



**FIVE THINGS I WISH  
I'D KNOWN AT  
GROUND ZERO  
GRIEF**

— KYM HINCHEY —

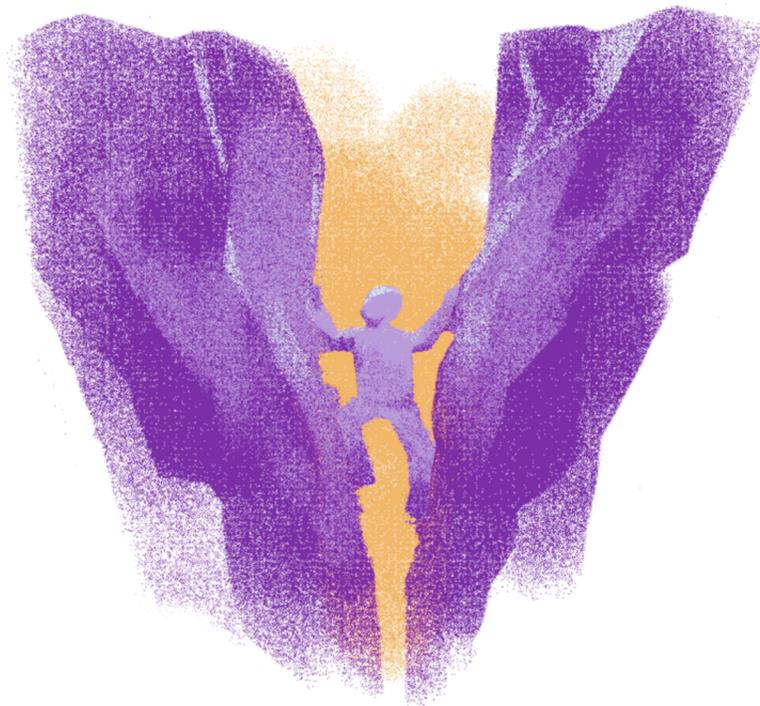
# I THOUGHT

I understood grief and loss. I had lost friends, family, and pets over the years. Each loss hurt, but I could keep moving. I had also struggled with depression for most of my adult life, so I knew what it was like to claw my way through dark times.

I knew what survival looked like.

But nothing, absolutely *nothing*, prepared me for the destruction I felt when my son Adrian died. And when my husband John died not long after, I found myself in what I now call *Ground Zero Grief*.

In disaster terms, “ground zero” is the point of the explosion, the place where the blast is strongest, and everything nearby is destroyed. Well, that’s where you are right now: in a disaster. That’s what this level of grief feels like.



When Adrian died, I, who had survived so many dark chapters before, suddenly had no idea how to keep going. Depression had knocked me down many times, but this was different. This was the earth itself being ripped out from under me.

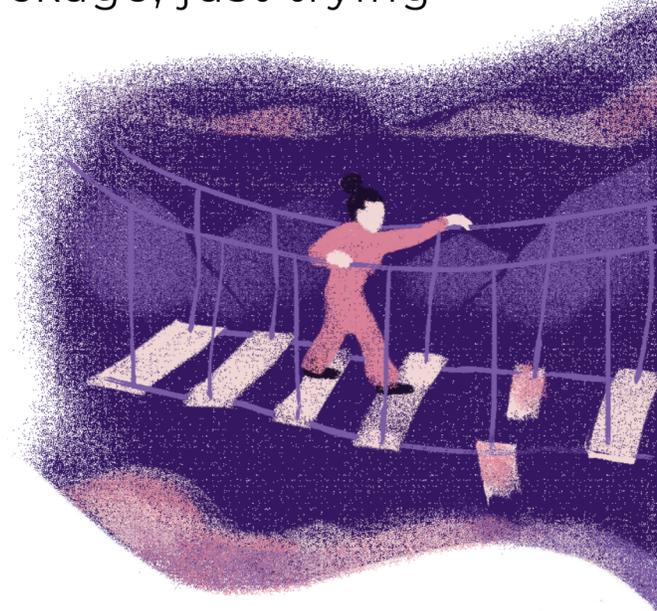
People tried to help, and I know they meant well, but there was nothing they could give me that would ever make it better. I needed the impossible. I needed my son back.

And then, three months later, my husband John died, and grief leveled up in every possible way. I had already been living in a nightmare, but this was Nightmare 2.0.

