

My New Reality, Not My New Normal

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The date on the calendar I was desperately trying to ignore screamed the news to me at 12:23 a.m. on August 4, 2015. Everyone was sleeping when I jolted out of bed, sobbing quietly as I made my way to the sofa in the beach house we had rented to ride out the two-year anniversary of my Devastation Day, August 4, 2013.

Much to my surprise, Bailey, our family healer, was stretched out comfortably on the floor in the hall, which was so unusual since he never sleeps alone. Was he alone? Our family dog has become rather neurotic since the sudden death of my youngest child, Amy. I often wonder whether this 12-pound dog of pure love did indeed sign up for the mega job of comforting a grieving family.

Finally, a piece of cheese lured him from his cozy spot and had him snuggling up next to me as I cried and began to write a post on my blog as well as on all of my support groups reminding them all to please remember Amy. Does every family worry the world will forget their child was here?

As another August 4 continued on, I was comforted by many who did remember my sweet girl. We burned a candle for Amy all day and toasted her as we always do at every single meal. Before the sun set, we released balloons on the beach while imagining we were sending our personal messages of love handwritten on the balloons directly to Amy.

During the weeks leading up to *that day* I started to crumble. Despite keeping a running mantra in my mind reminding myself that the worst day had already happened, my heart and mind had their own agenda. Flashbacks and death words kept jabbing me until it finally took me down to revisit the raw pain from the earliest weeks and months. Time does not heal all wounds.

What had become of my life? Who am I without one of my children? I wanted to throw up from the building pressure that August holds with Amy's birthday following 8 days after Devastation Day. Why does the truth continue to ambush me as if I am learning the news for the first time, sucker punched over and over again by the reality that Amy died. Grief does ebb and flow and sometimes you have no choice other than to allow it to beat you up before it releases you back to a better functioning state.

The bridge leading to and from the beach town was under construction. One afternoon I had to venture out and upon returning found myself in a 2.5 hour traffic jam approaching the bridge. When I finally made my way onto the bridge, I noticed only one lane was smooth and functioning while the lane next to it was being jack hammered. Suddenly that jack hammered lane screamed my life without my child. The realization made me want to pull over and hug

myself as I truly acknowledged my own challenges I now face each day. My reality is that Amy is not coming back in the way I need her and I will never be able to drive on the ezpass life lane again.

Two years has taught me that I am not alone on this jack hammered road. There are those who have traveled before me and those who will sadly follow behind. Tragedies happen every day yet it is only my tragedy which keeps me awake at night. Does that make me self-absorbed or human? At the end of the day, Amy is not here and that reality is a life lane changer.

People's tolerance for grief runs out quickly. No one could possibly be familiar with the invisible bleeding wound I carry except those who live this loss. During these past two years I have met many grieverers who have found it necessary to retreat in order to survive. Grieving the death of a child can be difficult for loved ones to witness. People will twist and turn your reaction to your unimaginable loss into intentional wallowing. My reality is that during the slow painful process of grieving Amy the rest of my life, many loved ones and friends will fade out of my life because I have not snapped out of my grief. Secondary losses are inevitable but pale in comparison to losing my child.

Whenever anyone honestly asks me what they can do to support someone who has lost a child, I can only respond standing in the midst of my own loss:

Please do not be afraid to say Amy's name and remember my child was here.

Your continued presence in my life speaks volumes and you have no responsibility to fix me. Ask me how I am doing and be prepared for an honest answer without talking me out of my response.

Please do not expect me to pretend my world should be unaffected by the loss of Amy's physical presence. Yes, her existence was vital to my personal well-being and ability to thrive.

Believe me when I confess that my reality is that *complete* happiness and peace are no longer available to me in this lifetime. It is unrealistic to expect me to overcome the loss of my child.

Trust me that intention has nothing to do with coping with the ramifications of out-of-order death and that nothing in life prepares you to bury a child and move forward without them.

Happiness is just not always a choice. I did not choose for my daughter to die or to become this sad while I awkwardly attempt to re-engage carrying the ramifications of this intimately personal loss. It's a fact that I have changed yet I realize I have a responsibility to those loved ones who are here to push myself into the best broken version of whom I have become without one of my children.

Over time, my reality may have more bright spots. There is laughter and always love, but my life will never be the same without Amy. Immunity from additional heartache is never granted; life makes no promises and everything can change in a blink of an eye and that reality frightens me.

My challenge remains coping in a world while carrying a gigantic ache in my heart. Most of the parents I have met resent the words "new normal." Just for the record, there is nothing normal about living without my child so finding my "new normal" will never be a consideration for me. Instead I am searching for ways to survive and make peace with my realities as best I can without turning into a bitter and angry woman. However, let me be perfectly clear, "getting over" Amy in order to survive the rest of this lifetime will never ever be an option for me. My heart will forever grieve my child.

These are my own thoughts based on my own personal reality living here without my child. Trust me, I do not know the way so I am making no predictions for anyone based on my own personal two plus year nightmare. Sugar coating the loss of my child is impossible as my heart spits out this painful reality.

All I know for sure is that love never ever dies and the love continues to flow between this mother and her child as I am always remembering Amy.

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.