



# MID HUDSON NEW YORK CHAPTER

## Newsletter

together we remember... together we heal...

Kathy Corrigan Chapter Leader

[www.mhbpusa.com](http://www.mhbpusa.com)

JULY/AUGUST 2016



### Please join us for our next meetings

Thursday, July 7<sup>th</sup> -- Topic: The Twelve Freedoms of Grief

Thursday, August 4<sup>th</sup> -- Topic: TBA

7:00 at The Children's Home of Poughkeepsie, 10 Children's Way, Poughkeepsie, NY

Call Kathy (845) 462-2825 for information



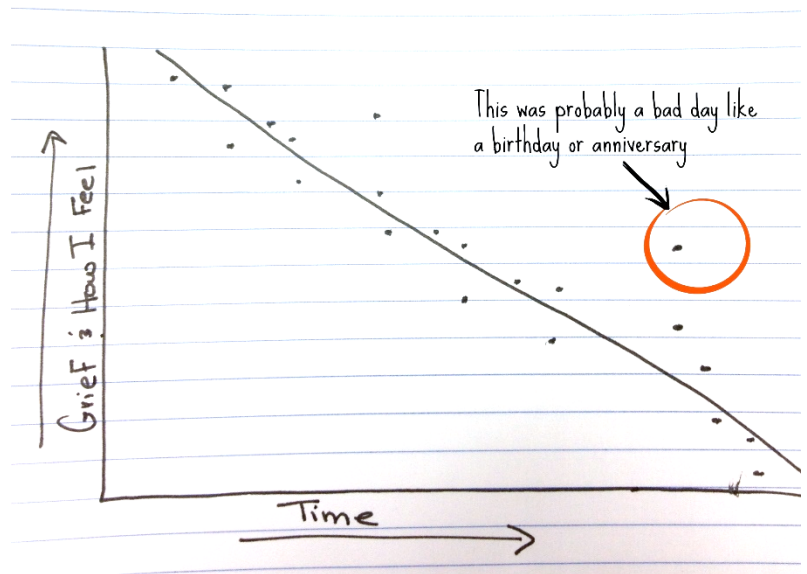
### DOES GRIEF HAVE A TIMELINE??

#### WILL I ALWAYS FEEL THIS WAY??

By Eleanor Haley [www.whatsyourgrief.com](http://www.whatsyourgrief.com)

Grief is not a race with a start and finish line, it's a labyrinth with twists and turns and dead ends. Grief is like trying to swim past the break in the ocean – you wade in but every once in a while a wave comes up and knocks you back a few feet. You're still deeper than when you started, but not as deep as you were before the wave hit.

Grief cannot be mapped on a timeline, although typically its intensity *should* be negatively correlated with time. This means the more time that passes, the less extreme and agonizing grief feelings should be. There will still be bad days, but overall its average intensity will diminish. It looks a little something like this...



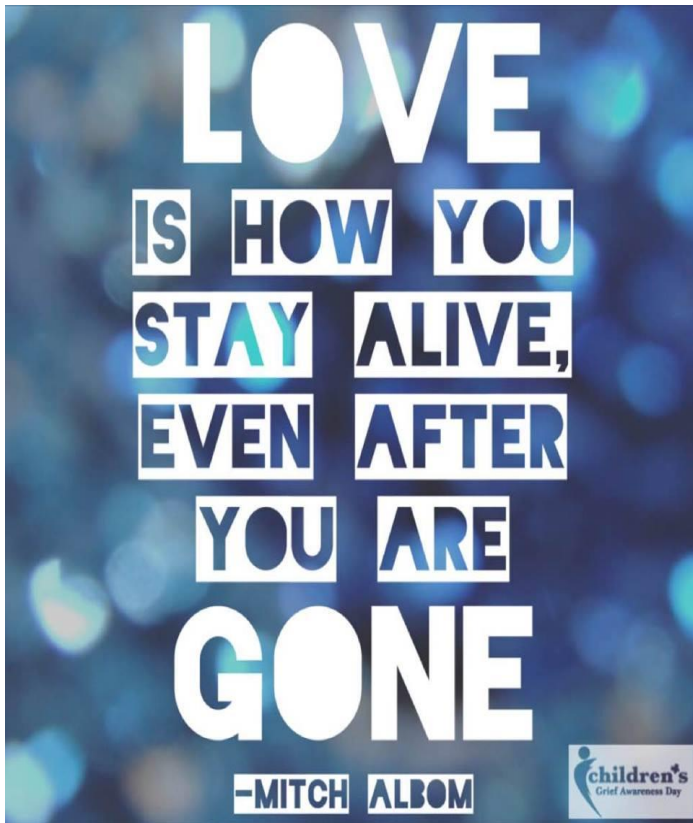
So feelings of grief will diminish, but not disappear. Grief is *infinitas* which means 'being without finish'. Grief doesn't end, but with time it should look different – more peaceful, hopeful, constructive and positive.

