

THE PLAYBOOK OF GRIEF

The end of my playbook remains unwritten

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I didn't want to get out of bed this morning. Not because today marks nine years since losing my daughter, Aly. Rather, the feel of the cool sheets, my sleeping hubby next to me, and the warm sun filtering through our bedroom window felt too peaceful to disturb.

So, I laid there and allowed my mind to wander over the past nine years.

I replayed that night in the field when I sat next to Aly, how I held her warm hand while first responders on scene surrounded me with love. How my husband called for an update on the fender-bender only to learn that his youngest daughter was covered by the stark white sheet of death.

How we made our way home as the full moon gave way to dawn, wondering when we'll wake from this nightmare.

**What I didn't know then
that I know now is that
I would survive.**

In those early days I didn't think I could endure the agony, and many days I didn't want to.

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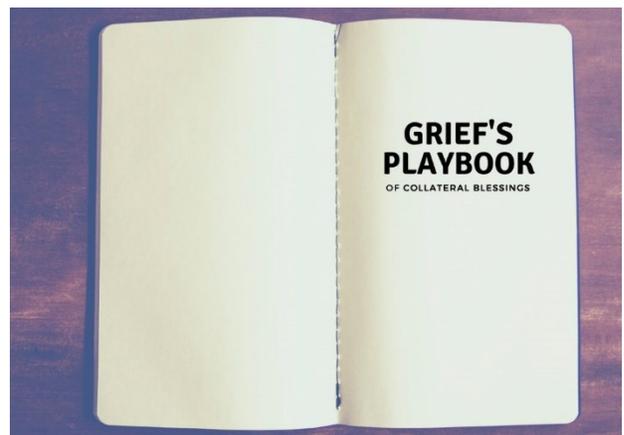
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The pain is beyond any words trying to explain it away in a college textbook.

**How could I learn to live
with Aly in my heart
instead of my arms?**

I didn't know. But whether I liked it or not, I was about to learn.

My playbook of grief begins with a fog of shock so strong, I don't remember much. The next few chapters are filled with wailing, gnashing of teeth, and spewing vile words. I then embarked on a desperate search for comfort, for relief from the agony.



The end of my playbook remains unwritten but the rawness has softened and the current chapters teach that my heart can hold joy the same time as sorrow.

There are many lessons and chapters in my playbook, but the most surprising of all is the one about transformation. In the early days we don't believe it's survivable, little alone transformation. How could we? We can't see past the pain.

But as the rawness softens and our coping skills strengthen, we move into an unexpected—and often positive—transformative phase.

What I didn't know nine years ago that I know now is that Aly's death was the gateway to many blessings.

My circle of friends has expanded to strangers around the world who speak all loss languages. This taught me that the foundation of mankind is love.

My skillset has expanded to things I didn't know I could do. This taught me that limitations are self induced, and I can do more than I think.

My compassion has grown in ways I could never have imagined. I learned to see outside my own pain into other hurting hearts, and how helping them helps my own heart to heal.

My gratitude has evolved into an intentional mindset. This taught me that being grateful is a powerful healing modality. The more grateful I am, the more gratitude I have.

Am I grateful for Aly's death?

No. It's a hellacious journey. But I am grateful for the collateral blessings. This taught me that there is more to grief than meets the eye.

Nine years ago I didn't want to live. But others held that light of hope when I had none. This taught me the importance of sparking, igniting, and shining our light for those in the darkness behind us.

I'm often asked whether the pain ever truly ends. One cliché is that we don't get over grief, we move through it. I don't believe we move through it.

**I believe we learn to carry
it with us as we move
forward in life.**

To answer the question, I do believe pain eases. If it can happen to me, it can happen to anyone. The timing might be different, but don't give up.

Life's second act will be different, but enjoy the moments when the pain isn't as suffocating and you'll find that you don't have to choose between sorrow or joy. The heart has room for both, and eventually the joy will grow.

Nine years ago I didn't believe I would survive losing Aly. What I didn't know then that I know now is not only would I survive, I might actually like—no, love—life.

Thank you, Lovey. I love you.