

AN AMBIGUOUS EXPERIENCE THAT MUST BE FELT

A BEST FRIEND'S JOURNEY

Emily's roommate Hannah, 20, died by suicide in 2014

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True stories from the award-winning Grief Diaries series



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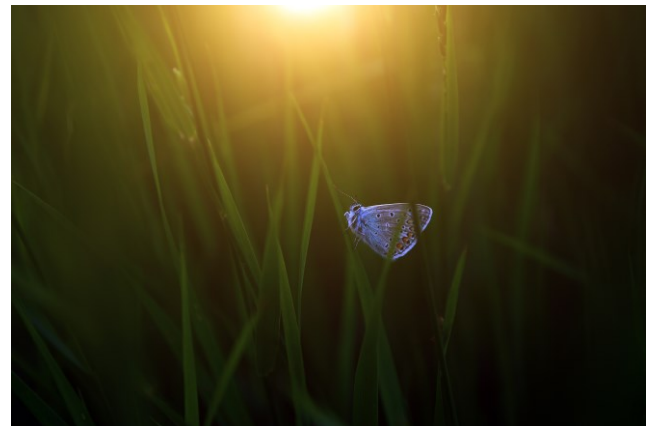
GRIEVING ISN'T LINEAR

The most important thing to know about my journey is that it isn't always uphill. Grieving isn't a linear climb where the various stages of it are completed and checked off one by one. It doesn't work that way.

Grief isn't an outline with corresponding deadlines that must be followed; it's an ambiguous experience that must be felt. We aren't in the driver's seat when it comes to experiencing the emotions of grief. We don't get to plug in our destination and choose our route; we have to simply sit in the passenger seat and process the emotions we experience at every turn.

I've found healing and growth in many areas and I've learned a lot of truths about grief, and I want to share those truths with others. I also want readers to know I have days where I feel the exact opposite of something I voiced. It simply demonstrates how grief can often be confusing, upside down, backwards, and exhausting.

I know deep down that I'm not responsible for the events of Hannah's suicide. But sometimes, on particularly fragile and emotional days, I truly believe that I am. I know the blessings and silver linings I've seen God bring out of this devastating loss, but there are also days when I don't see it at all.



I try to celebrate my little victories, because I know they're important and they matter, yet there are some days when I beat myself up over the areas I feel I'm falling short in. It's a rollercoaster; the kind that takes unexpected turns and jolts, and just when you think it's about to level out, you suddenly plummet. That's just how grief is, unfortunately. We don't get to build or choose the tracks of the rollercoaster, but we do have to ride it.

ANGER AND SELF-BLAME

I want to address two specific and important issues that often surface while processing this type of loss: anger and self-blame.

An honest truth is that many survivors of suicide struggle with feeling angry toward their loved one who died. When a loved one is murdered, the survivors process the anger toward the person who killed him. In loss by suicide, complex grief often results from the reality that the victim and perpetrator are one and the same.

I had moments of feeling very angry at Hannah; I still feel a twinge of guilt and pain even as I write these words. How can I feel angry at someone I love so much, and who was hurting so deeply? That's honestly one of the many reasons why grieving a loss by suicide is its own unique hell: there are contradicting thoughts and emotions involved.

There were honestly moments when I wanted to hate Hannah for taking her life. Immediately I would then hate myself for even thinking that, because I knew I could never hate her; I loved her too much.

When I dug deeper, I realized that my anger wasn't hateful anger; it was heartbroken anger. It was an anger stemming from love; it stemmed from a place deep within me, where the pain of losing her was so devastating and overwhelming that my desperate mind needed to find a definitive cause and/or someone to blame. And though it was heartbreaking to feel angry at her, I did at times. I was angry at her for giving up and acting so impulsively that night.

I was angry at her for leaving me to deal with the pieces of her life and the life we had together.

Our once intertwined routines were now just fragmented pieces.

I was angry at her for not giving me the chance to help her get through that night. I was angry at her for not calling me, when I made her promise that she'd call if she felt like she was going to do something irrational before I could get to her.

I was angry at Hannah for not thinking about what taking her life would do to those who love her. I was angry at her for causing the depth of pain and heartache I felt. I was angry at her, ultimately, because I loved her...and that's why it hurt so deeply.

