



SEEDS

BY ROSS MACKINTOSH



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By Ross Mackintosh



FOREWORD (I)

Cartooning is the art of distilling reality to its essence. There is nothing superfluous in a good cartoon. That quality makes the medium particularly well-suited for memoir: comics are like memories, in that they filter and capture only the most important details. The difference between good and bad cartooning is how well the cartoonist filters and captures. Ross Mackintosh is a good cartoonist.

In the century-plus history of modern comics, the notion of using the medium to tell personal, powerful, true stories is relatively new. In *Seeds*, Mackintosh draws himself struggling to describe the type of “adult comic” he wants to attempt, not even sure what to call it. There are many people who still believe that comics are only meant to be funny ephemera for children. They are wrong. *Seeds* adds to a growing bibliography of comics work that refutes them with intelligence, maturity, sensitivity, seriousness of purpose, and wit.

Comics combine words and art to transcend the sum of their parts. Their lack of detail encourages readers to fill the void with details from their own lives and identify with abstract squiggles of ink. It’s strange and wonderful. Readers will tell a cartoonist, “My family and situation were nothing at all like yours but it’s as if you were sitting in our home watching us!” When this happens to Ross, as it will, he should graciously say thanks, take the credit, and not try to solve the paradox. He will have discovered that he has told a nearly universal story and that families facing a crisis are pretty much the same everywhere. It is a simultaneously sad and heartening realisation.

Having learned that lesson first-hand, I’m gratified but not surprised to recognise aspects of myself and my family in a story created by a man I’ve never met who lives a continent and an ocean away. *Seeds* is about Ross Mackintosh’s family, and mine, and millions of others. That’s what good comics can do.

Brian Fies
Creator - Mom’s Cancer

FOREWORD (II)

Death is part of life and comes to us all. Sometimes it is sudden and unexpected and at other times it announces itself well beforehand... but in both cases it is a subject which we still find difficult to talk about openly.

We all have to cope with the death of someone close to us in our lives - frequently this will be the death of a parent, though for a child it may also be the death of a cat or some other pet. What we need to do is be able to talk about it with someone we know well - either the person dying themselves or with friends, parents some other close confidante.

If we can discuss it with our nearest and dearest it helps both the dying and those left behind - to (a) come to terms with death (b) to know what the person dying and those who have to cope with the death - want.

As far as what the person who is dying actually wants - some will want lots of medical treatment to keep them alive as long as possible, whilst others will feel, because of the chances of treatment doing any good being so small - that they want the emphasis to be more on a 'dignified' death which is quick and as painless as possible - but a kind of death where they feel 'in control'.

Seeing how Ross felt about his father's death will help others in the same situation.

Dr Ann McPherson FRCGP FRCP CBE, GP
Medical Director of Health Experiences Research Group at University of Oxford.

and

Dr Aidan Macfarlane MA, MBBChir. FRCP, FRPCH, FFPH.
Independent International Consultant in Child and Adolescent Health.

INTRODUCTION

My previous attempts at creating a comic story had always resulted in short, comedic sketches. I thought that if I were capable of creating a comic I would have to channel a more grand inspiration. This was to come sooner than I thought, and in a way I could not have predicted.

I often feel that I am observing my life, as if each overheard conversation or view of a scene is framed in my mind as a work of art. As the distressing events of my Dad's terminal disease unfolded, I couldn't help but visualise them as a sequence of images, narrated by my new opinions.

When dramatic things happen in our lives our senses amplify and we suddenly seem to have a more efficient memory. I wrote down snippets of dialogue and narration, without a clue of what I should do with them, but when I realised this could be a comic, I could see the whole thing in my mind, from beginning to end.

I worked on rough sketches between February and April 2010. I then spent three months pencilling and another three inking and lettering. I didn't presume anyone else would like to read it, let alone publish. As I was creating it, it became clear that it was not only a catharsis but somehow a gift for the casualties: my brothers and my Mom; a record of the tumult and a brief homage to my Dad. A way of prolonging the memory. A lot of work we do in life is done to achieve longevity, making our artifacts mimic our genes and live on after we depart.

