

How I Met Myself in Grief

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I never expected to enter the third chapter of life grieving the loss of my youngest son.

Although, the first two chapters, rarely offered up the expected. I entered young adulthood and unexpectedly became a mother at the tender age of eighteen. Then again at twenty. I married and divorced and faced single motherhood by age twenty-two. I married again a few years later and had three more children. Expectations moved aside to make room for the unexpected.

Abandonment, mental illness, addiction, domestic violence, economic hardship, and raising a child with congenital heart disease, were some of the unexpected experiences I lived with, and through. And with each unexpected challenge, I dug deep and made choices that led me to meet my truest self.

Motherhood came naturally as the eldest of eight siblings. I mothered someone ever since I can remember. My own mother included. Mothering is a touchstone, an identity I am familiar with, bringing fulfillment and pushing me to grow in ways that nothing else could. I devoted my life to raising my children. Each one, beautiful and unique. I was and still am, their greatest advocate, nurturing a strong sense of self-esteem and unconditional love. I tried my best to provide them with what I wished I had growing up. I grew so much as a parent.

I was relentlessly challenged. Not in my devotion or dedication, but with how much support I would or would not have. I learned that those I expected would be my allies were not. Family, friends, the fathers of my children, society, and religion, all posed various threats to my desire to instill a healthy sense of self identity, esteem and belonging for my children and myself.

I learned how to love and support myself through the unexpected turmoil and betrayals. My children's fathers each brought their own brand of pain into the marriages and into how they parented. Through it all I kept reaching deep, meeting myself in the pain and joys and persevered for them, my children.

I also wanted to live a full life and sought to pursue formal education, my passions in writing and art, creative expression, personal growth, and complementary healing modalities. My personal pursuits were often met with resistance, shame, and guilt by others. I pursued anyway. I was meeting myself and discovered great joy in learning and expanding my awareness beyond that which others told me I could be or do. Slowly I freed myself of other's and my own ideas, of what was expected of me and who I was supposed to be. The more I became myself, the more a true sense of soul esteem emerged.

Divorcing the second husband when I was well into my second chapter, allowed for a new surge of creative energy to be released and I built a healthy and loving environment for me and my children. Encouragement, compassion, patience, and support were staples. Hard truths could be faced with loving kindness rather than denied. Challenges were ongoing, yet I could meet them in my wholeness instead of my brokenness. I met myself and discovered my way forward.

Perhaps this is how I gathered the courage to face the greatest challenge of my life. The death of my youngest son. He was a mere twenty-four years of age when he was killed instantly in a single car collision in early 2017. Unexpected, sudden, and tragic. He was a true light. A kind young man with a heart of gold. How could I meet myself in this?

I would need the greatest medicines of all to put my shattered heart back together. Medicine for the body, mind, and soul. I promised myself and my children that we would figure out how to grieve and live on after the unspeakable loss. A promise not unlike the one I made for myself

when I unexpectedly became a mother at the age of eighteen. I did not know how, but I would meet myself in unspeakable loss.

I met myself first with a daily question. What do I need today? I was trained to first ask of others, what do you need? Tending to others does give me satisfaction, yet I couldn't lift a finger to tend, if I tried. Most days, I met myself with simple needs. Rest. Food. Sunshine. That was enough.

I met myself by creating and maintaining my home as a nest. A nurturing, healing environment that sat high in a fir tree, figuratively. I wrapped my body in warm, soft blankets, inviting in angels to comfort me. My home *has a heart and a soul* and became a safe place where no one and nothing could interfere with my healing process. I met myself, as Mark Twain so aptly expressed, *in its grace, and in the peace of its benediction, I could not enter it unmoved.*

I met myself with compassion. A true elixir that eases the pain of life's greatest challenges. Compassion is an art to be practiced, a muscle to build. Fierce compassion guided me to care for myself slowly, and with the truth that you can never rush the healing.

I met myself with kindness. Kindness offers a buffering place within where I retreat to when the harshness of the world gets too close. The walls of my nest are layered with kindness.

I met myself with nonjudgment, continuously releasing the heavy stones of judgment and criticism that weigh mightily on a grieving mother's heart. Nonjudgment releases the unforgiving need to criticize, critique or shame my progress and feelings. It allows the construction within the destruction of loss.

I met myself in the knowing that no two people grieve alike. How I met myself may not be helpful to another. Applying compassion, kindness and nonjudgment helps, no matter where or how a fellow human needs to be met.

I met myself with open minded trust in what my body needed. I stopped pushing my body to be something it is not. When I am tired, I rest. When I can't sleep, I use soothing music and meditation apps. So many good ones, so easily accessed. I met myself with a deep understanding about grief as a physiological process that is overpowering and exhausting. I met myself with salt baths and massages, cranial sacral work, and body gentleness. I met myself with healers who could meet me with trauma awareness.

I met myself by feeling. Feeling is healing and the feelings that surface when walking the path of grief are immense, and unbearable at times. I met myself by going through these feelings of rage, anger, and searing pain with great care and patience. I met myself on the other side. With grace.

I met myself human to spirit. I accept my humanness, and my emotional, mental, and physical needs. I accept my spirit self and let her guide me in sweet connections with my son in spirit, the magical synchronicities, signs, and symbols that give me exactly what I need to trust in the places of spirit, higher consciousness, and dimensions beyond the earth bond. I found great solace in the places where my human self in all its suffering met my spirit self in healing eternal love.