Here are a few small indicators you might be making progress in your grief. I find it important to note, you can take steps forward, yet still grieve your loved one. Just because you return to work, date, or decide to have another child does not mean you won't continue to grieve the person you lost. The capacity you have to be happy, enjoy life, and love others exists *in addition* to the love you feel for your deceased loved ones. Because love...love is infinitas.

- You start to feel 'normal'
- You have more good days than bad
- You experience an increase in energy and motivation
- You remember memories fondly as opposed to experiencing them as grief triggers
- You can constructively think about the loss of your loved one and the impact it's had on your life
- Your sleep patterns return to normal
- You experience feelings of optimism about the future
- Improvement in performance at work
- You're able to focus on personal health and wellbeing
- You feel ready to date again, have more children, and/or make new friends.
- Your relationships feel more functional and healthy
- You feel as though you are 'rejoining the human race'
- You feel ready to get out of the house
- You experience an increase in desire for emotional and physical intimacy

## A WARM WELCOME TO NEWCOMERS

We understand how difficult it is to attend your first meeting. Feelings can be overwhelming; we have all experienced them and know how important it is to take that first step. Our stories may be different but we are alike in that we all hurt deeply. We cannot take your pain away but we can offer friendship and support. Bring a friend or relative to lean on if you wish.



## SOCIETY'S EXPECTATIONS VS. REALITY

By Michelle E. Steinke

Let me share below a few of the expectations and realities that surround grief for those who are open to listening. None of my concepts fit into society's grief box and despite the resounding amount of mutual support by the grieving for what I write below, many will discount my words and label us as "stuck" or "in need of good therapy." I'm here to say those who are honest with the emotions that surround loss are the ones who are the least "stuck" and have received the best therapy around. You see, getting in touch with our true feelings, embracing the honest emotions of death only serve to expand the heart and allow us to move forward in a genuine and honest way. Death happens to us all so let's turn the corner and embrace the truth behind life after loss.

**Expectation:** Grief looks a certain way in the early days. Tears, intense sadness, and hopelessness.

**Reality:** Grief looks different for every single person. Some people cry intensely, and some don't cry at all. Some people break down, and others stand firm. There is no way to label what raw grief looks like as

we all handle our loss in different ways due to different circumstances and various life backgrounds that shape who we are.

**Expectation:** The grieving need about a year to heal.

**Reality:** Sometimes grief does not even get started till after the first year. I've heard countless grieving people say year two is harder than year one. There is the shock, end of life arrangements and other business matters that often consume the first year and the grieving do not have the time actually to sit back and take the time to grieve. The reality is there is no acceptable time frame associated with grief.

**Expectation:** The grieving will need you most the first few weeks.

**Reality:** The grieving are flooded with offers of help the first few weeks. In many cases, helping the grieving six months or a year down the line can be far more helpful because everyone has returned to their lives and the grief stricken are left to figure it out alone.

**Expectation:** The grieving should bury the dead forever. After a year, it is uncomfortable for the grieving to speak of their lost loved one. If they continue to talk about them, they are stuck in their grief and need to "move on."

**Reality:** The grieving should speak of the dead forever if that's what they wish to do. When someone dies, that does not erase the memories you made, the love you shared and their place in your heart. It is not only okay to speak of the dead after they are gone, but it's also a healthy and peaceful way to move forward.

**Expectation:** For the widowed - If you remarry you shouldn't speak of your lost loved one otherwise you take away from your new spouse.

**Reality:** You never stop loving what came before, and that does not in any way lessen the love you have for what comes after. When you lose a friend - you don't stop having friends, and you love them all uniquely. If you lose a child and have another, the next child does not replace or diminish the love you had for the first. If you lose a spouse, you are capable of loving what was and loving what is....one does not cancel out or minimize the next. Love expands the heart and it's okay to honor the past and embrace the future.

