

Life is not what Happens to You

After a near fatal accident 18 years ago, which left my husband permanently blind, I thought the grief would never go away. The grief was so intense it permeated every cell in my body. The intense loss of sharing our dreams: seeing our twin boys play baseball, snow ski and watching them walk across the stage to receive their high school diplomas, were shattered in a single instant. The trips we had planned on taking with friends were crushed in a fleeting moment. I still miss the feeling of "I am safe" when I looked into his eyes. His gaze had always told me things would be OK.

Life can be difficult for many of us and in spite of going through one tragedy, we do not get a guarantee that there won't be many more. But life is not what happens to you, it is what you do about it.

When something horrific happens the first logical place to go is depression. And when one traumatic event stacks on top of another, the impact can be devastating. This despair can feel like a bottomless pit, a dreadfully gloomy place that quite literally envelops your very soul.

Know that you aren't the first person to wake up and feel that you can barely put one foot in front of the other. Embrace the fact that sometimes the grief of your loss will unexpectedly knock the breath out of you, and that is OK.

Fortunately, there is a way to climb out of the depths of despair. Each of us has to find something to hold onto. Mine was a faith in God, understanding that bad things happen to good people and a determination to make life better. I made a commitment to help others by obtaining my graduate degrees. I know grief. I understand it. I personally know how to get through it and I embrace the joy of living life again.

I counsel those who are grieving and help them to discover, "Who am I?" "What gives me joy?" "What is my life's purpose?" Journaling your feelings or drawing a picture, or writing a song can also help you to reframe your grief.

It is important to surround yourself with a positive support system. The people who you choose to be your allies cannot be judgmental. They do not have the right to tell you when it is time to get over your grief. They cannot tell you that they, "Know how you feel." And they must not tell you that "God doesn't give you more than you can handle." These statements are not comforting. They are discouraging.

People who truly care about you will listen. They will allow you to feel what you feel and say what you think. Many times, simply talking about your grief will allow you to move forward. The goal for you is to find happiness in spite of the loss you have endured.

Find a good therapist, one who will discourage you from being helpless and playing the victim, to empower you to embrace optimism and a new way of living. Working through your grief will give you the courage to heal and help you to find the gift of happiness.

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