**It Comes In Waves**

I do not live by the rules of grief. When you have someone in your life die, you grieve. You dress in black, pay your respects and go through the five stages of grief; denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. The sixth step is to move on with your life and forget that minor bump in the road, even if the bump in the road is actually a deep pothole and destroys your path. Forget the week where your eating patterns were messed up, where your head was filled with images of a person you will never see again.

If I don’t stay on the path that grief gives me, is that bad? What if I never get over my loss? What happens if I get over it too quickly? What if I cry every day for months, then suddenly stop. Do I need to talk to a doctor? A therapist? What if I shove all my feelings of grief in a box, lock it up with chains, douse it in gasoline and burn it in the pits of my despair?

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My experience with grief changes each time it enters my life and knocks on my door. The first time I was visited by grief was when my grandfather died. I was seven and knew he was sick, but it was only when my parents sat me down and told me that he was really truly absolutely gone, that I was hit with grief.

I didn’t see him much because he lived in a different state, so my everyday life wouldn’t be affected. I skipped three days of school to fly down for his funeral. At one point during the service all of his grandchildren were asked to stand up. My brother and cousins stood still, dealing with their grief in their own way. I stood shaking and sobbed. I tried so hard to stop because people were watching and even the seven-year-old me was embarrassed by my grief.

After I flew back home, I was finished with my grief. I still think about my grandfather whenever I eat a corndog with ketchup, but there is no gaping hole in my heart that demands attention and hurts daily.

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What do you do immediately after? Do you start grieving the second you hear the news? Or do you start before the body even goes cold so you can get your closure over with? Do you just eat macaroni and cheese and watch TV until the relaxation hits?

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Later in life I would have two more grandparents die. My father found out about his dead father after dinner over a phone call. He dropped his phone and screamed out loud. I didn’t know my father’s father well at all. He never visited us, but just the act of seeing my father cry, made me cry. I didn’t fly out for his funeral.

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Six months before my mother died she was diagnosed with cancer. It was a mild case and we believed she had longer than six months. In the hospital, I was not allowed to visit her. She came home for Halloween, Thanksgiving and Christmas. For New Years she was put back in the ICU. After February break she was gone. For that entire month the feeling of death loomed over me. I was in a constant state of silent sobbing and denial.

On her last day on earth, I visited a pale woman in a hospital bed. She was unrecognizable as my mother. She was surrounded by flowers, cards and gifts, as if she would “Get Well Soon :)”. She didn’t respond to me because she was in a deep sleep. I squeezed her hand and didn’t get a squeeze back. I cried and my brother apologized. We left and ate mac and cheese at home. I spent the afternoon watching TV until my dad came home alone, without the dying woman, my mother.

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How do you know when the realization hits? It comes in waves. For me it’s any time I see a friend's mom hug her after school. Talk about boy problems or give her ice cream for dinner when she's sad. Then, the realization attacks me because I have no one to do that for me.

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Over time all symptoms of grief get better. All the emotions you feel only get worse before they can get better. The average time span to get over grief is one year. It is okay if you take longer to recover than others. Talking with friends or a therapist can help. Don’t be afraid to reach out when going through this distressing period of time.

Grief is very unpredictable so if you don’t find yourself crying or staying up late, unable to sleep, that is perfectly normal as well. Do whatever you can to help yourself.

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I don’t know if my grief is gone. I can’t tell if I will be grieving forever. I’m pretty sure, for right now, and in the near future I will still be grieving. Hopefully, there will be a time where there is not a constant ache in my heart. For now I will eat mac and cheese when I’m sad and grieve when I hurt. This is my own grief journey.