**Expectation:** Time heals all wounds.

**Reality:** Time softens the impact of the pain, but you are never completely healed. Rather than setting up false expectations of healing let's talk about realistic expectations of growth and forward movement. Grief changes who you are at the deepest levels and while you may not forever be in an active mode of grief you will forever be shaped by the loss you have endured.

**Expectation:** If you reflect on loss beyond a year you are "stuck."

**Reality:** Not a day goes by where I am not personally affected by my loss. Seeing my children play sports, looking at my son who is the carbon copy of his Dad or hearing a song on the radio or smell in the air. Loss because part of who you are and even though I don't choose to dwell on grief it has a way of sneaking in now and again even when I'm most in love with life at the current moment. It's not because we dwell or focus, and it's not because we don't make daily choices to move forward. It's because we loved and we lost, and it touches us for the remainder of our days in the most profound ways.

**Expectation:** When you speak of the dead you make the griever sad, so it's best not to bring them up.

**Reality:** When we talk about our lost loved one we are often happy and filled with joy. My loss was six and a half years ago and to this day, my late husband is one of my favorite people to talk and hear about. Hearing his name makes me smile and floods my mind with happy memories of a life well lived. It makes the grieving sadder when everyone around them refuses to say their name. Forgetting they existed is cruel and a perfect example of our stifled need to fix the unfixable.

**Expectation:** If you move forward you never loved them or conversely if you don't move forward you never loved them.

**Reality:** The grieving need to do what is right for them, and nobody knows what that is except the person going through it.

**Expectation:** It's time to "move on."

**Reality:** There is no moving on - there is only moving forward. From the time death touches our lives we move forward, in fact, we are not given a choice but to move forward. However, we never get to a place where the words move on resonate. The words "move on" have a negative connotation to the grieving. They suggest a closure that is nonexistent and a fictitious door we pass through.

**Expectation:** Grief is a linear process and a series of steps to be taken. Each level is neatly defined and the order predetermined.

**Reality:** Grief is an ugly mess full of pitfalls, missteps, sinking, and swimming. Like a game of chutes and ladders, you never know when the board might pull you back and send you down the ladder screaming at the top of your lungs. Just when you think you've arrived at the finish, you draw a card that sends you back to start and just when it appears you've lost the game you jump ahead and come one step closer to the front of the line.

**Expectation:** The grieving should seek professional forms of counseling exclusively.

**Reality:** The grieving should seek professional forms of counseling but also the grieving should look strongly towards alternative modes of therapy like fitness, art, music, meditation, journaling and animal therapy. The grieving should take an "active" part in their grief process and understand that coping comes in many different forms for all the different people who walk this earth.

**Expectation:** The grieving either live in the past or the present. IT is not possible to have a multitude of emotions.

**Reality:** The grieving live their lives with intense moments of duality. Moments of incredible happiness mixed with feelings of deep sadness. There is a depth of emotion that forever accompany those who have lived with a loss. That duality can cause constant reflection, and a deeper appreciation of all life has to offer.

**Expectation:** The grieving should be able to handle business as usual within a few weeks.

**Reality:** The brain of a grieving person can be in a thick fog, especially for those who have experienced extreme shock, for more than a year. Expect forgetfulness, a reduced ability to handle stress and grayness to be commonplace after a loss.

I've just scratched the surface above on the many areas where grief is misunderstood in our society.

One hundred percent of the people who walk this earth will deal with death. Each of us will experience the passing of someone close that we love or our personal morality. It is about time we open up the discussion around death, dying and grief and stop the stigma that surrounds our common bond. Judgment, time frames, and neat little grief boxes have no place in the reality that surrounds loss. Western culture asks



us to suppress our pain, stuff our emotions and restrain our cries.

Social media has given many who grieve the opportunity to open up dialogue, be vulnerable on a large scale level and take the combined heat that comes with that honesty. As a whole, society does not want to hear or accept that grief stays with us in some capacity for the rest of our lives. Just like so many other aspects of our culture, we want to hear there is a quick fix, a cure-all, a pill or a healthy dose of “get over it” to be handed out discreetly and dealt with quietly.

The reality is you will grieve in some capacity for the rest of your life. Once loss touches you, you are forever changed despite what society tells you. Stop looking at the expectations of an emotionally numbed society as your threshold and measuring stick for success. Instead, turn inward and look at the vulnerable reality of a heart that knows the truth about loss...



