

I have learned that well-meaning people will sometimes say the stupidest things when they are trying to help. I know I have to be patient because they do not understand, and probably never will. And, I have to accept that everyone has an opinion on how I should grieve. It may not be my opinion, but they will have one!

I have learned there is no time limit; I will always miss my daughter - today, tomorrow, in a year or five years, or even 30 years down the road. I will still miss her; time will not change that. I have learned that it is okay to grieve no matter how long it's been. It's my grief – no one else's!

I have learned that I am stronger than I thought I was, and yet I am weaker than I ever was before.

In a year I have learned that my memories won't fade if I take them out and share them with others. It's up to me to share the gift that is my child with the world.

I have learned that a terrible monster called *Anger* lives inside me, and I don't know what I would do without him. *Anger* has now become a very best friend, much like *Sadness* and *Depression*.

In a year I have learned that I can get used to visiting a cemetery, and I will even take pride in making my daughter's grave the best-decorated one around. So that anyone who chances by will know that my child was and always will be loved.

In a year I've realized that I may get used to taking my precious child flowers instead of toys or clothes, but it doesn't stop the hurt or erase the longing for what I should be buying.

In a year I have learned that a sweet smell like her baby lotion or even shampoo - no matter how faint - can make me cry in a single heartbeat.

In a year I have learned that even though I hurt, I am lucky to have known her, been able to hold her, and love her. So many people were not that fortunate.

I have learned how to turn away and control myself when I see someone who reminds me of her: a glimpse of a tiny baby dressed in pink, a giggle, or seeing an innocent smile. And, I wonder if the parents of that child realize how very lucky they are. I have learned that I may be envious or even a little jealous, but I always wish that child well and hope that her parents never learn my pain.

I have learned to accept that I will never see my daughter walk, or talk, or call me Mommy. I have learned to accept that I will have no more pictures: That what I have is it; there are no more coming!

I have learned to accept the fact that in my house, she will never grow old, and I will never know her as a young woman learning about life. I will never watch her fall in love, or get her heart broken. I will never have to let her go as she walks down the aisle, and I will never hold her hand as she struggles to give birth to my grandchild. I will never look at her all grown up and feel pride knowing I gave this world another shining star. So many things I will never have.

In a very long and heartfelt year full of pain and so many many tears, I have learned that love alone was not enough to keep my daughter by my side.

I have learned that love unfortunately does not conquer death, but it will outlast it. And that even after so much pain, some memories will always make me smile, even though I may cry.

In a year, I have learned not to fear death, because only in death will I hold my daughter again.

My Baby Angel, Malia Izabel Melendez, is and was the strongest person I have ever known. She was a fighter who never gave up; even when they said she couldn't win, she did. And even though she had to leave me; she will live forever in my heart and my memories...

--By Amber Melendez

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Newly Bereaved...

Grief Shared Is Grief Diminished

There is no detour around bereavement. There is no short cut in the mourning process. It must be worked through. As you are empty, so is the world around you. You are living a nightmare. You think, "I have touched the bottom of despair. I can't go any farther." You do go farther ... You may cry hysterically, or you may remain outwardly controlled, showing little emotion. Reactions are varied and contradictory. Not all questions have answers. Unanswered "whys" are a part of life.

You reject the overtures of your friends. How dare they talk of your future when you know life holds nothing for you. Your heart is breaking - and they offer you cliches. Accept their companionship, but you need not take their advice; do what is best for you.

Grief is universal. At the same time it is extremely personal. Heal in your own way.

Of course, your weeping will not bring back your loved one, but that's why you cry - because you cannot