All the air had been sucked out of the world and I was suffocating. I did not recognize myself. I wasn't the same person anymore. I was someone broken into a million pieces.

If you are reading this, you are probably standing at Ground Zero. Your life is leveled. Everything you thought you knew about yourself, the world, and how life is supposed to go has been blown apart. You are standing here, in the wreckage, just trying to remember how to breathe.

***And I know you are in shock. I know that information might fly right through your brain, but I am going to tell you now five things that I wish I had known about grief before grief became my life.***





# YOU ARE NOT BROKEN.

The first thing I want you to know is this:

***You are not broken, and you don't need fixing.***

I know you feel broken. I know. But you are not. This is what it feels like to lose someone you love so much.

It is devastating. People will probably try to make it better by offering well-meaning words or searching for a silver lining, but there is no fixing this pain. There is no bright side when someone you love is gone.

Grief is a natural and organic process that we go through, and it will likely be the hardest thing you will ever face.

I don't lie to grieverers. This is real. This is brutal.

But grief is not something to be fixed. It is something to survive.

When I was standing in Ground Zero Grief, I felt like I was shattered into pieces. I could not think straight. I forgot how to do basic things, like eat or take a shower. I cried until I was empty, and then I felt nothing at all, which was even scarier.

I thought, *Something is wrong with me.*

But nothing was wrong with me, and nothing is wrong with you. This is what grief looks like. It is ugly, unpredictable, and overwhelming because love that big does not just vanish when someone dies. You are grieving because your love is that strong.

Your heart is broken, yes, but *you* are not broken.





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# THERE IS NO RIGHT WAY TO DO THIS.

The second thing I want you to know is this:

**There is no right or wrong way to grieve.**

Grief is as individual as a snowflake or a fingerprint. The way you are doing it is exactly the way it should be done.

I know it's scary. I know you might feel unsure because you've never done this before, so how could you possibly know what is right or wrong?

I'm telling you, *there is no right. There is no wrong.*

There is only your grief and how you are feeling it today, and it is exactly right for you in this moment.

People might try to tell you *how* to grieve. They might offer you advice or share what worked for them. Sometimes, they might say things that are helpful. Other times, they will not. But the fact is, none of them are living this loss. None of them are inside your skin, carrying your love and your pain.

When Adrian died, and then John, I had no idea what I was doing. Some days I screamed. Some days I sat in silence, staring at nothing for hours. Some days I laughed at a memory and then felt guilty for it.

I thought, *Is this grief? Am I doing this right?*

It took me a while to realize there is no “right” way to do this. There is only the way that feels true to you right now. And that might change tomorrow, or in the next ten seconds. But your grief is going to be done your way, and that is the way to do it.





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# YOUR GRIEF WILL LAST LONGER THAN OTHERS KNOW

The third thing I want you to know is this:

**The world will stop talking about your person sooner than you are ready for.**

In the beginning, people will show up. They will send messages, bring food, share memories, and say your person's name. However, the calls eventually slow down. The texts fade. The flowers stop coming. And one day, you will realize no one has said their name in weeks. Or even worse, they never say their name at all, as if your person never existed.

This silence is another kind of loss.

The world is moving on while you are still standing at Ground Zero, screaming inside for someone, anyone, to remember.

You want to tell stories, but you are afraid people will change the subject or get uncomfortable. You want to keep their memory alive, but you start to feel like you're carrying it alone.

I went through this with Adrian. At first, everyone talked about him, shared how wonderful he was, how much they loved him. But over time, it got quiet. It was like people thought mentioning him would make me sad, as if I wasn't already living in sadness every single day. When John died, the silence came even faster. It hurts. It's lonely.

Please know this. You are allowed to say their name. You are allowed to tell their story. You are allowed to keep them present in your life. I named my business after my son so that I could keep hearing and seeing his name.

And if you need someone to listen, there are people, like me, who will never tire of hearing about them. Find your grief community, whether that is in person or online.





# GRIEF WILL CHANGE YOU

The fourth thing I want you to know is this:

**You will not be going back to the old you.**

This might be distressing to hear, or it might be a relief.

What I know is that I kept waiting for the old me to make a reappearance, and it took me a long time to understand that grief like this changes everything, including us.

When Adrian died, I thought if I could just get through it, I would somehow go back to the old version of me. But she never came back. And after John died, the truth became even clearer.

The old me is gone. The person I was when they were alive will never return because their death changed the shape of my life forever.