From an early age we become aware that one day we will die, but are encouraged not to contemplate it. Indeed, mythologies have been created to distract us from it. All the people around us, our loved ones, our work colleagues, our bus drivers and celebrities, will end, just as we will. Although our instinctive self-preservation may find the prospect of decay and ultimate disappearance discomfiting, it will happen. Should the consideration and discussion of an inevitable event in all our lives be so repulsive? Can't we all learn from hearing the opinions of others about something so pertinent? There's a reason that skeletons are used as figures of fear. It's not as if a ligament-free bone man can cause us any harm, is it? Think of Dickens' Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come, the thing that we fear the most. It's not a werewolf or an unpaid debt, it's death. Death and insignificance.

But this is not a book about death. It's a book about my Dad. A man who never took things too seriously. He was an engineer by trade, gradually working hard enough over the years to carve himself a niche whereby he could earn a living wage by exerting the least possible amount of effort. His love of sport was something he failed to pass on to his sons, but I can see how his curiosity about how things work (usually machinery) has passed on to me. It's unlikely Socrates' claim that, "The unexamined life is not worth living", was a conscious pursuit for Dad, but he certainly didn't like to take things at face value. His apparent working-class roots and pub-going, sport-loving image were at odds with his philosophical, inquisitive mind.

Dad was also a fan of comedy. Whether it was an Edinburgh Fringe stand-up or a new TV sit-com, Dad knew about it. He didn't enjoy fiction, be it literary or cinematic, preferring documentary - 'real life'. I'm not sure what he would have felt about being the main character in a 'factual' comic book but I'm certain he wouldn't disapprove.

Too many father/son relationships burst at the seams with unarticulated emotion and one can guess the reasons for this. My connection with my Dad, albeit still fraught with unspeak, was as satisfying as I could ask for.

Dad's care during the early stages of his decline was provided by an NHS Hospital. We are fortunate that we live in a country and period in history where we have doctors and nurses who are available to draw upon immense knowledge, gathered over centuries, and not only tell us what ails us but try their best to treat it. Overgate Hospice, who provided care in the later stages of Dad's illness, not only ensured my Dad was cared for in a sympathetic way, but the support they provide for families is nothing short of remarkable. That such an organisation exists within our society should reassure us all of the level of humanity we are capable of.

I am lucky. Some people experience the death of loved ones who haven't yet reached adulthood. I didn't. Some people don't get advance notice. I did.

Ross Mackintosh, 2011.

For Andy, Greg and Mom

COMPLIMENTARY COPY
NOT FOR RESALE



WHAT'S WRONG?



I'VE GOT SOME BAD NEWS



YOUR DAD HAS CANCER



OK, I COULD
DEAL WITH
THIS.
PEOPLE GET
CANCER ALL
THE TIME
AND
SURVIVE.
ESPECIALLY
PROSTATE
CANCER...



