

MY PLAYBOOK OF GRIEF

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 at the crash site 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 beloved youngest daughter was covered by the stark white sheet of death.

How I made my way home as the full moon gave way to dawn, wondering when I'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 grief's agony, and many days I didn't want to. The pain is beyond explanation, and can't be comprehended by simply reading about it in a college textbook.

How could I learn to live with my daughter 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 the 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, it's hard to believe grief is survivable, little alone transformative. How could we? We can't see past the pain.

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

TRANSFORMATION



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

My circle of friends has expanded to include strangers 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 carry it with us as we learn to 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. It's worth fighting for.

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 as the rawness softens.

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.

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