



Mom's Gone, Now What

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On January 21st, 2006 our mother died. None of us even got to say goodbye. She left three children motherless—well, a child and two young adults. The absurd obituary made it sound like it was completely normal for her to be gone, as if it were to be expected. The damn thing was cut and dry, with no empathy or sympathy; it was as cold as her dead body. Her funeral, though beautiful, was full of so much tension. I know we were all pissed that our aunt, who had degraded and treated my mother like shit when my mother was alive, had the audacity to speak at her funeral and say how much she would “miss her sister.” We all knew that this was a lie, and we all knew that she was just saving face in front of our grandparents.

I will never forget the day she died. It was surreal to the point that I really did not want to believe it. My sister showed up first. She was balling her eyes out, and I just assumed something happened to her then-boyfriend. Then my dad showed up with my brother. I still didn't think that something happened to my mother, but I was fucking wrong. The day she died, a part of my soul died with her. My heart shattered and left an empty hole where she used to be.

People, in general, don't know how to help those grieving. They offer up condolences, but in the end, it never helps. Nothing anyone says will ever help or make you feel better. So instead, you start searching for ways to cope, and sometimes they're going to be the worst coping mechanisms you can have. The sad reality of it all is that the grieving are just looking for that safe place, and that was ripped right out from under us. I was beyond overwhelmed with the abundance of emotions racking my body, mind, and soul. The main emotions that are still there today are anger, despair, and jealousy. I am angry for her being taken away. I feel despair for the hopelessness of not having my mother, and knowing I will never get to see her nor hear her voice ever again. I feel jealous because it is like I was cheated out of having a relationship with my mother, while my brother and sister who are older got to actually have a relationship with her. For years, I have felt these emotions; I still struggle with them 15 years later.

Even though the three of us shared this traumatic event, we each handled it differently and we each handled it alone. Hell, none of us share the memory of finding out that she died, even though we were all told together. At the time, we were only 21, 20, and 13 years old.

My brother acted as if nothing happened, my sister became a bitter and resentful alcoholic, and I became a depressed and angry drug addict. They say that there are five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. My brother is stuck in denial, while my sister and I are stuck in anger and depression. So how does someone accept that their loved one is gone with no chance of seeing or hearing them again? Seriously, how?



My brother went on living his life as if nothing happened. The week after her funeral, he jumped right back into work and went on with life. He never talks about her or what happened, to the point that no one would ever know he lost a parent. A few years later, he got married and had a son. I wonder if his son knows who his grandmother was. Do they talk about her? Hell, do they even show the kid pictures of her? I guess this is his coping mechanism—blocking out a traumatic event, pretending like it never happened, bottling up all his emotions so he doesn't have to acknowledge or deal with it. I can understand the appeal, but in the end, when you bottle too much up, it tends to explode. I'm still waiting to see if my brother is going to explode or not.

My sister started drinking her feelings 'till it got to the point that she didn't want to drink alone. When this happened, she started providing me with alcohol while I was still a minor. She had a tendency to blame everyone else for her problems, causing her own isolation from the rest of the family. Eventually, she stopped drinking, started a family, and now has two kids. She makes sure to let their kids know who their grandmother was with pictures, videos, and stories. Which finally brings us to me. I started by drinking to deal with my issues, which then led to weed. When weed no longer was strong enough to help me forget, I started trying other things like cocaine, acid, ecstasy, prescription painkillers, and self-harm. Basically, I did anything to mask the abundance of emotions I was feeling. I chose to be emotionally numb rather than deal with my emotions, because most days it was too unbearable. It wasn't until I got arrested that I finally got my shit together and started dealing with my emotions. I guess we can say this was my wake-up call, because I was going to be serving at least 6 months in the county jail if I failed even one drug test.

I chose to stay clean because I realized I would never want my mom to see me like that.

To this day, I have not accepted my mother's death. However, I know she is gone and is not coming back, which makes my anger start all over again. The sad part is, January 21, 2021, will make it 15 years since she died, and she's been gone longer than I even knew her. I still struggle with accepting that.

My brother and sister have moved on with their lives and have started families of their own, whereas I refuse to get close to anyone and prefer to be alone. I wonder if these were the kind of lives she envisioned for her children, or did we go down the paths that were truly meant for us to become the people we are today. Charlene Marie Cordes died on Saturday, January 21, 2006, leaving behind a pretender, an alcoholic, and an addict. None of us have completed the stages of grief simply because grief is an individual's process and is different for every soul.