*The world may wonder: are we bound by death, we who have lost the child whose breath we shared.*

*The world should know: though we may cry at night, we are not strangers to the art of laughter. And sometimes we reach deeper into life.*

*Has death then left us with a finer ear for listening to the song of other children?*  
~ Sascha

## TEARS AND YOGA MATS

Well I finally did it. Last night I went to my first yoga class since I lost Jake. As I settled into my mat that hadn't been unrolled in seven months, I began to feel a little piece of myself exist again. Lights dimmed, music calmly playing in the background and the breath work began. Breathe in. Hold. Breathe Out. Repeat.



Breathe in. Hold. Breathe Out. Repeat.

As I began to center myself, connecting my breath to my body I realized I hadn't felt that connected to my own soul in a very long time. The very moment you learn you are pregnant, your life is no longer about you and that *never* changes. Whether your child is in your arms or in the Lord's, every moment becomes about your child. Even in the subconscious moments that you do not realize. They are there. That is what makes the bond of motherhood so incredible, so strong, so immeasurable.

It was then time to set my intention for my practice. This is done in the quiet place of your mind and meant to connect your thoughts to your heart. So I fearfully and boldly set my intention and asked Jake and my other babies for permission and forgiveness...to allow me this time for me and only me. I wanted this one hour for myself, for my body, my mind and heart to simply **be**. The tears came flooding because it made me feel like the worst mother in the world. My babies are dead and here I am asking them for some alone time. The irony in that hit me so hard. But I gave myself permission, like every mother should, to take some time for myself. I cried through several poses. Tears dripping one by one on my yoga mat. It was as if I was spending time with myself, a dear old friend, for the first time in years. I felt torn between a place of a comfortable familiarity and a desperate sense of sadness.

Breathe in. Hold. Breathe Out. Repeat.

As we worked into our first stretch I felt every muscle in my body desperately crying out to me, “keep stretching, keep moving, I’m so tired of aching”. I listened, I tried and when my sweet boy came to mind (which he did so very often), I silently and gently reminded him that Mommy needs this break. I wasn't sure if I was going absolutely crazy or the complete

opposite. I was mothering my child in a way I haven't experienced yet. I was giving him boundaries, all the way up to heaven. Or was I giving them to myself?

You see, there is a relationship that continues with your child after they die. Most people do not realize this, unless they have lost a child themselves. Jake is still very much a part of my present and that may confuse others. They may think "*she hasn't moved on at all, she's going a little crazy, in denial, she hasn't accepted his death.*" Wrong. I have accepted. But I also accept his life. **His life is eternal.**

And there is this place that I can sometimes find when the world is quiet enough where I can feel him, *I mean actually feel his presence.* It's so unexplainable. It's the place between heaven and earth that I am so grateful for. When I am blessed with these moments, I know everything is going to be okay. I know he is there. I know he surrounds me, waits for me and sends his energy to me...

All moms need time to themselves. To quiet their minds. To find themselves. To remember who they are and who they were long before their precious little ones made way into their life. Because that woman, the one who takes time to refocus and rekindle her own spirit, *she makes a beautiful and present Mama.*

It may have taken seven months, but I did it. I don't when-or if ever-that I will make it through an entire practice without him on my mind and that's okay because I want him there. I will keep fighting to find myself, the woman I was before him, the one I am after him and the one I am becoming with him guiding me.

Breathe In. Hold. Breathe Out. **Repeat.**

*Lisa at [www.hopeafterhope.com/](http://www.hopeafterhope.com/)*



## THE CAPACITY TO LOVE REQUIRES THE NECESSITY TO MOURN

*By Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.*

"Every time we make the decision to love someone, we open ourselves to great suffering, because those we most love cause us not only great joy but also great pain. The greatest pain comes from leaving...the pain of the leaving can tear us apart.

"Still, if we want to avoid the suffering of leaving, we will never experience the joy of loving. And love is stronger than fear, life stronger than death, hope stronger than despair. We have to trust that the risk of loving is always worth taking." ~ Henri Nouwen

"All you need is love," famously sang the Beatles. I couldn't agree more. We come into the world yearning to give and receive love. Authentic love is God's greatest gift to us as human beings. Love is the one human experience that invites us to feel beautifully connected and forces us to acknowledge that meaning and purpose are anchored not in isolation and aloneness, but in union and togetherness.

What higher purpose is there in life but to give and receive love? Love is the essence of a life of abundance and joy. No matter what life brings our way, love is our highest goal, our most passionate quest. Yes, we have a tremendous need for love -- love that captures our hearts and nourishes our spirits. In fact, our capacity to give and receive love is what ultimately defines us. Nothing we have "accomplished" in our lifetimes matters as much as the way we have loved one another.

