

# Living Without *Mom*



Finding comfort while  
learning to live with loss

A **GriefShare**® BOOK



# Introduction

**I** don't think anything prepares you for death, and how final it is," shares Brenda after the loss of her mom.

Losing your mom changes everything. Whether your relationship was close or complicated, whether her death was sudden or stretched out over time, the world feels like a different place when Mom is gone. Many describe the days after her death as disorienting. A common image is that of being adrift on the ocean without an anchor.

If that's where you find yourself, you are not alone. This book was written for people trying to make sense of life without Mom and find comfort through grief. Inside you'll read honest stories of real people who are walking this road. Their reflections can help you put words to what you are feeling and give a gentle reminder that what you're feeling is normal.

Yet grief is never one-size-fits-all. That's why the middle section of this book allows you to trace a path that fits *your* story. Are you an only child or grieving with siblings? Do you carry the loss of your father as well, or are you grieving alongside him? Was your relationship with Mom close or complicated? How old were you when she died? These questions, and more, will help frame the context of your grief.

Wherever you are on your journey, you'll find "Anchor Points" at the end of each chapter. These are truths you can hold on to, along with tangible ways to steady yourself when the waves feel overwhelming.

The final section of the book is filled with help for the practical questions and decisions you might face as you navigate the loss of your mom.

Our hope is that as you read, you'll discover that your grief is normal (even if it feels messy) and that you don't have to face it alone. While it's true that you can't return to life before your mom died, in these pages, you'll find comfort for your sorrow, reassurance, and strength for the days ahead.

## SECTION 1

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# Nothing Feels Normal

**W**hen someone you love dies, the world shifts in ways you never expected. This is especially true when it's your mother who passes away. Ordinary routines can feel strange, as though you've stepped into a life that no longer fits. Grief doesn't only impact your emotions; it can unsettle your body, your mind, your relationships, and even your faith.

If you find yourself asking *Is it normal to feel this way?*, these chapters will prove to be a balm to your soul. They walk with you through the shock of the moment, the ache of loneliness, the weight of regrets, and the spiritual confusion that can accompany loss. Each chapter is meant to help you see that what you're experiencing isn't a sign of failure, but a natural response to losing your mother.

While the road through this season is not simple or quick, you don't have to walk it alone. God promises to be near to the brokenhearted (Psalm 34:18).



## CHAPTER 1

# The moment it happened

**I** remember driving to the hospital thinking my life could change, *I could lose my mom*. ... They took us into the quiet room, and I told my niece, “This is bad. You don’t get taken into the quiet room for good news.”

Like Didra, you likely remember when you first heard that your mom died. You may have heard the news through a phone call, or maybe you were there. Her death might have come without warning or after a long, slow goodbye. Either way, this moment will indelibly shape you.

Do you remember where you were? And what you were doing? Some do—even recalling what they were wearing or eating—others don’t. But most people remember how it felt. You may have collapsed with emotion or responded with silence. Some experience chaos and others a surprising calm. However it showed up, this moment will likely leave a mark. Things won’t be the same.

## You’re not alone in your initial response

Different people react in different ways after the death of their mom. There are multiple factors that contribute to how you respond. Perhaps you can identify with these people who reacted with intense emotion:

*I felt like I couldn't cry long enough or hard enough to release the grief inside me. **Renee***

*I experienced a deep, deep sorrow. ... I felt a sudden feeling of being unprotected. **Jackie***

*It felt like my entire world shattered into a million pieces all at once. I fell to the floor screaming to the top of my lungs feeling like a child in a store who had lost their mother. **A grieving daughter***

Many people respond with shock before their other emotions kick in:

*I didn't cry at all. I felt numb and confused. **Micah***

*The shock I felt as I listened to the doctor made his voice sound like it was echoing in a tunnel, like this was a nightmare and wasn't real. **Karen***

*I was numb and in disbelief. I couldn't believe she was gone and I was never going to get to hear her laugh, talk, or spend time with her or celebrate life with her again. **Didra***

Even if the death was expected, it can still be difficult. Guenn's 106-year-old mother died, and she shares, "I knew she was going to die and it definitely was not what people call an untimely death, due to her age, but it was still *very* hard."

Stephanie had a similar experience:

Even though my mother was in hospice care, watching her slowly slip away was almost an out-of-body experience. I remember feeling shocked after I realized she took her last breath—and almost like I couldn't breathe [myself].

