continues to be.

Research contribution

Contributing to the broader field of graphic memoirs that use comic panels to lead the reader through a narrative, this work employs written and visual elements within fixed panels, borders and text boxes to tell a highly personal story. Adding Carroll’s work (2014), who uses black and white images with colour spotting in her short horror comics, and short diary comics by Bell (2017), this work is a visually dense graphic memoir that relies on comic conventions and poetic prose to articulate the thoughts and feelings that followed the news of my brother’s suicide.

Research significance

This work demonstrates the lasting and reverberating significance of such a death (Kaslow and Aronson 2004). Anatomical heart screen prints were chosen to attempt to represent the realness of lived experience. Adding spotted colour to these illustrations highlights the addition of a new element to *my* life – suicide. Carrying this illustration through to the second page of the memoir sought to reinforce the message of the piece – that suicide is a form of death that resonates with survivors long after the event. This work was peer reviewed before acceptance for publication.

Works cited

- Bell, G 2017 *Everything is flammable* Minneapolis: Uncivilised
- Benn, A 2016 ‘Two neat boxes’ *TEXT* special issue 35, at <http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue35/Bennett.pdf> (accessed 8 May 2018)
- Benn, A 2018 ‘The year my brother died’ *The Waggle Magazine* 7, 30–3
- Carroll, E 2014 *Through the woods* New York: Margaret McElderry
- Kaslow, NJ and SG Aronson 2004 ‘Recommendations for family interventions following a suicide’ *Professional Psychology: Research & Practice* 35 (3), 240–7