I met myself in deep knowing and faith. Not in a religious concept, but in love I shared with my son and will continue to share. I met myself in a continued relationship him. I am still his mother. Here I found miracles beyond explanation. Miracles continue to remind me, there is more to life than meets the human eye alone.

I met myself through the hearts and sweet faces of my grown children and grandchildren. I met myself in their hugs and smiles, meals shared, tears shed, silliness and joy. I met myself in their milestones and everyday life, hardships, and triumphs. I met myself with them.

I met myself each morning as I greeted the day, unsure if I could. I met myself in whatever frame of mind I found myself. This was the hardest part, to meet myself in sadness or terror and try not to move it too soon. I met myself in the moment when it was all I had room for in the confines of a mind trying to make sense of the nonsensical.

I met myself at the end of the day. With gratitude. I counted the days. I still do. I met myself in making each day matter. I met myself in reverence for the moments, and the hours and with the revelation of hidden knowledge that so many deny. Life is short. No one knows how many days we have. Let's make the most of each day and look for the love. Sometimes hidden, sometimes out in the open, yet always there.

I met myself by honoring my deep inner knowing of ritual and ceremony. Ancestors, mothers in my lineage who also lost children came to me in dreams offering their wisdom and love. Did they meet themselves? I would do it for them and for my children's children. I lit the candles, and fires, sat with trees, made prayer mandalas and bundles filled tight. I met myself as I applied rituals that are containers of pure love and self-respect. I lifted many a prayer up and into the winds of healing. I met myself as an Ancestor, Ancient, Healer and Priestess.

I met myself walking in nature, having playlists titled Walking in Healing Love. I read little and when I did it was always inspirational words that would stick. All the rest fell out, like leaves on a cold autumn day or warm tears running down my face.

I met myself by validating what I endured, acknowledging my courageous and brave heart. I met myself as my fierce protector. I met myself with hope, encouragement, overflowing love and promise that healing can and does occur. Everything superfluous fell away. Everything timeless stayed. The noise of outer opinions mattered not.

I met myself with grief counseling, art therapy and grief group support. Grief is not an illness. It is a time and place that honors how much I love. I did not push myself, nor admonish myself if I was not up for it. I allowed gentle feelings to mix with the deep burdensome sadness. What I created in art gave my body space to hold the soupy mixture or became a place to hold it outside of myself and gaze at the immense beauty of grief given form.

I met myself with forgiveness and a deep knowing that sprung like confidence up from the ashes of the past. I provided my son with much love, guidance and unwavering support and this truth did emerge to meet me. I could have done more, yet this was not a place I ever stayed in. It held no healing, just shame.

I met myself with forgiveness for others when they could not or would not meet me. I met myself when acts unforgiveable were thrust upon me in the throes of my loss by people and family who professed to love me. I met forgiveness as a journey, that I do not fully understand. I learned its balm is a surrender of sorts. A willingness to let go of the unforgiving actions of others and continue to meet myself with peace of mind.

I met myself by not having to have answers to the unanswerable. The mind will ceaselessly try to find answers to the unanswerable questions of death, trauma, and tragedy. If only and why became sharp daggers inserted into open wounds. I made peace with the truth that our minds can break in times of deep grief. I met myself in my broken mind, calling in peace as the needle and thread, glue, and gold that would weave my broken mind and heart back together. Grieving is weaving.

I met myself setting boundaries on my time and energy by not explaining or proving my needs, decisions, or actions. I met myself on shaky ground. I said no. I said yes. I changed my mind on shaky ground. I met myself by commanding my boundaries and knowing this was the

territory of no compromise. I met myself in growing trust that shaky ground would indeed hold me and my wizened, battle-weary heart.

I met myself in friendships with loving and kind people, soul kin. Very few and select. Some long-time friends, others new, many who were learning to meet themselves through life's deepest challenges too. I savored the moments in silence with my people. We openly wept and held one another blessing each other with our tears. We know the otherworldly joys and sorrows and in the depths of this real human connection, we heal, thrive, and find ways to laugh again.

I met myself in the mending and weaving of safety nets though the most hazardous of life experiences. I met myself in being a dispenser and receiver of the exact right medicine at the exact right time. A knowing of the miracles of interconnectedness, of life after death and how spirit works to ensure our safe passage through the most trying of times. I met myself by being an answer to a prayer and by being in service to love.

I met myself with writing poetry, journaling, teaching, and as sacred circle gatherer. I met myself in my shattered heart as self-healer, medicine woman, wise elder, broken mother, and devastated child. I met myself in all the shattered pieces and in the depths of my soul.

Through it all, I became the woman I was always meant to be. I am both a work in progress and a masterpiece. This is me in the third chapter of life, living each day as opportunity to meet myself and others in safe and sacred spaces, offering a compassionate healing practice for those hungering to meet themselves and nourish their soul.

My days are devoted to a solidification of my service to self, family, community, and humanity to continue to heal and grow through shared story, sacred healing practices, creative expression, and the sharing of my deep knowing that come from places discovered as I met myself. One sacred step at a time.