This change is not something to fear, even if it feels like you are a stranger to yourself right now. It is simply what happens when you survive something that changes your life.

Grief rearranges who you are and how you see the world. Sometimes that feels unbearable, and other times it feels like a good reminder of how much you loved them.

Over time, some changes in ourselves even become something we come to embrace and see as positive. But that is not always true, and it does not happen quickly.

I also want you to know this. If you are in very early grief, *this* is not the you that you will always be, either.

This is the newly grieving you, the version of you that is barely getting through each day. As time passes, you will not stay in this exact state. Grief will still be part of you, but you will not always feel like you do right now.





# STRENGTH IS NOT WHAT WE THINK IT IS

The fifth thing I want you to know is this:

## **You do not have to be strong.**

People will likely tell you to be strong. Or they will say you are. They will say it as if it's the only choice you have, but it is not. You do not have to hold it all together. You do not have to smile when you want to scream or pretend you are ok when you are not.

Falling apart is not weakness. It is grief doing what grief does.

We are taught that “being strong” means holding it together, smiling through the pain, and showing the world we are ok. But that is not strength. That is performance. It is an illusion that keeps people from seeing the truth of our pain. It is an act we put on to lessen the discomfort of others.

But you, while grieving, do not have to lessen the discomfort of others. That is not your job.

Real strength is not about pretending you are fine. It is about letting yourself feel the full weight of your grief when everyone around you is ready for you to “move on.”

After the deaths of my son and my husband, I tried to be strong for everyone else. I thought I had to keep it together so people would not worry about me.

But inside I was breaking, and hiding it only made me feel more alone. I learned that strength is breathing when every breath hurts. Strength is allowing yourself to cry, scream, or crumble if that is what you need. Strength lies in waking up every day and persevering.

You do not have to prove anything to anyone. You are already doing something impossible. Surviving this is strength. Even if all you do today is breathe, that is enough.



# BEFORE YOU GO

I want you to hear this.

You are not alone. I know it feels like the world has tilted and you are standing in a place no one else can reach, but there are others of us who have been here.

We have walked this path, all of us unwilling members of a club that no one ever wants to join.

Sometimes the only way forward is to follow the footsteps of those who have gone before you. I have walked this path. I know how dark and isolating it can feel, and I will show you the way when you cannot see it for yourself.

If you want to be with others who truly understand, join me in my private Facebook group:  
[The Grieving Healing Path](#)

I also write weekly letters about grief, filled with the words I wish someone had told me, here:  
[A Grief Support Substack](#)

You do not have to do this alone.



# RESOURCES:

Adrian Grief Support Socials:

[Facebook](#)

[Instagram](#)

[Youtube](#)

[Grief.com](#) – Resources from my mentor, expert David Kessler, including free articles, videos, and tools.

[What's Your Grief](#) – Practical and compassionate articles, podcasts, and free downloadable resources.

[Refuge in Grief](#) – Blog posts and resources for validating grief.

[Center for Loss](#) – Helpful writings and guidance on grief and mourning.

[Open to Hope Foundation](#) – Articles, videos, and podcasts with stories of loss and healing.

Dougy Center – Excellent free resources for grieving children, teens, and families.

Helping Parents Heal – A non-profit dedicated to helping parents find hope and connection with their children in the afterlife. They host free online support meetings and guest speaker events with mediums and spiritual teachers.

The Compassionate Friends – Trusted resources for parents, siblings, and grandparents grieving the death of a child. They offer free local chapters, virtual support groups, private Facebook communities, and a 24/7 online forum.

National Alliance for Grieving Children – Guides and free tools for families and professionals.

Soaring Spirits International – Offers free online support groups, programs, and resources for widows, widowers, and partners.

Modern Widows Club – A supportive community that provides free resources, online support groups, and local chapters.

Alliance of Hope – A compassionate online community specifically for suicide loss survivors, with free forums and support groups.

The American Association of Suicidology – Surviving a Suicide Loss – Provides resources, support group listings, and a free downloadable handbook.

GRASP (Grief Recovery After a Substance Passing). – Free in-person and online support groups specifically for those grieving a loved one's death due to substance use.

Team Sharing, Inc. – A peer-led organization supporting families who have lost children to substance use, including fentanyl.

## **Hotlines and Immediate Support**

Crisis Text Line – Text HOME to 741741 for free, 24/7 crisis support (U.S.).

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline – For moments when grief feels unbearable, dial 988 (U.S.).

# **YOU ARE IMPORTANT.**