

You've experienced a great loss and it's so overwhelming that you have to make life really small for awhile, just to survive. What do you do when you disappear from life for long enough that you're not sure if the people, places, and things you love most will be patient enough to wait for you?

THIS IS SUCKER PUNCHED

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After my husband died, I really struggled with not being able to compensate for his absence. I couldn't do all the child care and house projects and household duties and cooking — overwhelmed was an understatement. Survival mode with two young kids had to include other people to help. I felt like crawling under a rock and hiding in order to grieve was an unattainable dream.

Another loss several years later had a very different outcome. I had to step away from a community that I loved but wasn't healthy for me anymore and I was really sad and disoriented. I wouldn't say that I cut people off, but I needed a lot of space, even from some of the people I cared for. I had to grieve and this was a grief that could only be shared with a very small circle of people (most of whom were long distance friends via text, Voxer, and Marco Polo). I didn't know how long it would take, but I knew I couldn't ignore this grief.

It was scary to make my world so small. To slow everything down. To truly take it one hour, one day at a time. When I was finally in a place to start opening my world up again and reconnect with some of those relationships that I'd put

on hold, I was holding my breath.

I had completely disappeared from life and my friends' lives had carried on. Was there still room for me in their lives? I hadn't expected them to pause their lives and wait for me, but I hoped I hadn't been forgotten either. As I tip-toed back into life, I tentatively reached out, sensitive to the response I would get. I was the one who disappeared, after all; I would have to live with the relationship consequences of that.

I never did let my life get quite as big as it was before that loss. And many of my friends, who patiently and graciously gave me the space and quiet I needed to grieve, were, in-fact, waiting for me. Other relationships changed — not ended, per se, but our paths diverged, and that's okay.

Re-emerging from a grief disappearing act is nerve wracking but I learned a few good lessons. I learned who loves and cares for me just because of who I am, not because of what I can offer or do for them. I learned what parts of life I missed and what others I was happy to leave in the past. I learned to be patient and gracious to myself as I processed the loss and the chronic pain and fatigue I was also dealing with at the time.

I took each of those lessons and used them. I realized how much I missed musical theatre and started looking for ways to bring more of it back into my life. I have been drawn to other people who have had to step away from things and people they love and their stories have comforted and healed me. I rethought a lot of what I want my kids to learn from me and about life and grief and how to be human.

Grieving is painful. Disappearing from life is both hard and (sometimes) necessary. Some people will stick around and others won't. We learn and grow and do our best as we creep out of our grief chrysalis because the alternative, to avoid the grieving that needs to be done, isn't a better option. We can't be all things to all people all the time and that's okay.

Here are a few books to help you feel less alone in your grief:

- [Crying in H Mart](#) by Michelle Zanier

- Rebellious Mourning: The Collective Work of Grief edited by Cindy Milstein
- The Sixth Stage of Grief by David Kessler
- H is for Hawk by Helen Macdonald
- How to Carry What Can't Be Fixed by Megan Devine
- The Year of Magical Thinking by Joan Didion

You'll find links to these along with a full transcript of this episode at BeckyLMcCoy.com/podcast/88

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If you found this episode encouraging or helpful, share it with a friend and remember: do what you need to do to grieve in a healthy way and trust that as you re-emerge there will be old and new people and things waiting for you. You're doing great.