

Dear Rachel,

This card and letter are intentionally slow in coming because I remember quite clearly how the time immediately following each of my parents' deaths brought a deluge of notes, cards and condolences which, at the time, my brain, was ill-equipped to process. The shock of them being gone prevented anything but the most basic of life-functions: bathe, dress, eat, do the next thing in front of me during the course of that day, then go to bed each night and **try** to sleep.

What I learned from each of the loss experiences (with the help of close friends who had already trodden this well-worn path), is that ***grief is a process through which there are no shortcuts***. In order to continue my own life with enthusiasm and gusto, I must deal with grief's emotions—allowing myself to appropriately feel and express the anger/sadness/ disappointment/loneliness that is a natural byproduct accompanying the death of a loved one.

The pain and anguish is real, often excruciating—leading many people to attempt relief by “stuffing” their feelings. In 1980, I lost my only brother, who died in a car accident at age 19. My parents, understandably, were devastated, but I remember my mother saying (with her jaw clenched in grim determination), “I ***must*** be strong.” She didn't ever cry in front of us and refused to allow her sorrow a foothold in outer expression. Locked up deep inside for the next twenty years before she died, I am convinced that my Mum's unprocessed grief over the loss of her youngest child contributed to a multitude of physical health problems including the brain tumor that ultimately took her life.

Masking grief's feelings with alcohol and drugs doesn't work either. This was my own coping mechanism back then, and I know, for a fact, I didn't genuinely grieve Joey's death until 1989 when I started my path of sobriety. I feel so grateful that my mind was clear and that I was able to suit up and be ***present*** by the time I had to face the very different circumstances surrounding each of my parent's demise—Mum in 2000 after a 13 month battle with cancer and Dad, unexpectedly, in 2007 when he simply keeled over and died in his home one morning. With help from a number of dear friends who'd already been through the loss of parents, I was blessed with the ability to perceive these experiences as the gifts that they were—a part of life's encounters offering me the opportunity to grow spiritually toward the inevitable day when my soul, too, will cross back over to the world from whence we came.

In any case, I offer these personal insights with the hope they will somehow assist in your journey through your mother's departure. She was an amazing woman with so much love in her heart, I, myself, choose to think it just burst open! Now the tenderness and devotion she felt for each of her children and grandchildren has become an eternal showering which will never, ever stop.

I'm enclosing several readings for you. The first two are reprints of material I was given after my mother's death that brought me a great measure of comfort and fueled my progress toward healing acceptance. I hope they may do the same for you. You may recognize these because I think I gave them to you also when your mother-in-law passed. Their words are powerful and deserve repeating—it's a new day and a new experience.

The third piece, a newspaper column about "when a parent dies" came to me recently quite by chance. As a firm believer in "there are no coincidences—only God-incidences," I felt duty-bound to pass it along as well.

The final enclosure is an excerpt from a book which I've currently been reading by Anne Morrow Lindbergh. This particular passage fairly jumped off the page to be shared in its eloquence and insight about grief and mourning. I read it over and over at least a dozen times, continually amazed at the wisdom integrated within its lines. Again, I hope some portion of the selection will illumine your heart and soul with a radiance of insight and maybe just a glimmer of peace.

Read this letter and these enclosures slowly, at your leisure, more than once, in order to derive the greatest benefit from the sentiments they convey. I truly believe it is through our shared experience, strength and hope, that God's plan for each of us is implemented. Never doubt for a second that the things you say and do in life have enormous impact on those around you. A simple kindness toward another or willingness to disclose something about yourself not only helps the one to whom you are reaching out; but paradoxically we find ourselves all the richer for the gesture.

God bless you, Rachel. I know the bond you shared with your mom was incredibly deep—woven into a tapestry where your entwined threads produced grand works of art! Some of these were beautifully in sync while others portrayed a dissonance which allowed you both to spring-board to higher spiritual awareness. I hope you can see all of this in hindsight, and believe that your connection with your mother doesn't ever stop, even though she has left this human life experience.

If you ever want/need to talk about "your process," I would welcome the opportunity to share in your thoughts and feelings.