

## **Life and Death**

Cian is a 10 year old boy who lives with his parents in Patrickswell, County Limerick. Patrickswell is a small rural town in Limerick. Cian moved there with his parents two years ago. He goes to the local primary school where his favourite subjects are art, music and physical education. He loves lots of sports especially Hurling, Gaelic Football and Soccer. His favourite soccer team is Manchester United. He plays hurling for his local club every Saturday evening. Cian and his parents live in a three bedroom, semi detached, end of terrace house. His parent's names are Niamh and Sean; they are both in their 40's and are originally from County Tipperary. Niamh is from Borrisokane County Tipperary and Sean is from Nenagh County Tipperary. They met each other when they were in secondary school over twenty years ago. They got married 14 years ago. Niamh is a teacher in the local primary school where Cian goes to, she teaches Junior Infants, Senior Infants, First Class and Second class. Sean is a car mechanic who set up his own car repair shop in the town a year ago. There are lots of families who live on the same street as them and they also have a next door neighbour named George. George is in his 60's and is an alcoholic. George lives on his own with his 12 year old Border collie named Jett. When he drinks he gets very angry and annoyed very easily and usually takes it out on Jett by hitting him really hard. Normally George is a lovely and friendly man when he is sober however when he is drunk he becomes very abusive towards his dog and this in turn makes Jett very weary and fearful of George all the time.

One fine Saturday morning when Cian was on his way to hurling practice, he passed George's house and he could hear horrible noises coming from the back of the house. The noises he could hear sounded like shouting, crashing and crying. They were terrifying noises. Cian stopped to see what was going on. A few moments later Jett, the Border collie, appeared from the back door, limping and bloody around the face. Cian got very scared and ran back home to tell his parents of what he had seen. His parents came out straight away and when they saw the dog they immediately rang the animal rescue centre and within minutes two animal rescuers came to the scene. Cian explained to them what he had witnessed. The rescuers told Cian and his parents to stay outside. The animal rescuers then went to the dog; the dog seemed scared and weary but friendly. They went in to talk to George. Cian went over to the dog feeling a little scared as he did not know how the dog would react. His parents did not want him to go near the dog and tried to stop him but he felt he had to do something for Jett.

He then approached Jett and the dog seemed very happy to meet a nice, kind person. It is like the dog knew that this little child was going to be kind to him. He started wagging his tail. The rescuers finally came out of George's house after what seemed like a very long time and told Cian that this was a case of abuse, not just animal abuse but alcohol abuse also. Cian could not understand why anyone could do this to any living creature.

Niamh explained to Cian that George suffered from alcohol abuse due to the fact that he was abused by his father himself as a child, his father used to come home drunk every night and beat his wife and children, she told Cian that back then that there was no help for people with alcohol problems and therefore the problems were taken out on spouses and children and so George now uses alcohol himself to cover up his feelings about the abuse that he suffered as a child, while not condoning the abuse that George gives to Jett she explains to Cian that when he is drunk he does not know what he is doing and when he sobers up he may feel sorry and regret what he had done.

Cian still could not understand what alcohol can do. Sean then explained that alcohol gives you a sense of false comfort or Dutch courage as some would say. It makes you do things and say things that you would not say or do if you were sober. There are chemicals in alcohol that make some people addicted to it and the only way they can come off it is with help from other people, and that is if they want it he explained to Cian.

The rescuers then told Cian and his parents that Jett will have to be removed from the property as soon as possible. Cian asks the rescuers what will then happen to Jett. They told him that he will be looked over by the vet at the centre. They then explained that the vet may have to put him down. Cian didn't know what that meant and asked his dad. His dad explained as gentle as he could that Jett may have to die because of his injuries or if they can't find him a proper home. Cian didn't like the sound of that and felt very overwhelmed by the whole situation, he then thought for a few moments and asked his parents if Jett could stay with them.

His parents were very sceptical about the idea because they thought that the dog may be too aggressive. Cian tried to explain to his parents that the dog can sense kindness and knows when people are being nice to him. The rescuers suggested that the dog be looked over by a vet and then a decision can be made. A few hours later the rescuers returned to George's house where they agreed to meet with Cian and his parents outside the house and they told them that other than cuts and bruises Jett seemed to be fine. Cian was very relieved at the news. His parents came around to the idea of having Jett stay with them after much talking with Cian about how the dog may not be allowed to live with them if the vet says he has to be put down and if Jett does get to stay with them that he is a living creature with needs and it is very important to comfort him, feed him and exercise him regularly. It is a big responsibility they warned him.

