

**True Confessions of a Grieving Mother**  
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**Discussion Notes – January 5, 2017**

My two children have died. One died during an emergency C-section when I was young, and then 4 years ago my 34 year old son, Scott, died by suicide. Even after 4 years I am still sad every day, and all these years later I still quietly grieve for my stillborn son. I may appear to some to be doing reasonably well. I like that I can now laugh and joke around like my old self and that I have become more involved in life again. I am managing my grief better but the hole in my heart has not closed. It is a hole surrounded by a ragged scar now.

Many of us have heard that trite comment that “time heals all wounds.” I had secretly hoped the passage of time would heal me. That with time I would be the old me again. But instead with time the pain and grief has changed me into someone different. I am still trying to understand who I am now, someone more cautious and guarded, and someone who feels a little lost. Sometimes it feels like I have an ogre, an ugly beast, named Grief inside of me. Thankfully the giant slumbers more now, letting me have some peace. But he can awaken and cause me havoc in a moment’s notice. Luckily it is not a daily occurrence anymore. But it is always lurking.

I know that those of you who are still early in your grief may not even be able to imagine that your mind could be clear for just an hour, much less a day, without thoughts and memories of your child bombarding you. I would never have believed it either. But here I am moving forward even if it is slowly. That is hope in a bottle for me.

I heard another bereaved mom say that she no longer feels guilty about having good days. It made me realize that maybe I am holding on to my sadness because I am afraid of letting it go due to some warped allegiance to my son and his memory. In those moments when I feel semi-normal and I have a sense of the old me peeking through, I find that I push my happiness away. It is like in that moment I fear I will forget my son. I don’t know why I feel it would be disrespectful or a dishonor to him if I’m happy. I know deep down Scott wants me to be happy and he even said so in his final note to me. So this year I will try and give myself permission to be happy without feeling guilty. And I know I will never forget him.

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Some of my relationships with people from my past have changed. The relationships have changed because I changed and I am not the same person I was before. I’m not any fun anymore. A friend of 45 years told me that a few months ago. I think this old friend is tired of the new, somewhat grumpy me and wants the old, fun, silly me back. I want the old me back too, even more than my friend does. I don’t think my friend truly understands what I have gone through these last four years where even a trip down the street means driving by my son’s old home and that starts a cascade of thoughts and memories about him. The comment my friend made stung and made me feel not very likeable. I hope this friend has more patience and understanding next time (if there is a next time).

I know I haven't been the good friend I used to be for many of my buddies from the past. Some old friends have begun to wonder if I have dropped them or if they offended me. I have avoided them because they require so much more energy than some other people. These are the friends that may say they get "it" because their grandmother died. Or they would be there for me but all they wanted was for me to continue to be their sounding board for all their problems. I have enough on my plate now and just can't deal with their stuff anymore. All my extra energy goes into making sure I have clean clothes and matching socks.

One such friend invited me to a mini reunion of friends from high school. I had to explain to her that just thinking about seeing people from the past and talking about my present situation makes my heart race, and not in a good way. I just dread meeting new people or being in social situations where the question about family or how many children I have may come up. Talking with old friends about what has gone on in my life these last few years is not good party conversation. I do appreciate that this friend has bravely continued to reach out. I had to clearly spell it out for her why this mini reunion terrifies me. She said she understands my need to distance myself for now and I believe she does to the best of her abilities

The friends I have chosen to be with are the ones who bring me comfort and accept me as I am now. They will hold my hand and let me cry. They know this can't be fixed but are willing to help me carry my grief.

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I have become quite acquainted with envy. It has taken up residence in me, and I really wish it would pack up and move away. I don't like this feeling of wanting what others have. There is the old proverb that says "envy eats nothing but its own heart." Well, envy has made quite a meal of my heart. When I see other young people living their lives, or when I hear other parents talk with pride about their children and grandchildren I just feel empty and sometimes even angry at what has been taken from me. Don't get me wrong, I'm happy for them, but that feeling of pleasure and happiness is laced with sadness for what my son has missed and for what I will no longer experience. I try not to let others see how hard it is for me to witness life moving on for them. I am envious also of my friends and their ability to live freely without this weight of loss – their innocence. How free it must be to not have this burden we all share- that in one moment your life can change forever. I really want to be free of my jealousy but it is how I feel. Maybe one day by owning it I can get over it.

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Some days I feel sort of like a stalker. I will be in the grocery store or in the mall and see a young man that reminds me of my son. It could be the hat he's wearing, the young man's build or the way he moves his body. I think "oh my gosh, Scott are you here?" I will follow this unsuspecting young man around. I want to lean in and take a deep breath to see if he smells like Scott. I want him to speak so I can hear his voice. I feel kind of weird doing it but I can't stop myself. There is always something about this person that is different from Scott, like the wrong color hair or his posture is different but whatever that hint of him is is enough to make me want to be in this person's presence. It brings Scott alive for

even just a moment. It is like a living echo of my son. My heart skips a beat when it happens and I feel Scott close by. Sometimes it will actually make me sad because I am not sure I remember everything as clearly as when he was alive. What did his voice sound like? I hope I don't get arrested for staring and invading someone's personal space and if I do I hope one of you will come rescue me.

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So I shared with you my feelings of guilt when I have moments of happiness and the invasive sense of envy when I see other intact families. I also shared how some old friendships have had to be put on hold for a while and how I can be a little crazy following young men around. So I would like to hear what's on your minds.

I want to remind everyone though that each person's feelings are their own and how we navigate through our grief is unique to each of us. We bear witness to each other's truth and as such need to be careful with each other's hearts.

There was this saying that I saw on Facebook that describes us. It says, "I love when people that have been through hell walk out of the flames carrying buckets of water for those still consumed by the fire." Let's make sure that when we share we carry buckets of water for each other.