

January 17, 2020

My Account : Checkout : Cart

BRAIN, CHILD

The magazine for thinking mothers

Home

Shop

About

Essays

Books

Blog

Art Attack

Raising Private Milk

The Eddy

January 26, 2015

By Sarah Kilch Gaffney



Sitting in a waiting room full of so many pregnant women, my body is panic personified. A wave of cold washes over me, followed by a surge of heat and sweat. I adjust my shirt and wish desperately that, despite the coolness of the season, I had chosen to wear short sleeves. My heart is pounding and I glance around to see if anyone has noticed.

This happened the last time I was here, too, but I thought it was because I was so emotional: the last time I was in my OB's office, my husband had just died.

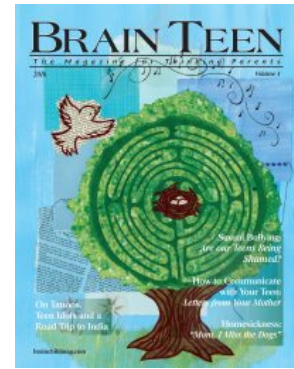
I debate whether to pull out the book from my bag, unsure of the wait time and my ability to focus. Instead, I watch the other people waiting and try to calm myself. A teenage mother complains to her friend about her weight gain. A couple about my age sit across from me, looking down at their phones. Three enormously pregnant women come and go. Another rubs her belly absentmindedly while watching her toddler play.

I sit and sweat, my face flushed. People walk by, and I stare at a stack of magazines, all touting healthy pregnancies and the latest baby gadgets, and I will myself to hold it together.

When my name is called, I rise and smile, follow the friendly medical assistant down the brightly lit hallway. When she takes my blood pressure and notes its somewhat elevated state, I try to explain through my clenched throat and blurred gaze. It feels like I am trying to talk while also swallowing a dry, spiky rock.

"We really wanted another baby," I whisper, "but my husband died this spring." She looks at me, tells

Brain Teen 2016: Pre-Order Now



Article, Author or Keyword



Connect with us



Brain, Mother Archive

What Our Readers Say

I LOVE this magazine! The articles are insightful and well written.

[Read More](#)

[Read More](#)
A. Hufford

[Susan Baron](#)

[LCSW, Co-Creator of Touched By Adoption](#)

Tags

[#brainteen](#) [adoption](#) [babies](#) [book review](#)

[breastfeeding](#) [cancer](#) [child](#) [childbirth](#) [children](#)

[children and childhood](#)

[daughters](#) [death](#) [divorce](#) [emotions](#) [family](#)

[fatherhood](#) [fathers](#) [fathers and daughters](#) [grief](#) [humor](#)

[Jon Sponaas](#) [Karen Dempsey](#) [Lauren Apfel](#) [LOSS](#)

[mother](#) [mother-daughter](#)

[motherhood](#) [mothering](#)

me she has goose bumps, and then wipes her eyes. We both needlessly apologize.

She leaves to let the doctor know I am ready; I change into the gown and arrange myself on the examination table. My skin is so damp that my legs stick to the paper sheet beneath me. A few minutes later, the doctor comes in; I promise her that, truly, most of the time I'm okay. I have good days and bad days, I say, but I'm doing okay. I swear, I say.

More than anything, I wanted my husband to beat the odds, to survive the brain tumor that would eventually take his life. I also wanted another child with him. We talked about it, waffled with many what-ifs, and talked about it some more. And just as we decided, yes, his body started its last, long downward spiral.

I wanted my husband to live to watch our daughter grow up, for us to have another baby together. For our life together to be just that—together.

I did not want to watch my husband slowly die, to be widowed at twenty-nine. I did not want to be genuinely happy for the pregnant women in my life, only to be hit by a nearly debilitating wave of grief every single time.

At my current age, and in this era of social media and acute semi-connectedness, friends, relatives, and peers frequently post announcements of pregnancy and birth. One by one, the other mothers at daycare reveal their second due dates and with every heartfelt congratulations, I feel more left behind, more empty. With each friend's pregnancy, my loss that much more acute.

Babies are such happy, vibrant things. They are beautifully vulnerable and exquisitely life-affirming. And yet, every newly announced pregnancy, shared baby photo, and chatter about potential future children leaves me reeling: tear streaked cheeks, disfigured by grief.

In the first few months after my husband's death, I relived his final moments and last, gasping breaths almost every night. My exhaustion was so pervasive that I often fell asleep quickly (except that first night, alone in the house next to an empty hospital bed). At night as I prepared for sleep, staring at the ceiling and feeling the vacant space next to me, his last hours and minutes would pass before my eyes like a reel of film. After several months, the frequency lessened, then all but ceased.

Every time I lifted the cardboard box containing his ashes, I set it back down on the linen chest at the end of our bed, astonished at the sheer weight in my hands. With the scattering of his ashes on the mountain where we met and eventually married came some relief, like progress, like release. After the mountain, I was knocked sideways a little less often: I was going to have to move on through this life without him by my side.