## You may have mixed emotions

Your mother's death can also stir up what might feel like conflicting emotions. That was the situation with these people:

*My grief for my mom was mixed with relief that she accomplished the goal of reaching heaven but deep, deep sadness that I had to live the rest of my life without her. **Christy***

*Intense sorrow and yet a deep love and gratitude to have been loved by her. **Robin***

*We had a strange relationship, so I ended up grieving the loss of rebuilding our relationship as well. I wanted to grieve like other people did when their mothers passed but it just wasn't there. **Linda***

*She had been sick for so long. I loved her, but I also felt relieved. Then I felt terrible for feeling that way. **Elaine***

Kerrie, who had a difficult relationship with her mother, shares: “When I heard she’d passed away, I felt sad, but I also felt guilty that I didn’t feel the [same] sadness I felt when my dad died. It was almost a relief that I didn’t have to deal with her anymore.”

## This moment will mark time

Your grief experience will not look exactly the same as another person’s, and there’s no set pattern for the emotions you’ll go through. But one thing is certain, the moment of your mom’s death becomes a marker in time. It has a clear before and after. And it’s one of those moments you’ll likely carry around forever, albeit with a different intensity as time passes.

Stacy considers her mother’s death a life-altering moment:

She was my final family member. [When she died], my world halted, it was like everything ceased to move, including me.

Your memory of this moment may continue to show up time and again. It can show up in your dreams. It can be triggered through everyday events; it can rise up on holidays and special days. Remembrances of your mom may seem to live in your muscles. You might still check your

phone, still think to call her, still feel her absence in a way that doesn't make sense to explain. That's not wrong. It's part of how grief works. You don't forget someone who shaped your whole life. What you're experiencing is a normal part of grief.

## Anchor points

### Truth to hold

- ~ **You are more than this loss.** The moment you lost your mom is etched on your heart. It may feel like a dividing line, but it is not the whole of your story. Your grief may echo in surprising ways, but echoes do soften with time. You will likely always remember the moment, but it will feel less intense with time.

### Finding steady ground

- ~ **Share your memory.** Choose one trusted person you can tell, in a sentence or two, what you remember about the day your mom died. Letting someone else hold the memory with you can help you move forward.
- ~ **Write it down.** Write down what you remember most clearly about that moment. Then, beside it, write one word that captures what you long for as you move forward.



## CHAPTER 2

# Why does this hurt so much?

**H**ave you had the electricity go out in your home? When it happens, you suddenly realize how dependent you are on electricity. You instinctively turn on light switches; you push a glass against the ice maker on your fridge—and get nothing; you try to take a warm bath only to remember the water heater is electric. No television. No internet.

There's an old saying that goes, "You don't know what you've got until it's gone." We might add to that and say, "You don't know how much you rely on someone until they're gone." This is a common sentiment after the death of a mom.

## She was always "there"—and then not

For you, maybe your mom was someone you could always count on. And no matter what kind of mother she was—quiet or talkative, serious or silly—she was a constant presence in your life. Brittney shares:

We would talk nearly every day. She was the one person that always checked in on me. She always called or texted asking how I was doing, and that felt meaningful for me. I was lucky enough to have her for 30 years of my life. We spent a lot of time together. She was my person, my best friend.

Ebony expresses what it felt like losing her mom:

My mom was the person I could call if I was in trouble or if I wanted to share some good news. If I needed advice, that's who I would go to. When she was no longer there, that was a struggle. No longer receiving her daily phone calls was a huge gap in my life. I didn't have that same type of support, and I didn't think I would get it again because no one could really replace that. She knew me like no one else.

Ebony's words capture what so many feel when losing a parent but struggle to explain: Losing a parent doesn't just break your heart, it destabilizes you.

## She knew you first and best

Being known by others is a deep human need. It's more than being noticed or liked. To truly be known by another means that they see who you are. They know your story, your wounds, your quirks, and your deepest longings.

Your mother may have been the person who provided that knowing. She knew you from the beginning. She knew that you liked your sandwich cut crossways. She remembered which stuffed animal you needed to fall asleep. She could read your face before you ever said a word.

Long before you even had words to explain who you were, she already knew. She watched you, listened to you, and loved you with attention. Imperfectly, sure. But your mother was one person who truly knew you. And that kind of knowing can create a deep sense of safety. *(If you didn't have a "safe" relationship with your mother, that will be addressed in a later section.)*

Now that she's gone, it can feel like a part of you has disappeared. You were "son" or "daughter," and since that role is no longer actively here, a profound shift in identity can take place. This was Carol's experience:

I felt totally lost, because now I'm no longer anybody's daughter. I'm just this person kind of floating out at sea. I can't go to her house anymore. I can't get another one of her hugs. I can't have four-hour conversations with her anymore. It's a hole in my heart. I didn't realize I was that close to her. She gave me so much.