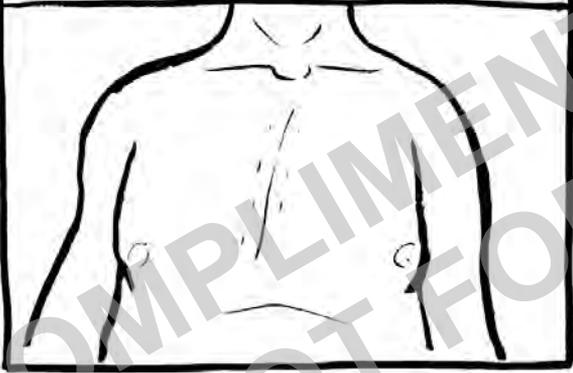
...AND THE GOOD NEWS
WAS THAT
THEY'D
FOUND IT



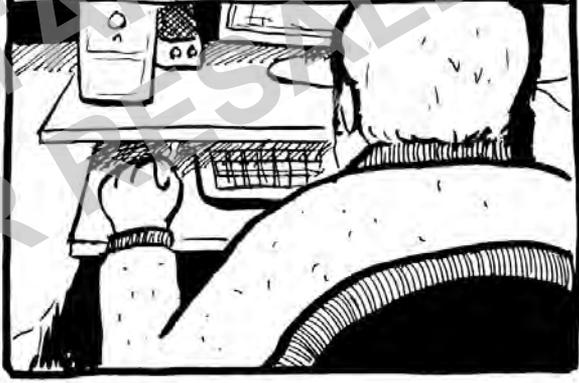
DAD HAD HEALTH
SCARES BEFORE...



...IN 1989 HE HAD A
TRIPLE HEART BYPASS



HE'S SPENT THE LAST
DECADE OR SO TINKERING
WITH HIS COMPUTER...



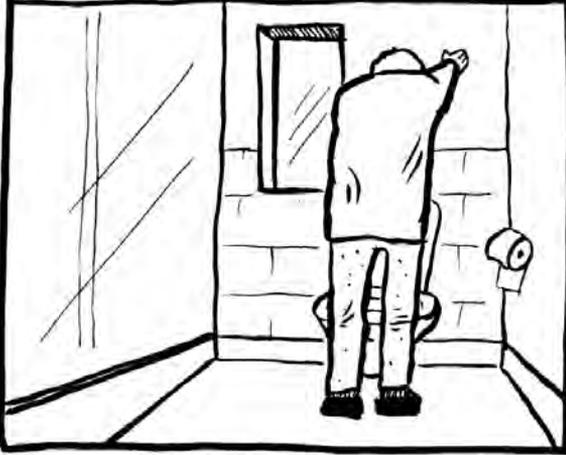
...OR WATCHING TV. HE
RARELY LEFT HOME...



...AND WAS PERFECTLY
HAPPY WITH THAT



THE DIAGNOSIS WAS PROSTATE CANCER...



...BUT APART FROM THE DELAY OF ALL THE DOCTOR'S TESTS...



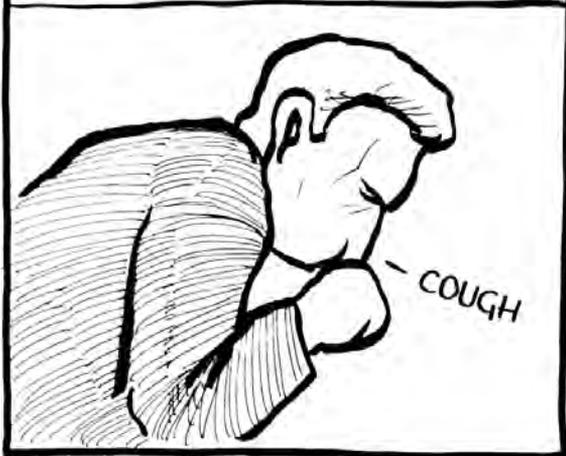
...HE DIDN'T FEEL TOO BAD

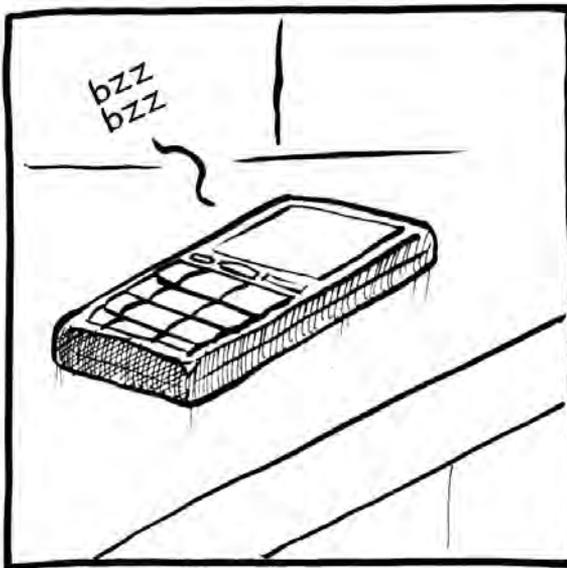


UNTIL ONE DAY, A FEW MONTHS LATER...



