

The Gifts of Grief

Category: Paperwork

written by Alison Hartman | January 9, 2018

In March 2017, my son died of a heroin overdose. He was twenty-five years old.

It began with his use of recreational drugs in his early teens. Before long, he was addicted to prescription opioids. And, finally, heroin.

Watching my beloved child slowly destroy himself was a heart-wrenching experience, almost as devastating as facing the finality of his death.

My therapist told me that you must own your grief so that it does not own you. I find that to be true. The more I move through all my emotions and let them move through me, the more healing takes place, and the gifts of grief are revealed.

Case in point: going through the nine years of files that accumulated over his disease. I waited eight months to have the strength and courage to review, sort out and decide what I would save. The files range from medical reports (he was hospitalized numerous times) and lab results (my son was diagnosed with Hepatitis C and HIV), EOBs (insurance "Explanation of Benefit" forms), drug rehab records, legal matters (many arrests took place over the years) and his own writings and journal entries.

As I looked over these papers, I was flooded with a vast range of emotions. These were the remnants of almost half of his life! The happier years before he was a teenager were memorialized in photo albums, trophies, his favorite stuffed animals, etc., but the latter years were summarized in this compilation of paperwork which could easily be titled, "The Dark Years." Reviewing this brought me face to face with his demise: each file a frozen frame in the film of his life.

As painful as this was, the overriding emotion surfaced like a photograph revealing itself in the chemical solution of a darkroom tray: Pure Love. I knew more than ever that these difficult papers did not define who he was. Nevertheless, sorting through the paperwork has been a means of healing my grief over his death.

My son was a beautiful person with a heart too tender for this world. He will always live inside my heart.

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