

Love After Death

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Strangely, I still felt loved. My former partner stopped breathing, holding my hand; just as intimately as in life. For the previous two years we'd faced everything together. I could still feel his presence long after he died and it frustrated me, gutted me and buoyed me in equal measure. I felt the love but I couldn't get to it. I wrote this in the depths of grief; dark waters you've got to cross, to get to a better shore.

On the morning he died, I watched his final breaths, saw them replaced by a palpable peace, where seconds before there had been only bone-agony. He wanted his life so passionately, until it was reduced to a wordless, twilight fever of hurt. Pain, chemo and hormones had laid waste to the life of his choosing.

Now, after months of unrelenting suffering he was free; and I was freed from one gut-wrenching kind of helplessness only to be plummeted into a new one. The release from aching anticipation was obliterated by storm surges of grief that came in waves: Brace. Hit. Out of control. Ride. Drowning. Surface, gasping. You don't know how strong you are until being strong is your only choice. I wondered everyday if there was a way to get to him, to see him again, one more time, to feel him physically again? Was it possible? How could I get there?

The bereavement counsellor tried to comfort me with a story:

Swimming in the water the dragonfly larvae dream of the air above the water because they can't see it or understand it from their world. The only way to see is to die as a 'swimmer' and become a 'flyer' instead, but once you become a 'flyer' you can't enter the water ever again. There are different realms but we can only experience each in turn, in the natural time. You can't leave the water 'til it's time and you can't return to visit once you're gone, but you're still out there, just changed.

It was beautiful, but it was no help at all.

Is that him, in that crowd? My brain would suddenly interject as I walked down the street.

He's dead I would tell myself. But I'd look anyway.

After a few weeks of grieving I'm so tired of my head, riding the roller-coaster of loss again and again. I crash, then come up to refocus my attention on living again; read a book with my son, do some coloring, punch the bag at the gym, work out dinner... get through the days on a micro-level, nerve by nerve.

I can do this, I would tell myself...*I can do this*. But everything is a reminder, on a raw sensory level. Sometimes I give up and crumple onto the kitchen floor, back against the hard, cold silver oven where every night I had cooked our food, before I was broken.

I go to our regular Sunday morning café. I know its going to hurt but I can't keep away from it any longer. I like the place and I want to invite the memory, call in the ghosts so I can commune, see what happens.

The waitress greets me and I say "Just me".

I want to ask her

You remember him don't you, you know the man I was here with every week, you remember, right? He's gone, he's died. What can we do? Hey, by the way, how can the chairs still be there unchanged, when he's dead? That window there... it might have been there a hundred years, but where is he? You remember him don't you? Tell me you remember him!

But I say none of that. I sit, order the same food and cry quietly to the table, watching my tears hit the newspaper until they stop and I begin to read between them.

For months I wandered, I wrote, I punched the bag, I grief-journalled, I focused on my other loves. I asked the universe for guidance and help because I didn't know what else to do. Just keep holding on to myself and my loved ones, I would tell myself; *Keep holding on until this moment is memory.*

I knew that feelings ebbed and flowed. I knew that no matter how bad I felt, if I gave grief my awareness and acknowledged it fully, it couldn't stay exactly the same forever. Nothing ever does.

If you have grief, fasten yourself to your supports. Tie yourself to love wherever it still lives for you, then sink deep. Know somehow you will rise.

Let love pull you up until you can swim freely again. Understand that death happens too easily to be the end.

This post is part of [Common Grief](#), a Healthy Living editorial initiative. Grief is an inevitable part of life, but that doesn't make navigating it any easier. The deep sorrow that accompanies the death of a loved one, the end of a marriage or even moving far away from home, is real. But while grief is universal, we all grieve differently. So we started Common Grief to help learn from each other. Let's talk about living with loss. If you have a story you'd like to share, email us at strongertogether@huffingtonpost.com.