Yet love inevitably leads to grief. You see, love and grief are two sides of the same precious coin. One does not—and cannot—exist without the other. They are the yin and yang of our lives. People sometimes say that grief is the price we pay for the joy of having loved. This also means, of course, that grief is not a universal experience. While I wish it were, sadly it is not. Grief is predicated on our capacity to give and receive love. Some people choose not to love and so never grieve. If we allow ourselves the grace that comes with love, however, we must allow ourselves the grace that is required to mourn.

The experience of grief is only felt when someone of great value, purpose and meaning has been a part of your life. To mourn your loss is required if you are to befriend the love you have been granted. To honor your grief is not self-destructive or harmful, it is life-sustaining and life-giving, and it ultimately leads you back to love again. In this way, love is both the cause and the antidote.

Yes, it is a given that there is no love without loss. Likewise, there is no integration of loss without the experience of mourning. To deny the significance of mourning would be to believe that there is something wrong about loving. Just as our greatest gift from God is our capacity to give and receive love, it is a great gift that we can openly mourn our life losses.

It is important that you understand that grief and mourning are not the same thing, however. *Grief* is the constellation of thoughts and feelings we have when someone we love dies. We can think of it as the container. It holds our thoughts, feelings, and images of our experience when someone we love dies. In other words, grief is the internal meaning given to the



experience of loss. *Mourning* is when we take the grief we have on the inside and express it outside of ourselves.

Making the choice to not just grieve but authentically mourn provides us the courage to live through the pain of loss and be transformed by it. How ironic that to ultimately go on to live well and love well we must allow ourselves to mourn well. Somewhere is the collision between the heart, which searches for permanency and connection, and the brain, which acknowledges separation and loss, there is a need for all of us to authentically mourn. You have loved from the outside in, and now you must learn to mourn from the inside out.

**About the Author:** *Dr. Alan Wolfelt is a respected author and educator on the topic of healing in grief. He serves as Director of the Center for Loss and Life Transition and is on the faculty at the University of Colorado Medical School's Department of Family Medicine. Dr. Wolfelt has written many compassionate, bestselling books designed to help people mourn well so they can continue to love and live well, including Loving from the Outside In, Mourning from the Inside Out, from which this article is excerpted.*



## SURVIVING AS A



Anniversaries are always times to remember and each year we are able to talk more about the wonderful memories our son left us, and less about the aching grief we felt for many, many months.

We even discuss how, in some strange yet remarkable way, we have "grown" out of this indescribable pain. We are more complete in aspects of love, compassion, forgiveness, understanding and tolerance; yet this has grown from the incompleteness, physically, of our family.

I am also reminded, very gratefully, that we have, as a couple and a family, "weathered" the storm as it were and have emerged a more close and caring group of people. But we came very close to shattering our lives as a family.

While we need the love and support, and most of all the "ears" of our friends and family in coming to a new understanding of our lives after a family death, there is, in each of us, a very deep secret place which we have to reach within ourselves. We not only have to find this place, we have to use it as the place where we, as individuals, plumb the depths of our grief and realize that there is a path also leading out of our secret place.

Some would call this secret place our soul, our psyche or even our heart. The name is irrelevant, but to deny it exists within each of us, is to deny our individuality, our uniqueness as a person.

In our case, and out of love and compassion for each other, we lingered almost too long in our secret places. We almost forgot to find the path out. We were in danger of indulging in too much grief, in letting it take us over, in turning our backs on those waiting with the torches to show us the way back. And most of all, we almost lost each other.

Our secret places are our refuge, and we tell ourselves this is for many reasons, but the one which we tell ourselves is the most justifiable, is that our partner's grief is enough for them to bear - we mustn't

put more pain on them. So, the secret place becomes a prison we lock ourselves into and even convince ourselves that the reasons for being there are unselfish.

And the stronger and more independent a person has been prior to a family tragedy, the more the family is in danger of falling apart, ironically because those whom we love, respect and uphold our needs as an individual.

But in losing a son, daughter, brother or sister, the family experiences something which was never contemplated or planned for. We don't anticipate the death of a child - we don't expect that we, as parents, will outlive our offspring, and we don't grow up as a family knowing how to deal with such a tragedy. So we have to learn a new dimension to our family life. Sharing usually involves giving and enjoying - the grief sharing involves giving of ourselves in a situation which can never be enjoyable in the usual sense.