HIS BREATHING BECAME LABOURED





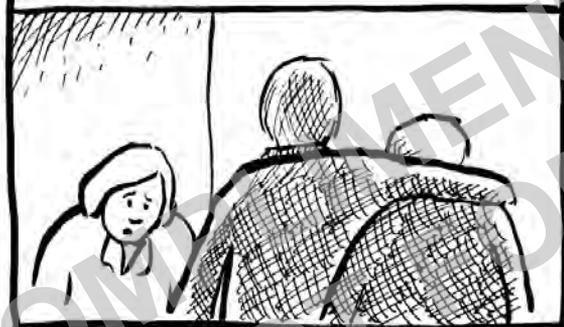
DAD WAS CRYING



I'D NEVER SEEN HIM CRY



MOM TOLD ME THAT HE'D COME FOR A CHECK-UP ON HIS BREATHING, AND ENDED UP HYPERVENTILATING



THEY THINK IT WAS A PANIC ATTACK

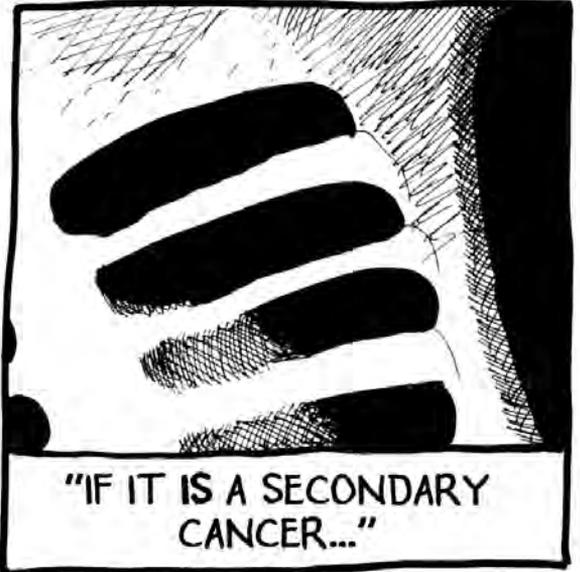
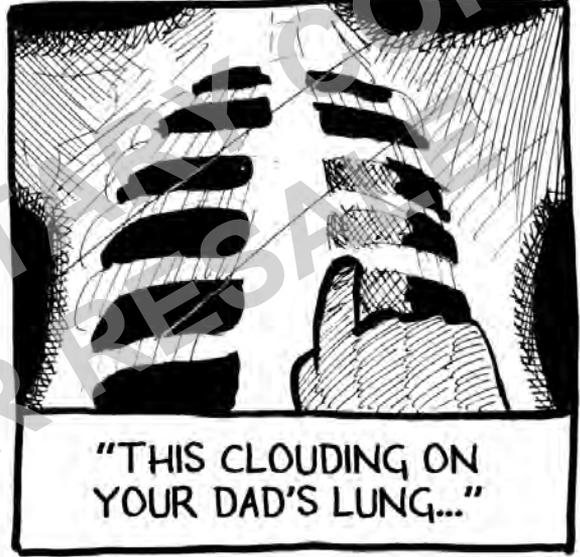


AT LEAST I COULD NOW PUT MY ARM AROUND HIM



..WHICH WAS SOMETHING I'D NEVER DONE BEFORE





THEN THERE'S NOTHING
WE CAN DO ABOUT IT



HE MUST HAVE THOUGHT
THAT I LOOKED LIKE A
RESPONSIBLE PERSON...



