

No One Tells You This about Loss, So I Will

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No one tells you this.

So I will.

No one tells you that you may want to die. No one tells you that you may lie in bed and pray for your heart to stop. That even your most cherished and beloved children and husband may not be able to rouse you from the depths of your sorrow. That even the breathtaking sunrises and majestic shooting stars above won't give you pause.

No one tells you this.

I'm not talking about depression. Or suicide. Or hopelessness. I'm talking about how you may feel if a person you love so deeply, a person who knew and stood by you from birth — and was supposed to be with you until death — dies. All of a sudden. With no warning. Way too young. Frighteningly full of life. And then in an instant, they are gone.

My brother Wyatt died suddenly at age 42 of an aneurysm. We were closer than most siblings. Our dad died when we were one and three years old and, bonded by this early trauma, we were each other's keepers. He was my anchor, my last stop, my wingman for life. My cradle to grave.

When he died, I lost all connection to planet earth. A window opened between dimensions and I climbed right in.

'Take me with you,' I repeated. Over and over and over. It was disorienting and at times completely engulfed me. But it was the only place I wanted to or could be. For months I would drift in and out of this state.

And when you articulate this to friends and family, when you try to give words to these feelings, every alarm rings. Everyone starts to worry. Our culture has nowhere to put these dark feelings and sorrow.

No one tells you this. Not in our American culture anyways.

So now that I've made it to the other side, I will.

Each individual mourns differently, but I have now witnessed how many people suppress their grief for fear of upsetting others.

First of all, the urge to 'die' isn't exactly about dying. It's about holding on to your loved one with all your might, about delaying the separation for as long as humanly possible. It comes from the deepest source of connection a human can feel. From a sense that souls are entwined, like a living whole, and that when one half dies the other simply can't go on.

It is normal, it is born of love and connection, and it is okay. You will return from this dimension, feel like you can live again, but not until you've seen the depths of that darkness.

The saying that kept me afloat on some of my hardest days was, 'the depth of your grief is equal to the depth of your love.' That is exactly how it felt.

Secondly, if it offers any solace, in other cultures and parts of the world this feeling is a known entity. In cultures where death is tied to the cycle of life, not shunned and feared as people desperately try to elongate life and escape death at all costs, there is an understanding and even an openness to the pain that accompanies loss.

In Middle Eastern cultures the saying that is ubiquitous with loss, which is showered on the survivors at the funeral and beyond, is *don't die with the dead*. 'We know you want to die with your loved one. But please don't. We see and understand that this urge is intimately tied to your love, and we remind you to stay with us,' the saying seems to imply.

In Judaism, there are periods of seven days (shiva), 30 days (shloshim) and twelve months (avelut) during which close family members are encouraged to or expected to abstain from celebrations and large social gatherings. It is understood that you will feel bereft, need to be alone, need to fall apart and slowly rebuild yourself.

In Mali and a number of other African countries, widows wear blue for an entire year after loss. In this way, they don't need to speak the unspeakable, and have the space needed to grieve.

We sorely need more of this acceptance and courage in the face of pain in our society. Each individual mourns differently, but I have now witnessed how many people suppress their grief for fear of upsetting others or seeming too wounded.

Let us be brave. Let us stay open to pain and hold space for what, ultimately, is not about pain as much as it is about love, connection, and life.

My telling you won't lessen your pain even slightly. But I hope to help you know that your pain is normal, socially accepted and even embraced in cultures less frightened than ours, and completely yours. When you tell me you just want to die, I for one will not be alarmed, but will say instead, 'I know. Of course you do.'

If you — or someone you know — needs help, please call 1-800-273-8255 for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.