I read once that we don't ever get over the death of a child, we work through it and each of us must do this in two ways, alone as an individual, and in company with our family and dearest friends.

~ Nan Kettle, *Mother of Allister*

"My grief journey has  
no one destination.  
I will not "get over it."

The understanding  
that I don't have to be  
done is liberating.  
I will mourn this  
death for the rest  
of my life.

~Alan D Wolfelt  
*The Wilderness of Grief*

TheAfterloss.com

*Save the Date • Save the Date • Save the Date • Save the Date*

## ***POT LUCK PICNIC & MEMORIAL EVENT***



***Sunday, September 25, 2016***

***2:00***

***Bowdoin Park • Sheafe Road • Wappingers Falls, NY***



## SEARCHING FOR HOME AFTER LOSING AN ADULT SIBLING By [Sarah Lyman Kravits](#)

Not long after I lost my brother, a friend passed along an article called [“When a Brother Dies.”](#) by Judith Newton. As I read, one line popped out like it was scrawled with neon tubing:

*“Even siblings we don’t see, who live differently from us, who move in their own world, may be shoring up our lives, our sense of family, our feeling of being at home in the world without our knowing it.”*

I could not get this line out of my mind.

When Frank was born, he completed our family of four. I had just turned two and have no memory of the time before he arrived. As I grew and began to form a picture of what it meant to exist, my brother and parents came into focus first. The rest of the picture gradually built up around and among them. On top of sixteen years growing up together, we lived in close proximity as adults -- we shared an apartment in New York for a while, and later after we married and had children, we spent five years living in neighboring towns, seeing one another whenever we could.

Although we had a strong connection, we did indeed “live differently,” traveling in unique orbits with our own colleagues, friends, and communities. Then a few years ago, a job change led him and his family to a new home nearly 2000 miles away. Over the time he lived at a distance, with the demands on both families of work and parenting and life, we generally did not see each other more than once or twice a year.

As a matter of fact, when he died, I had not seen him in eleven months. Although we were going to get together at my parents over the December holidays, a combination of illness and weather scuttled our plans. We thought we might travel to Frank’s for Easter that following spring but he and his wife were going to be away the whole holiday weekend for a wedding, so we figured it wouldn’t make sense to come all that way and then not see them.

We were speaking and e-mailing frequently about my parents’ upcoming anniversary party, their move to an apartment, work stuff, kid news, and so on, and for that I am grateful.

Then in a blink of an eye he was gone, killed by a drunk driver.

The first few months were a blur of unimaginable tasks, which I performed while feeling numb with shock, as though I were encased from head to toe in a suit made of foot-thick rubber.

**“When I began to have a little time to think, I realized that I felt his absence constantly, in every location, at every event, at every moment.”**

Why? I couldn’t figure it out. The pain made sense on holidays and special family days, or at events and places we have shared over the years. But why did I miss Frank at places where I never saw him? Why did I feel his loss at events we never shared together? He wasn’t at my house more than three or four days a year since he moved - why did every room seem so empty? Then I remembered Judith Newton’s words and how her brother gave her a “feeling of being at home in the world” in a way she had not realized was happening. Suddenly I knew why I felt the sinkhole of his absence everywhere and all the time, even though he was not physically here everywhere and all the time: *The sinkhole is in me*. The sinkhole is everywhere I am and everywhere I go, because my home in the world had my brother in it, and now it doesn’t.

I see now that this can be a particular burden of someone who loses a sibling, especially a sibling close in age as we were, and especially when the loss comes in adulthood. Something that has been there since the beginning of your consciousness, that you expected to remain throughout your life, is suddenly pulled away. You are left trying not to fall into the sinkhole that is inside your own self, trying to find a way to trust anything anymore. It makes sense to me now, the fact that I took my brother for granted as I do trees, or the sun rising in the morning, or the changing of the seasons. His existence was a daily fact of my life in the exact same way.

**“I never conceived of a world without my brother in it. As a matter of fact, to me it makes as much sense for him to be gone as it would for the sun to stop coming up.”**

I am working now on surrendering to this new world, attempting to understand it, one moment at a time. If you know one of my tribe — people who have lost siblings — be kind when we seem confused and unsure of ourselves. Understand that our loss, whether we have been close to our siblings or not, may have made us feel like our home in the world has been firebombed. Support us without judging our loss as less significant than other losses. Maybe help us pick up the pieces of our connections and experiences and form them into a new home. It won’t be what it was, but if we take time to create it with love and care, we might find that we can shore up new lives within it.