I also realized that some of that anger I felt wasn't toward Hannah, but rather toward myself. I was angry at myself for the events of that night. Why did I let her hang up the phone? Why didn't I force her to talk to me until I got to her location? I was angry at myself for not seeing the severity of the situation. I was angry that, while out looking for her, I unknowingly drove past her location, the very location where she took her life. So I was angry at myself for not looking harder. I'll always wonder if I could have saved her in that moment, if only I had looked more.



I was angry at myself in general. I berated myself for not loving her better and not helping her more. I was angry at myself for waiting until we met to say what I wanted to say. I was angry at myself for not telling her often enough how much I loved her, cared about her, and what a difference she made in my life.

I was just angry in general and I felt like I failed her. I was angry for a while, because it didn't make sense. And no matter how hard I tried, no matter how deeply I searched within, no matter how much I tormented myself with retracing the events of that night, I still couldn't find any sense to it.

Hannah was an amazing, lively, loyal, driven, passionate, funny, outgoing, and loving girl. She had so much going for her. She had dreams and career goals: to be a nurse, a mother, to get married and to experience life. She worked so hard and never gave up. So it didn't make sense to me. And it didn't seem fair.

It still doesn't make sense to me, and I've had to come to terms with the reality that it possibly never will. I could easily spend the rest of my life obsessing over the "what ifs" and all the unanswered questions. But I know that it tortures me when I stay in that place, and Hannah wouldn't want that.

It's okay to feel whatever you're feeling, even if it's deep anger at your loved one who passed. Allow yourself to ride the waves of emotions and not judge them. Have compassion toward yourself. Your loved one's decision to take his or her life was his or her decision alone. We are never responsible or equipped to keep someone else alive, especially when that person doesn't want to be.

When it comes to feelings of guilt or self-blame, I want to remind you that in everyday life we face countless decisions, whether significant or menial. As we go about each day, we're always making decisions. And we'll honestly never know what different choices, even in the menial decisions, might have influenced a different outcome in a situation. We all do the best we can with the knowledge we have in any given moment. That's all we can do.

Sadly, hindsight can often make us feel like we failed though; it will berate us for what we did or didn't do, and tell us that what we did wasn't good enough. Hindsight is cruel in that sense; it creates a false notion that it's possible to live and act perfectly.

In the loss of our loved ones, we have to compassionately accept that we did the best we could with the knowledge we had, which can also mean no knowledge at all. We will drive ourselves crazy with the guilt and "what-ifs." It's our mind's way of trying to make sense of and find answers to something we will never be able to fully understand.

If your loved one told you they were about to take his or her life, you would have done anything to stop them. But they didn't. They didn't tell us their plan. I hope you find comfort in knowing how deeply you love the person you lost – how you know you would have done everything in your power to save them if you could have. But because your loved one didn't tell you his or her plan, we can't hold ourselves responsible for that. We can't blame ourselves for a decision made without our knowledge, because we know we would've chosen differently for them. And because they made such a devastating decision without us, it's also normal for it to feel like a rejection or an abandonment at times.

Just know that you will have an endless range of different emotions, and understand that is common and expected. I believe that the reason we often feel guilty and blame ourselves ISN'T because we realistically should have done or said more, or known what he or she was going to do. I believe that our tendency to feel guilt and to blame ourselves only speaks to the depth of love we have for our loved one, and how desperately we want to find the answers and understand how this happened.

Unfortunately, blaming ourselves can falsely feel like a concrete explanation we can grasp when, in reality, we're truthfully just searching for an explanation that can never be concretely defined. We want to understand because we hope that understanding will help us in processing our loss.

Search if you need to, just don't let your need to understand project any blame onto you, it's not yours to carry. What you must focus on carrying right now is your grief, your memories, your love for the one you lost, and your fragile heart. Take care of it. Take care of you.

Your deep sorrow is a reflection of the deep love you have in your heart. Your sorrow is beautiful evidence of that love, and your grief journey will take as long as it takes. So keep taking steps, no matter how small, and congratulate yourself for the little victories, no matter how insignificant they may seem. Rest when you need to, and take all the time that you need.