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RULE NUMBER ONE

It was the famous line in the *Fight Club*: rule number one, 'don't talk about *Fight Club*.' Surreal as it was, the great thing about *Fight Club* as a film was the sideways look it took at support group culture.

The only thing that's missing is a support group for people who have no real problems but would like someone to talk this over with.

Are support groups and charities really part of the problem more than part of the solution? When my brother died of cancer at the age of 42 I was left so isolated I might as well have been on a desert island with my top 10 favourite records. The advice I heard time and time again was to go and see the nice volunteers at Cruse Bereavement Care.

This is all well and good but I suspect at least part of the function of organisations such as Cruse is to provide a 'feel good factor' for their volunteers as much as to provide 'therapy', doled out in 60-minute bursts, for us poor unfortunates who've experienced what is, after all, a purely natural event that is going to happen to everyone sooner or later.

As a way of getting to know new people and make friends I've been setting up a county-wide yahoo group for Shakespeare fans.

It was an idealistic image — a housebound octogenarian chatting online with a 17-year-old GCSE student about the real meaning of 'get thee to a nunnery'. People lift sharing, offering the seldom used back seat of their car to someone who can no longer drive (perhaps because of failing eyesight, a Parkinson's tremor, or being unable to afford a car). E-mails have flooded out from this PC to the MS society, the blind association, the deaf association, schools, and sixth form colleges.

I was obviously being too idealistic if I thought groups would be interested or even bother to mail a reply.

There certainly are people out there who would love to join a yahoo group and chat about Shakespeare, get the old grey cells working, perhaps visit a local amateur dramatics performance, but it's difficult to break down the barriers that age and ability have placed around us all. Charities have their own agendas. Those poor unfortunates (who are blind or have MS for example), need the help of those lovely volunteers and have to be treated

as 'disabled' rather than as people who have all kinds of experiences which they could share with the younger generation.

I sent an email to Cruse about the Norfolk Shakespeare fans, believing that bereaved people would benefit from the opportunity to chat online about their hobby, have the chance to meet up with other people at the theatre, life share, that kind of thing.

I should have known better than to think that Cruse wanted someone treading on their patch and challenging their idea that all bereaved people need a good cry and someone to hold their hand rather than a network of new friends.

The Norfolk branch of the Depression Alliance didn't reply either. Perhaps they've already seen Hamlet.

We live in a society which is increasingly placing us all in different boxes. Faith schools are going to break us all down by religion. From Lidl to Sainsbury's, from *The Sun* to the *Telegraph*, our class system breaks us down by work and education. Support groups are breaking us down by 'problem'.

Even the egalitarian world of yahoo groups is unable to scale the dizzy heights of the walls we all live behind.

Pity really, it was such a nice idea.

The Norfolk Shakespeare fans yahoo group welcomes members regardless of (dis)ability, education or income. You just need to live in Norfolk, enjoy Shakespeare and want to chat about the world's most frequently performed playwright. We're also on Facebook. By the way, 'nun' in Elizabethan England was slang for a prostitute so Hamlet's famous line to Ophelia is just a way of a young man calling his ex-girlfriend a whore.

Shakespeare could prove better than temazepam!

Fiona Dowson

If there are any Norfolk GPs who would like a poster of The Norfolk Shakespeare fans yahoo group please do email norfolkshakespearefans@yahoo.co.uk

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