

My Changing Perspective of Mother's Day

January 22, 1979 – October 1, 2000

As bereaved parents we look at those dates often because this symbol represents our child in our present. Thinking about this Mothers' Day, I recognize how that symbol has changed for me over the 9 ½ years since my son Zac's death. For 21 years that birth date represented a day that was not only etched in my memory as one of the best days of my life but it signified the passage of time that added experiences, memories and events to a life that I witnessed. Of course, like every other parent, I never expected to place that second date next to the first one in my lifetime. But when it occurred, I faced uncharted territory, and my life turned upside down and inside out. At that time, I did not know how I would arrive ten years down the road let alone two weeks hence. It's a journey that must be experienced through individual coping, resilience and choices.

Obviously, when that second date was added to Zac's identification, not only his physical existence ceased but my life changed in every conceivable way. But, as I progressed through this grief journey, I recognized growth and change in previously unfathomable areas.

On Mothers' Days in the past, I experienced a variety of reactions depending upon the year, my acceptance, my growth and the condition of my heart. In my grief, time both trapped and freed me. While experiencing early grief, I was self absorbed and could not see past my own pain. I was trapped into perceiving Zac's death in relation to my sadness, my emotions, my pain, my loss and how I felt at the time. This time was MY time. It trapped me into seeing the entire world only through my loss. As I began to climb those steps of acceptance, I viewed Zac's death from his perspective and chose to reframe my grief. However, this reframe required time to accomplish and was another time trap for me.

(Once I made the decision to view his death from Zac's perspective, I wanted to be free of the pain but grief does not work that way and making choices in grief does not extinguish the pain!) For short periods of time, I could transfer my thoughts from my agony to what Zac must be experiencing in his new and continuing life. I missed him and it was extremely painful. But, as time progressed, I was able to slowly shift the focus from my pain and loss to Zac's perception of his death. The many steps of acceptance did not automatically remove the fantasies and dreams I imagined for his future but luckily, the process of time helped reaffirm my faith and past spiritual beliefs that could have been swallowed up by my narcissistic universe.

This was a natural process for me, but it was not easy. I did not want to live in this much pain so I had to choose differently. Through the pain I was comforted by a quote from Eugenia Price's book, *Getting through the Night: Finding Your Way after the Loss of a Loved One*: Birth is natural, illness is natural, failure is natural, grief is natural...but none is easy."

Adjusting to a new life direction required strengths and qualities I did not know I possessed. Change came through trauma and pain but the rewards were worth it. I have received many gifts through my grief and seeing life through new eyes is only one of them. I realized that time gave me the opportunity to grow in my grief and develop a different frame of reference.

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I used to look at Zac's birth date through eyes that cried and felt the pain of not being able to celebrate another birthday with him. I used to view his death date as the end of my life. But because of choices I consciously made while grieving, I now focus on the area between those dates with respect, love and awe. I experienced 21 years with this wonderful soul. This was our plan.

I now look at Zac's death as a life, where before I looked at his death as my sadness.

This Mother's Day when I think of Zac I will think of his smile. I will remember those years between the birth and the death dates. Zac was happy with whatever life handed him. Thus his often statement "it don't matter!" He accepted life, the good, the bad, the lessons.

I'll probably cry a little on Mother's Day and miss my Zac, but I'll focus on his life and not his death.