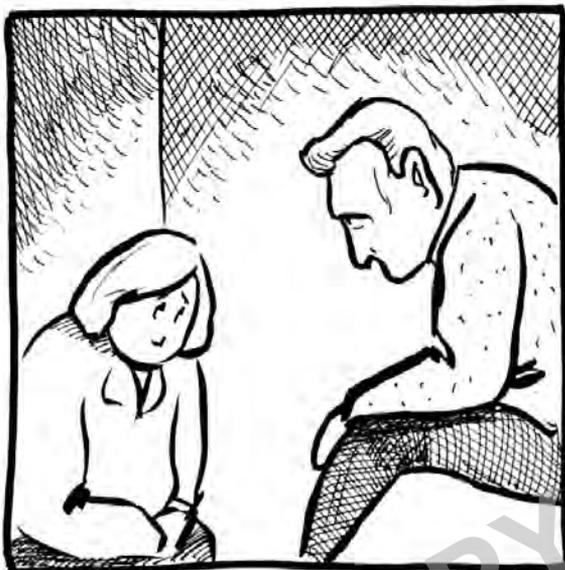
...THAT I LOOKED
RESILIENT ENOUGH TO
ACCEPT BAD NEWS...



...AND TO DO WITH IT
WHAT I CHOSE



WHAT WAS I GOING TO TELL THEM?



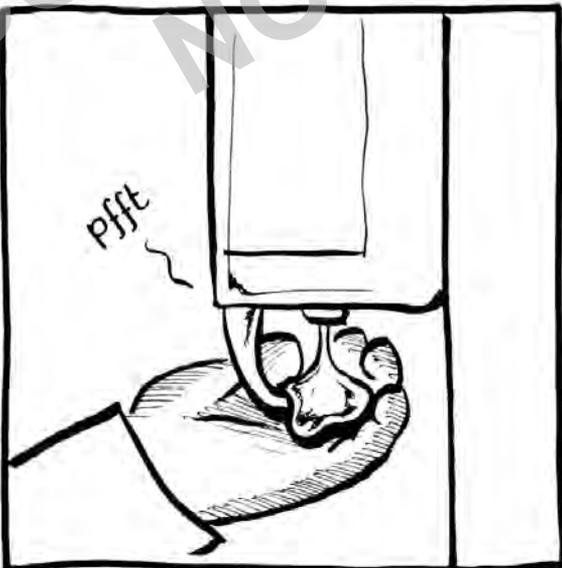
I GUESS THEY HAD WORKED IT OUT FOR THEMSELVES



WE'LL NEED TO KEEP HIM IN HOSPITAL OVERNIGHT

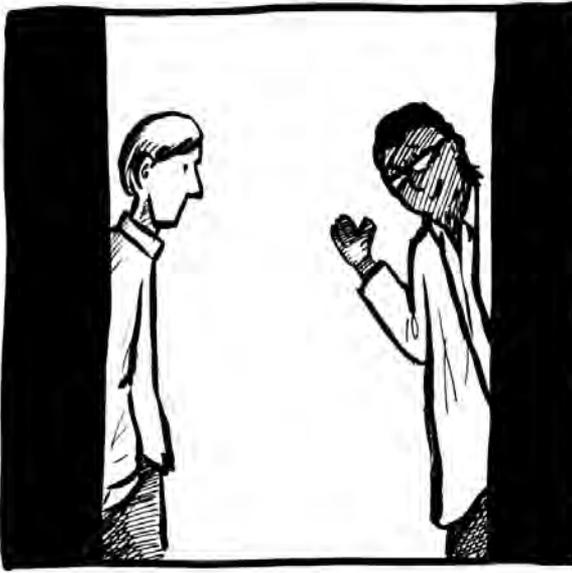


Pffft



A PORTER WILL BE HERE SOON





BEFORE I SAW THE X-RAY,
THERE WERE THREE OF
US IN THAT ROOM...



...NOW THERE WERE FOUR

