

The Irony of Death

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Experts say the healthy way to grieve is to feel all feelings and not run from them ... to let the grief-tide flow through you without swimming against the current. But what of grief with the strength to suspend one within the sea? These are issues I grapple with since losing my mother, and arguably my best friend, in November of 2022.

An exceptional bond exists between mothers and daughters which is so strong, it might as well be covalent. The uniqueness of this relationship is such that the grief of its loss has its own categorical distinction which author, Hope Edelman, describes as being stronger, more emotionally detrimental, and often never-ending.¹ My mother and I shared such a substantial connection that its rhetorical description is infeasible. Since her passing, anything and everything reminds me of her. Yet, saying I am “reminded” of her is erroneous. The truth is that the moment this person who I deeply love ceased to physically exist, she simultaneously encircled my heart-space in a more profound way than I have ever experienced.



In 2001, Danish physicist, Lene Vestergaard Hau, managed to completely stop a beam of light, two years after succeeding in slowing it down.² I think about this often as I journey down the path of acute grief. It is a curious feeling to go through the motions of life, unfazed and functionally fast-paced as ever, while internally feeling like Dr. Hau’s photons – suspended, as if waiting for a phenomenon to restore normalcy.

Grief, however, is a one-way journey ... it is inevitable that one cannot revert to who they were before substantial loss. Straddling the chasm of devastation and comfort is a peculiar thing, but comfort is nevertheless present as the continued emotional connection to a loved one reverberates in the psyche with full resonance.

The sensation of feeling a person's presence in one's proverbial heart so intensely and abundantly is something I find astonishing. Suffice to say, my mother's physical death was followed by a metastasis of her essence in my consciousness to the extent that I feel her omnipresent love in all things beautiful ... rain, laughter, rustling trees, glistening snow, and every other magnificent thing in this world. I also notice her in myself like never before. I see her features in my hands and face ... each glance feels like a little gift from her.

I find that these experiences constitute the ultimate irony of death – that someone we lose in one realm becomes infinitely present in a myriad of other realms. And profound grief, as it turns out, is an awakening to human closeness and resilience ... but most of all, to all-encompassing, enduring, metastatic love. Perhaps Nobel laureate, Albert Camus, described it best – “In the midst of winter, I finally learned that there was in me an invincible summer.”³



Works Cited

1. Edelman, H. (1994). *Motherless daughters: A legacy of loss*. Addison-Wesley Pub. Co.
2. Hau, L.V. (2001). Frozen light: Slowing a beam of light to a halt may pave the way for new optical communications technology, tabletop black holes and quantum computers. *Scientific American*, 285(1), 52-59.
3. Maquet, A. (1958). *Albert Camus: The invincible summer* (p. 5). George Braziller, Inc.