

Sometimes Goodbye is a Second Chance

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At least once a week every week of every month for the past nine years, I've played a movie clip in my mind. Sometimes the clip is different, though it usually revolves around the same general idea. Oftentimes at the end of this mini-movie, I'm crying. Other times, I'm laughing at the memory of what once was. Cringing at the memory of what could have been, and smiling at the thought of what life now is and will come to be in the future. The death of a loved one is a curious thing. It's hard to grasp the reality that someone you've grown close to will no longer be there. We all deal with the thought of death differently. Some of us cry while others are too young to even realize they should be upset, and still some are struck even deeper—so deep that they feel the need to be with their loved one no matter what it takes. If you were a six-year-old child, how would you react to losing the two people closest to you? Flipping through the scrapbooks, memories, and movie clips in your head, you might laugh, smile, and cry, but would you ever be thankful it happened?

It was towards the end of 1999, which means that it's been almost a decade since I last saw her face. I remember it all too clearly, yet at the same time so many pieces are missing. My childhood is fuzzy because I've forced myself to forget, to move on, though I've held on to a few saddening little movie clips. I'm not sure if they're real or not, the memories I do have, but how could I make up memories so painstakingly terrible? I remember my mother not feeling so well after we came back from our usual Sunday bowling trip as a family.

"Daddy," I said, "maybe we should take her to the hospital."

"No, she'll be fine," he assured me. "Now take your brother and run upstairs."

I did as he asked but secretly watched. Now that I think about it, I don't remember what I watched. I don't remember what happened, if I was at the hospital or not. I don't even remember crying at the funeral, because as I recall, I didn't. How foolish of me. How could I not cry? I just sat on my daddy's lap, knowing that my mother was inside that box, that terrible coffin. But why was she there? My mother, Pamela, had a second heart attack, one that proved fatal. Maybe I would've cried if I had been given the chance to say goodbye, to be prepared. Though, maybe it was better this way.

Unfortunately, my father did not take the news well at all. I was kind of mad at him, though. I still am. In my childish mind I blamed him for letting my mother die like that. Why hadn't he just taken her to the hospital like I begged him to? Now I realize that sometimes adults really do know more than children. He couldn't have saved her. No medical attention could have protected her. One of the memories that I have after the event is one I believe no child should have to deal with. No person should have this memory buried deep in the back of his or her mind only to have it dug up and played all too often.

A few months after my mother's death, my father finally broke. He sat me down beside him and asked where I wanted to live. What kind of question was that? I wanted to live with him, of course. I wanted to be in my own house, safe from any more harm. I longed for him to see me grow up, to be daddy's little girl. Where was he going anyway? How could he leave now? I needed him. My younger brother needed him. I had never realized until I became a teenager why he did what he did then. He missed the woman he loved so much. He had these two children that were a constant reminder of what he had lost. I suppose it's not that he didn't want us anymore, though it's hard not to feel that way sometimes. In 2000, shortly after my mother died, my father passed away. Ron Rosenauer committed suicide.

Until recently, no one had told me what exactly happened. No one said, "Hey, by the way, your dad shot himself with a gun." I suppose telling that to a six-year-old wouldn't really go over too well. Somehow, though, I just knew what had happened. The act of suicide is often viewed as a cowardly way to end one's own life. I hear people around me always joking about it all the time. For some people, maybe it just an easy way out, an act done without much thinking. However, I believe it was different with my father. He knew exactly what he was doing and why he was doing it. He wanted to be with the beautiful woman that he loved and adored. I'm sure he dreaded the idea of leaving his children behind, because from what I remember he was an amazing father. He knew, though, that he would never be able to raise two children on his own. I also believe that he was so in love with my mother that he

was never going to remarry. He understood, better than I did at the time, that I would live a better life in the care of another family, one with a mother and a father to protect me.

So, for a while, I would become an orphan. Okay, maybe that sounds a bit dramatic, but by definition I was an orphan. However, I went to live with one of my aunts. I had gone from a three-story brick house with a pool in the backyard to a one-story house where I often slept on a cot. I didn't live there for very long, or my life would be drastically different right now. After living there for a short period, I went to live with Uncle Ken and his wife Janet. They had a three-story house and neighbors with children our age. I was definitely excited to move. Or was I? I actually don't remember how I felt then, only how I feel now. I really do feel like I was completely emotionless throughout this whole experience.