This is one reason why this loss hurts so much. You've lost a person who knew you deeply and a role that was attached to that relationship. Now that your mom is gone, it can feel like you've lost a part of your identity.

## She was the glue for your family

You don't usually think about the glue that is holding your chair together—until it isn't. Then the chair creaks, shifts, and even wobbles. The same is often true in a family. You may not have noticed all the ways Mom was holding things together, until she wasn't there to do it anymore.

She may have been the one who remembered the birthdays, made the phone calls, planned the get-togethers, and much more. She may have also been the one smoothing over conflicts and understanding who needed what and when. She didn't simply organize the events, she stabilized the family.

Bob shares how his mother was the backbone of the family:

She epitomized that old saying, "If the world gives you lemons, make lemonade." She was our biggest supporter. Our cheerleader. You never came home without a meal, and you never left without taking something with you. She was always in your corner, doing everything possible for you.

When she died (and my mother-in-law died, too, shortly after), my wife and I looked at each other and said, "Wow. We don't have that support anymore. We don't have that heritage with us any longer."

It's not surprising that this loss is painful. You're not only suffering the loss of Mom, but you've lost the glue that held so many things together.

## She was a safe place

You likely wouldn't be surprised to see a book titled *How to Get a Meeting with the CEO* or *Mastering the Elevator Pitch*, because we've been taught that access to important people has to be earned: We have to say the right things, prove our worth, and present ourselves well.

But for people who had a good relationship with their mom, there is not a massive market for *How to Earn 10 Minutes of Your Mother's Time*. If you were close with your mom, her attention isn't something you worked to earn. You didn't have to impress her; you showed up as you were. Sad. Messy. Angry. Afraid. Mom was there.

So when you hear people share thoughts like, "I felt a sudden sense of being unprotected"—that's understandable. You've lost a place of refuge. She offered comfort, covering, and a place to exhale. When that place of emotional safety is gone, it leaves you feeling exposed in a world that feels a bit less safe.

## Places of deep love can also be places of deep hurt

It's possible that your mother was nothing like what's been described. She didn't provide a place of comfort and safety. Rather than the glue that held things together, she was more like a firestarter. Or maybe your mom wasn't present and didn't know you that well.

Instead of comfort, you may carry confusion. Or even relief that your mother is gone. If that's you, you aren't alone. So many others can identify with the hurt and confusion of grieving a difficult relationship.

That's why grief can feel disorienting and deeply painful. You aren't just mourning who she was, but you may also be grieving who she wasn't. You may ache for what you had, but also what you hoped to have but didn't. And for what you'll never have the opportunity to reconcile and repair.

It's also possible that this loss has exposed some of the wounds

you've endured through your relationship with your mother. That was Richard's experience:

There are times I felt like I did not get things that my friends got from their mother; their moms were loving and kind. I wanted to have that in my mother, but I didn't. And I wish I did. I missed out. It's like taking a jigsaw puzzle piece that doesn't fit and trying to shove it in to make it work. It might look okay, it might feel okay, but it's not okay.

There isn't always resolution in this kind of grief. Sometimes the wisest thing to do is name what was missing and admit that you wish it had been different.

Many people, though, live somewhere in between a safe relationship and a difficult one. Love isn't always clean or uncomplicated. The deeper the bond, the more room there is not only for beauty but also for pain. You likely have memories that are sweet as well as bitter. You had hardships as well as hugs. Celebration and conflict.

Maria shared honestly,

We had fought so much during life, and she was such a fighter in general. Toward the end of her life, I felt like she gave up. ... She had been really mean to me in my lifetime, but I just pictured her as a fighter. And when she wouldn't fight anymore, it was very hard for me to see.

The loss of your mother brings hurt, no matter the type of relationship you had. But that doesn't mean you are without hope.

## Anchor points

### Truth to hold

- ~ **This loss touches every part of you.** This loss hurts so much because you've lost someone tied to your rhythms, your identity,

your roots, and your memories. Even if your relationship was complicated, the loss still impacts many places you might not expect. If this loss feels disorienting or overwhelming, you aren't alone.

## Finding steady ground

- ~ **Name what you're missing.** List three (or more) losses you feel because your mom is gone (her phone calls, her meals, her role in the family, her support, her talents, her advice, her humor). Just naming them helps you understand why the pain feels so heavy.
- ~ **Reclaim what remains.** Take a moment to finish this sentence: "*Even without Mom, I am still \_\_\_\_.*" Hold on to one positive truth about yourself that remains.