

Sense of Gratitude

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I cannot say I am grateful my brother died; I cannot, since I would do nearly anything to have him back. The past three years since Andrew's sudden, luminous death devoured me with every excruciating icy bite of grief. That single event left a space in my life I don't have a name for; but sometimes when my heart contracts around those shards of glass, those broken impossible pieces, when I stay with them long enough, they give rise to a beautiful question...that question has something to do with knowing how to live; now, again, perhaps for the first time.

So now my life is really a story about how the wounded bird of my heart lives for something I couldn't and wouldn't have asked for myself. I have seen my life turned inside out, at an exhausting frequency. I have had to become a student and teacher of love and loss. Losing my brother that monsoon morning in Kathmandu when Buddha Air Flight 103 didn't make its landing means I cannot forget, as the Tibetans say, there is only one breath between this world and the next. When he died, I could not have predicted over the next three years I would also lose a business, a very long and dear friendship, and then my marriage.

I would also come to a deeper kind of love in the birth of my son who was in my womb when Andrew's plane crashed. And I would begin to believe I was really worth loving and that my life would need me to be fearless if I was going to survive this kind of transformation. I would see my ability to sit with others and tend their pain expand exponentially. There were many times I wasn't sure I could make it to this day, but I have. My wise mentor and therapist told me while in the early months of mourning that "you will realize that the worst thing that could happen isn't the worst thing." And it's true worse things do happen. But what is also true is I have found a kind of beauty in living my life because I am still dressed in skin with the ability to feel, sense, and experience, and I am humble to that gift we living often complain about.



My brother Andrew was a great lover of life. He was 26 and beautiful when he died. He was the clearest love of my life; unconditional, uncomplicated, true. Through him I know love is real. And love is necessary. That is something I have humility for, a gift of his presence that is still giving to me in my life. His dying has implored me to have the deepest regard for the common things he can no longer have himself. To taste my food with full enjoyment, to listen to the sounds of every instrument in a piece of music, to see laughter in the eyes of my children, to smell deeply the fragrance of roses, and to find my breath again and again in the arms of my beloved, who gives me the invitation to inhabit my flesh; because touching, in this moment, is remembering.

When death comes, I will leave here knowing I was asking the right kind of question. I also know it is not about finding the answer. Meanwhile, life is flowing through our senses and gratitude is sometimes simply, life feeling itself.