

Survival

If I could go back to those first few days and weeks after Patrick was stillborn, I would tell myself a lot of truths about life after loss.

I would tell myself that, in those first few days and weeks, there is only one thing that I need to do. There is only one thing that is important in the face of loss. I would tell myself that everything else is insignificant and unnecessary. I would tell myself to survive. That is it. Just survive.

The loss of a child is the most traumatic event that a person can experience. The most traumatic. Nothing gets worse than that. I would tell myself that I have just experienced the worst thing imaginable and I should understand the severity of that.

If I could go back in time, I imagine that I would take myself by the hand and tell me to sit down. I would have tissues handy - a lot of tissues. I would be compassionate, kind, and caring and I would break the news in the gentlest way possible.

"Suzanne, you have just lost your beautiful baby and life will forever be a bit sadder. This can never be changed; never be made better; never replaced by how life was before. Everything has changed. You will not realise how much until much later. But, at the moment, the only thing you need to do is survive.

Suzanne, you need to lie on the couch. You need to be cared for. Do not think about other people's expectations. You do not need to do anything else but function and survive.

Suzanne, you do not need to 'move on' or 'get over it'. You cannot. You do not need to get up and go out. You do not need to pretend that you are okay. You do not need to halt the tears. You are not depressed if you are sad. You are not a bad mother if you get frustrated easier. You do not need to worry that your children will be taken away because you are upset.

Suzanne, do not worry about future life, not at the moment. Just survive."

When I look back, I view those first weeks and months through a net curtain. That is really the only way I can describe it. Everything is hazy. It is a little, 'out-of-body'. I watch myself living, but do not really see anything that could resemble life. A lot of the time I started tasks, went out to places, and pretended to be okay in day-to-day life, because I thought that I was 'supposed' to. I thought that people wanted me to be better (and they did), but I wish I knew that I did not have to do any of those things.

When I imagine myself back then, although I may have looked the same physically, I imagine that I was like a lost child. I picture myself curled up in the palm of a giant hand being held and comforted. I imagine someone whispering, 'survive, just survive'.

Because, everything else can wait. Everything else will be fine, will work out, will keep turning and moving. Nothing else is important after loss but the emotional, spiritual, and physical wellbeing of those affected. Time needs to be given to heal, to make sense, and to grieve for the life that has been lost...

Be gentle, be kind. Know that nothing else is important but survival.