But, the baby thing. It still gets me every damn time.

This past summer, my husband's brother and his wife announced they were expecting their second child. After my initial burst of happiness, I was once again overtaken by grief. The baby-to-be was conceived within weeks of my husband's death and was due a week before our daughter's birthday. I felt so grateful for something positive to focus on, and so completely eviscerated at the same time.

Grief is not a pretty thing. It is sobbing and face-crumpling and screaming at the sky. It is turning away from the others left behind, returning to them only when you are ready. It is bursting into tears in the grocery store, forgetting your keys, your shoes, yourself. It is uncertainty about whether you are going to make it out of bed or through the day, and then concern that something is terribly wrong when a day passes with something akin to ease. It is questioning everything, and sometimes just not caring anymore how the story ends. And sometimes, often times, it just doesn't go away, no matter how much you hope and beg and pray.

My daughter and I talk about her father every day. We look at his pictures and tell Daddy stories and she keeps a Daddy "snuggle" (one of his old fleeces) at preschool and in her bed at home for the times when she misses him most.

At school, her friends acquire new siblings, and she sometimes asks if she can have a brother or sister, too. The first time she asked was only weeks after her father had died, and I sank to the living room floor and cried. Now, when she begs me to grow a baby in my belly and is so perplexed by its lack of possibility, I have the strength to deflect. Nearing four, she also sometimes asks when Daddy is going to get better, and when he is coming home. Other times, and with a startling clarity in her eyes, she asks, "But why did *our* Daddy have to die?"

I have no answers for her, beyond the oft-repeated recommendations of using concrete language to explain that his body stopped working; to repeat "really" or "very" many, many times before the word "sick" so that she doesn't associate the severity of cancer with illnesses such as a sore throat or the common cold; to assure her that I, her only remaining parent, am healthy and am here.

It still hurts so intensely because we loved so deeply, but sometimes I feel I am caught in an eddy, spinning and bobbing and waiting while I try to keep my head above the water. I see the rock and the river, but I am not really part of that world anymore.

[mothers](#) [new mom](#) [parenthood](#)

[parenting](#) [parenting teens](#)

[pregnancy](#) [Rachel Pieh Jones](#) [relationships](#)

[Sarah Werthan Buttenwieser](#) [siblings special](#)

[needs summer](#) [teen/tween](#) [teens](#) [toddlers](#)

[toddlers](#) [twins](#)

Hard as it is to remember sometimes, I try to believe that this vortex is a journey towards peace. I know the time will come, and I know I probably won't be ready for it. Part of me believes if I felt the current shift, I might just dive under and grab hold of that rock and never let go.

Eventually, though, I will need to float downstream. Eventually, I will need to let go, to make my own way through this grief. And maybe, someday, on some different stretch of this same river, will come that place of peace.

Read Sarah's original post [here](#).

Sarah Kilch Gaffney lives in rural Maine with her daughter. Read more from Sarah at: www.sarahkilchgaffney.com.

Share

Tweet

Like 8

Pin it



You may also like -



My Son's Dress



Brain, Child (& Brain, Teen) are moving



The Healing Words of My Holocaust-Surviving Grandmother



Mirrors on Fire

This entry was written by **Brain, Child**

About the author:

Additional posts by [Brain, Child](#)

Tags: [family](#), [grief](#), [loss](#), [motherhood](#), [parenting](#), [pregnancy](#), [Sarah Kilch Gaffney](#)

5 Comments

brainchildmag

Login

Recommend

Tweet

Share

Sort by Best



Join the discussion...

LOG IN WITH

OR SIGN UP WITH DISQUS



Name



MaggieMay1974 • 5 years ago

Thank you for sharing this. Really engrossing writing. I am so sorry for your loss.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share



Sarah S • 5 years ago

My dad passed when I was 9. I still keep one of his work shirts in my dresser. Thanks for your brave and inspiring piece.

^ | v • Reply • Share



Kristin S. • 5 years ago

Sarah, I am sitting here, honoring your husband's memory with you. Thank you for telling your story.

^ | v • Reply • Share



alexandra • 5 years ago

Heartbreaking. Thank you for sharing your story. I hope that by reading it here, I have helped lighten this heavy load. Even a little for you and your daughter.

^ | v • Reply • Share



Kari • 5 years ago

So poignant and moving. I'm so very sorry for both your tragic loss and your husband's young life being snuffed out way too soon. You sound like an amazing, empathetic mother to your daughter. Losing my dad at 22 was so hard for me, I still miss him profoundly 7 years later. I can't imagine what you feel. Hugs and blessings to you both.

^ | v • Reply • Share

Subscribe

Add Disqus to your site

Disqus Privacy Policy

← Art Attack

Raising Private Milo →

Shop | Privacy Policy | Contact Us

© Copyright 2020, Brain, Child Magazine. All rights reserved.

Google+