

Grief has always been part of my life. It really kicked off when my biological dad decided not to be involved in my life, but it got way heavier when I lost my mom and stepdad in 2015 and 2017.

To start off, my stepdad and I always had a really rough relationship. We never really saw eye to eye, and he was a very angry man. In 2015, after my freshman year of college, I was trying to get my life back on track, transferring to the school I graduated from while going to community college to raise my grades. My stepdad's health started going downhill. He had been unhealthy for a long time, and we were finally trying to figure out what was going on. It turned into countless late-night ER trips. One day, I found him on the floor and had to call an ambulance, as well as my mom to come home right away. On the way to the hospital, he coded three times. By the time we got there, he was basically brain dead. Due to some miscommunication, we waited around for two weeks, hoping he'd wake up, but on December 25, 2015, he passed away. They later figured out he had **Addison's disease**, which just destroys your immune system. It turns a common cold into a life-or-death situation. All the negative things we saw in his personality were just exaggerated by this disease that he was fighting every single day, unbeknownst to him, to us, and to everyone around him. That was just a really tough thing, and **I had no idea how to deal with that realization.**

Just 13 months later, my mom died unexpectedly from a massive heart attack. She was overworked, stressed, and just didn't take care of herself. The months leading up to her passing were really tough because I distanced myself from her. I didn't have the tools to deal with my own grief over my stepdad, let alone try to support her through hers. When she died, it hit me hard, and **I was left grappling with all the guilt** of not treating her well. I was trying to carve out my independence, and that just added strain to our relationship.

Her death hit me like a ton of bricks. I found myself wrestling not just with her loss, but also with the regret of how our relationship ended. I went into a dark place, honestly feeling indifferent about living life. I never really blamed God for their deaths, though. A lot of people said it was okay to be mad at God, but for me, God didn't "take away my parents"—life did. **I found comfort in my relationship with God during that time, reflecting a lot on the book of Job.**

Not long after her death, I watched a movie called ***Collateral Beauty***. It truly felt like it was given to me by God. It just put words to all the pain I was feeling. In that movie, the main character wrestles with the death of his daughter and comes to the conclusion that he's mad at love, death, and time. That really resonated with me because that's where I was at. I was mad about the time I lost, this death that wasn't supposed to happen yet, and losing this incredible person that loved me and that I loved. Soon after watching that movie, spring arrived, and I remember **noticing flowers everywhere**. My mom loved flowers, and I vividly remember the unspoken words of God saying, **"There's still beauty here."** Now, flowers are God's reminder to me of the beauty that is still present in the world, and that has been so healing. God met me in all the places I noticed flowers, even amidst my grief. At the same time, He was doing incredible work by placing people in my life that I needed for the years to come. After my dad's death, He had surrounded me with a wonderful wrestling team in college, which gifted me with so many friendships. They were patient, kind, and gracious with me throughout that time.

Both of my parents' deaths changed my perspective on my faith and made it so much stronger. I saw God show up in countless ways; I never once didn't have enough money. I was always taken care of. Through my grief journey, I learned to pay attention to the collateral beauty—**the beauty that comes through pain. If you search your pain deeply enough, you will find beauty.** I know I have, especially surrounding grief. Do the work; do the grief work. Don't allow your pain to make you forget those people. Remember them.

grief.