As I sit here writing this, I'm trying to think of where I want to go with it. What meaning am I trying to get across? At the moment, as I read and reread it, this story seems all too upsetting. One that would make the reader feel bothered and sympathetic. That's really not the message I want. I'll admit that sometimes it's nice to hear someone say how sorry he or she is and how tragic it really is. In all reality, though, it's not a tragedy. The death of my parents was not an ending but merely a beginning. (Often times when I think about this topic, I start to feel like a great philosopher, like Plato or Aristotle. I feel smart, like I know more than those around me. In a sense I suppose I do.)

I recently heard a song by one of my favorite bands. I'd heard the song many times before, but I'd never really thought anything of it until now. It's called "Second Chance" and is performed by Shinedown. The chorus says, "Tell my mother, tell my father, I've done the best I can to make them realize this is my life. I hope they understand I'm not angry. I'm just saying, sometimes goodbye's a second chance." Now, honestly, that song is about a boy who's running away from his parents and starting a new life. Though, why can't it apply to my situation, too? It makes me smile to hear the song, but the last sentence in the chorus hits me the hardest. Sometimes goodbye's a second chance.

To me, that means that saying goodbye to my parents gave me a second chance, a chance to start over with a new life. Now, why I needed a new life when my old one had barely started is beyond me. I've learned not to ask questions, just accept answers. I suppose this could all deal a bit with fate. Religious fate or not, I most certainly believe it was my destiny to be where I am now. Although many people may not like to hear this, I've been questioning my religious views lately. I go to church, and I love my church family so much. They've changed me for the better. However, do I believe in God? That's the hardest questions for me, as it is for most of us. I'm just not sure. How could God take away a young girl's parents both in the same year? On the other hand, why would He then give her such a wonderful new start? My point is: maybe the big man upstairs knows what he's doing. I want to believe that so much. The death of my parents has actually given me a stronger religious faith. I thank God every day for what he has given me because it's so much.

I like to think that heaven exists. There's a big, beautiful, fluffy, white-clouded heaven above that spreads on and on without end. I like to imagine that my parents are up there. (Now, I actually imagine that they are watching me on a big screen television or a small glass ball, both equally strange things to have in heaven.) I like to pretend that they're not gone but simply in a better place. Whether heaven is just a fantasy or not, it's where my mother and father are. Mommy and Daddy are in a better place, and one day they'll be ready to bring their little girl home again.

Now, I believe in happy endings, and so far the ending of this story is making me frown a bit. Anybody else feeling a bit teary-eyed or needing a new box of tissues? (Please note that this is my attempt to add humor to a heavy topic. It's certainly not easy.) I'm not sure if anyone reading this has noticed, but my writing here is as if I were actually saying it aloud or writing it in a diary. I intended for it to be this way. I was overjoyed when I found out about this essay contest, a chance to do something I'm good at in order to maybe win a prize. That sounded pretty cool, though what I was more excited about was a chance to simply share my story, no matter the quality of the contest.

More than anything, I just want people to hear the story of an everyday, normal teenager. Me. There's nothing special about me, yet if one thinks about it, isn't there? How many other teenagers does anyone know with a story like mine? I'm certainly not the only one. Oh, how I would love to just talk to someone with a story similar to mine. How wonderful it would be to connect with someone who knew exactly what I was going through. However, I don't see that happening for now, so I write. I write a story of a young girl who arose from a "burning building" type tragedy. The cool thing about this story is that I've actually lived the perfect nightmare with a beautiful fairytale ending.

I'm smiling right now at the thought of being able to write a wonderful story about a topic that is often quickly viewed and set aside for fear of its awkwardness. If a reader remembers nothing else from what I've written, he or she should remember that death is not something to be pushed aside and forgotten because, come on, who really "forgets" that someone they love is dead? It's impossible (believe me, I've tried). No, death is something that needs

to be talked about. (If not for the listener, then for the speaker himself or herself.) Many may forget about a terrible boyfriend or yesterday's mail still in the mailbox but never forget about the death of a loved one. Keep that person close to your heart because they're only really gone if you forget them.

I'd like to end this essay with a prayer (pushing aside the whole question of whether "the big man" is really "upstairs"). This is not a prayer to God, but he can listen. I'd rather He hand the phone over to my parents so I could tell them a few things. If they could hear me, I would tell them how much I love them and miss them. How I wish that I really knew who they were. I'd also like to thank them for simply being smarter than I am. I'd ask my father to forgive me for doubting his actions. I'd thank my mother for giving me her stunning looks and assure her that I'll be careful around those silly boys. (Oh, what I would give for even just five minutes with my parents right now.) Most of all, I'd let them know that they're still my mom and dad and that I'm still and will always be their little girl. After I've said all this, I would say, "Goodbye," and then wait—for a second chance.