George came out of the house a lot sober now then he was a few hours ago. He was very sorry about what had happened and was willing to sign the dog over to the Animal rescue centre. He explained to them that he never meant to hurt Jett and that he loved the dog so much and would love to see him go to a loving home, he explained that when he was drunk he didn't know what he was doing but when he was sober he loved Jett so much that he didn't want to give him up however he felt it was the best thing for Jett in the end. The Animal Rescuers told George that there is nothing wrong in admitting that you have a problem and the first step is admitting it. They advised him of a local Alcoholics Anonymous programme held in the town every Tuesday night. George did not know about this programme and was very relieved and happy that someone told him about it. He resolved to go there every Tuesday to get help for his problem. Cian and his parents told George that Jett was going to be OK and that they would look after him and as long as he was doing well in the programme he could visit Jett any time he wanted. George was very happy to accept and hear this.

A few months went by and one morning Cian woke up a little earlier than usual, he came downstairs to find Jett was not moving. He went over to the dog and shook him a little. He then ran upstairs as quickly as he could to get his parents. He dragged his parents downstairs and in a frantic voice told his parents that Jett was in the sitting room and was not moving he kept asking what's wrong, what's wrong. Sean went over to Jett and gave him a gentle touch and had a sad expression on his face. He came back to Cian and knelt down to him and told him in a gentle voice that Jett had passed away peacefully in his sleep. Cian started crying and felt very sad over the death of a dog he had grown to love so much in the last few months. Niamh told him that he can always have comfort in the fact that Jett in his last months of life died in a loving, caring home. Cian couldn't understand how he was feeling or what to do as he had never experienced death in any kind before. He told his mother he had all sorts of thoughts and questions going through his mind. He said I don't know what to think or feel. His parents told him that this is normal and that anytime he needed to talk to them about any questions he had or how he was feeling it is ok to talk to anyone he knew about it because it is very important to talk.

Cian asked his parents why Jett had to die. Niamh told him that Jett was a very old dog and was abused in his lifetime and his heart could not take any more. But Jett is only two years older than me Cian cried. Niamh said yes that is true however in dog years 12 years is very old. Dogs age

differently to us. Cian started crying hysterically and Niamh came over to hug him. He then asked why am I feeling this way dad. Why am I so sad? The reason you feel this way is because you know that Jett has died and you are going to miss him very much. I remember when I was your age I had a dog much like Jett and he died too and I missed him so much for a long time. Will this feeling ever go away Cian asked. It will eventually his dad said, it may take a little while but it will and you will be happy again. What about George we will have to tell him.

Niamh suggested that if Cian wanted to, we could all go over to George's house together in a few hours and tell George about the death of Jett. Cian asked if he could be the one to tell George what happened to Jett. His dad was open to the idea as it may help Cian in the grieving process. His mother was more sceptical and asked Cian are you sure about this? It is a very hard thing to tell someone and it is your first experience of death. Cian thought for a moment and said I'm sure, I know what it is like to lose Jett and I know that when George was sober he loved Jett very much.

Although George had seen Jett a few times after he was handed over. He had been so busy getting help for his alcohol addiction, he couldn't see Jett as often as he would have liked. He went to the meetings every single week and was progressing well. He now even volunteers for the animal rescue centre that removed Jett because he realised that he loved animals so much he wanted to help them especially after what he had been through with Jett. After much paper work and when the Animal rescue centre were happy that he was genuinely getting help for his addiction they decided to give him a chance.

George was out in his garden attending to the potatoes he had planted a few months ago on the afternoon that Jett died and when he looked up he saw Cian and his parents walking on the footpath towards his house. He noticed that Cian was crying he had that sinking feeling that something was wrong. When they approached George Sean asked if they could talk to him.

George said yes definitely and showed them into the sitting room in the house. He said sit anywhere you like, what is it you would like to talk to me about? Niamh told him that we have some very upsetting news and Cian has decided that he would like to tell you himself about it. Cian took a minute to gather in his head what he would like to say to George. He told George in a slow calm way that Jett had died and as soon as it was said he started crying hysterically again. George looked shocked and started to cry also. He came over to comfort Cian he put his arm around him and told him it is ok and said that Jett will never ever again experience pain. George told Cian of all the good times he had with Jett when he was sober and how he loved to play ball. Cian began to smile because he also had great memories of playing ball with Jett and told George that he loved his bed also. He then went on to tell George that he and his parents are very proud of him and how he is getting a lot better now with his alcohol addiction. He looked up at his parents and they gave a nod of approval. He told George that he was their best friend and now that Jett was gone they wanted to help George even more with his program until he was finished with it and even after. He assured George that he will always have friends. George was very happy with what was said and told Cian and his parents that even though Jett was gone he brought three great friends into his life and they all shared a group hug and more stories about the dog they all loved until it was time for Cian and his parents to go home.

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