

TURNING PAIN INTO PURPOSE

When I was a kid, I wanted to be a doctor. A brain surgeon. But God has a way of throwing us curve balls that force us down a different path.

Sometimes those paths are most welcome, like mothering four wonderful children. My least favorite? Losing a child. That path is long and torturous, and took me straight through the belly of hell.

My story began one night in 2007, when I had a vivid dream. I was the front passenger in a car and my daughter Aly was sitting behind the driver. Suddenly the car missed a curve and sailed into a lake. The driver and I escaped the sinking car, but Aly did not.

My beloved daughter was gone. The only thing she left behind was a book floating in the water where she disappeared.

Two years later, in August 2009, that horrible nightmare came true when Aly died as a back seat passenger in a car accident.

Returning home from a swim meet, the car carrying Aly was T-boned by a father coming home from work. My beautiful fifteen-year-old daughter took the brunt of the impact and died instantly. She was the only fatality.

Life couldn't get any worse, right? Wrong. Hell wasn't done with me yet.

My dear hubby buried his grief in the sand. He escaped into 80-hour work weeks, more wine, more food, and less talking. His blood pressure shot up, his cholesterol went off the chart, and the perfect storm arrived on June 4, 2012.

My husband suddenly began drooling and couldn't

speak. At age 46, my soulmate was having a major stroke.

My dear hubby lived, but he couldn't talk, read, or write, and his right side was paralyzed. He needed help just to sit up in bed. He needed full-time care.

Still reeling from the loss of our daughter, I found myself again thrust into a fog of grief so thick, I couldn't see through the storm. Autopilot resumed its familiar place at the helm.

I needed God's reassurance that the sun was on the other side of hell. As I fought my way through the storm, He showed me that helping others was a powerful way to heal my own heart. I began reaching out to individuals who were adrift and in need of a warm hug.

In 2013, I formed AlyBlue Media to house my mission. Comforting people who spoke my language and listening to their stories, my mission took on a life of its own and came in many forms: a radio show, film, webinars, and writing. I also hosted a national convention. I wanted to bring the brokenhearted together.

I had many wonderful speakers, but the one who excited me most was a woman who had faced seven losses in a few short years—Martin Luther King's youngest daughter.

I didn't bring Dr. Bernice King to the convention to tell us about her famous father—we already knew that story. I wanted to know how she survived.

Over the course of that weekend, I was deeply moved by watching strangers swap stories and become newfound friends. These were stories born from hardship and yet remarkable on many levels.

Touched to the core, I set out to capture them into a book series aptly named Grief Diaries.

Now home to 5 literary awards and more than 700 writers spanning the globe, Grief Diaries has over 35 titles in print. Two years later I founded the International Grief Institute to help others invest in community resilience and strengthen the pipeline of hope.

I wanted to be a brain surgeon, but God had other plans. Being thrown into the forge so He could mold my soul was necessary for Him to accomplish those plans.

Life's lessons aren't easy because as humans, we don't learn from the easy stuff. It's sometimes necessary to reduce us like molten metal before we can be forged into a pillar of hope, courage, strength—or whatever God wants us to be—so we can serve others.

Once the forging was done, He filled my life—and heart—with blessings for which I am truly grateful, blessings that wouldn't have come about any other way. He'll do the same for you.

Where am I today?

Once a bereaved mother, always a bereaved mother. My heart is a bit like a broken teacup that's been glued back together. All the pieces are there, but they might not fit as seamlessly as they once did.

Some days the glue is strong and unyielding. Other days that glue is soft and threatens to spring a leak. Nonetheless, that teacup still holds water and serves God's purpose.

It's important to hold out hope that the sun can be found at the end of the path. But until you find it, it's comforting to know you aren't alone. God is there, even when you don't think He is.

For the record, I've found the sun. Some days I marvel at its beauty. Other days it hides behind clouds. But I now know those days don't last forever. And thanks to the lessons I've learned from my loss and trusting God along the way, my umbrella is stronger than ever.

Long story short, if I can turn pain into purpose, you can, too. Maybe not right this minute, but when God feels you're ready, he'll point you in the right direction.

Just trust that there is a bigger picture at play, and remember that He's not asking you to save the world, just help one person at a time.

In doing so, you'll help your own heart to heal.

LYNDA CHELDELIN FELL