

Mother's Day – Both Ends Burned

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My mother died Jan. 2017, 89 years of age. She had a long illness, stroke, TBI, and dementia. Her passing was finally the end of years of suffering and a blessing.

My son died Jan. 2019. Kevin was 28, and his life was literally exploding with opportunities, a future, many hopes, and dreams, but ended on a fatal kayaking trip.

In that two year span, after Mom died, my role model, my pillar of strength, at least on this physical earth, I came to terms with her passing, as the natural order of death should occur. She did live a full life. She saw her daughters marry, and have families of their own. It was a family joke that I was playing mother to my mother, and we just reversed roles, as one naturally ages. It was difficult not to have my mother in my life anymore. I missed her hugs, kisses, and words of wisdom. I missed her calling me “doll.” And yet, the expanded definition of mother, existed for me, as I was still a mother to my son, and knew I always would be.

Mother's Day did not begin any day of any year until I received Kevin's gift or phone call as a grown young man who did not live home. It was what I waited for, more than anything. I devoted my life to raising and nurturing him, providing opportunities, expanding his life with all kinds of possibilities. I felt honored to be Kevin's mother. I loved being Kevin's mother.

“Hi, Mom, Happy Mother's Day! What are you and Dad doing today to celebrate?” *Then Kevin died.* In the weeks leading up to the first Mother's Day alone last year, no longer a daughter who could honor my mother, and no longer a mother to transfer these skills and intense love to my son, I lost my identity. I lost my purpose. Who am I now? Am I an orphan? *What is a word to describe someone who lost their mother and also lost their ability to be a mother because their child is no longer here?* The heartache hangs heavy within my chest. To be a daughter and lose your mother, as a grown adult, is something that can be processed mentally. To lose a child at any age, that you can no longer “MOTHER” is something that makes no logical sense. To be in limbo where you have neither, is irrational, a sense of displacement in the world, as I knew it.

Motherhood is not just about birthing or raising a child. It is about a lifelong yearning to protect and nurture. It is about deep love, that which you receive from a mother, and that which you give to a child. It is about doing more for your child than was done for you. It is about emotions, pride, great joy, and sometimes sadness. It is about correcting mistakes you may have seen in the past in your own childhood and doing better than that. It is about being the resource, the sounding board for your child, at every twist and turn of life, a process that never ends. It is about ultimate sacrifice and unconditional love.

There was nothing that gave me greater pleasure than for my son to ask my advice as he got older. With no other child to “mother,” where does that yearning, that skillset, that learned and perfected trade of motherhood go? *And with no mother to guide me, no mother's shoulder to cry on, there is vast emptiness and loneliness.* I have been searching. I have been asking.

I have been trying so hard, to place the art of “motherhood” somewhere else for more than a year. It doesn't seem to fit, anywhere. I am a jigsaw puzzle piece in the wrong box. I no longer have a mother and I am no longer a mother to my child. How do I complete the puzzle, when I do not fit? I will continue exploring, but it is such a uniquely exquisite, beautiful skill and role, that seems to be irreplaceable and can't be substituted with something else. Do I mother a friend, my spouse, a friend of my son? Do I mother a sister, or another bereaved childless parent? I try every day. I haven't stopped trying. This is the journey and the “purpose” that demands my focus. *I keep looking for how to re-invent myself as a “mother.”*

Mother's Day will be a day of reminders, question marks, and intense emptiness. It will be my second year of being “Motherless.” No mother, and no child to mother on this physical earth. But I will keep trying to figure it out, as I was blessed to have a mother and blessed to be my son's mother. It is not enough to remind myself that I am still Kevin's mother, and always will be. That motherly love has to find a place to go... and will become my lifelong search and quest.