



'How I get through Mother's Day without mum'

Zara Zubeidi's had to navigate her twenties without her number one support and best friend, but she's found an inner-strength she didn't know she had...

'MUMMY, WHAT WILL WE DO WHEN YOU DIE?'

It's a question no daughter should ever have to ask, but on August 21 2012, it became a reality for me when my mum Joanna, at the age of 53, was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. Just one month prior, I had celebrated my 21st birthday, and like many young starry-eyed women, was looking forward to the future – my first job in the big wide world, meeting The One and making mum a grandmother. But that dream came to an abrupt halt within the space of nine months when, after a short battle, mum passed away. This year will mark my fifth Mother's Day without her – and while I've managed to accept the fact she isn't coming back, navigating my twenties without a maternal figure has been an ongoing struggle.

I lost count of the number of times I was told, 'You're doing so well,' over the past five years. After we said goodbye, I threw myself into landing my dream role as an entertainment journalist, not only as a way to distract myself from what had happened, but as a way to make her proud, as she knew how much I wanted to work in the industry in the lead up to her death.

But behind closed doors, I was falling apart. I felt numb. My relationship with my then-boyfriend broke down as we both realised the only person who could make me

happy was no longer here. I became withdrawn and most of all, angry. I couldn't understand how something so terrible could happen to somebody so full of life, and how my brothers – the youngest just nine years old at the time – and I would cope.

As mum's only daughter, I took it upon myself to step into her shoes by giving my family the support they needed, ignoring my need to grieve in the process. I put on a brave face and tried to explain to my little brother that he'd never see mum again, but that she still lived on in spirit. Yet despite my attempt at staying strong, I fell into a downward spiral of anxiety and depression. Her passing also took its toll on my relationships, and I'd find myself feeling isolated again and again as I yearned to fill that void she'd left behind.

Yet, as much as I never thought I'd get to this point, here I am, five years later, a much stronger person. Yes, it's been tough – at times, unbearable

– not being able to speak to my best friend when I needed her most. But it's taught me so much about myself and inspired me to do things I never would've done otherwise. Last year, I quit my job in the UK, travelled the world

and moved to Australia. From witnessing the magnificent sunrise at Adam's Peak in Sri Lanka, jumping out of a plane over Lake Taupo in New Zealand to marking Mother's Day with a bungee jump in Cairns, I began to adopt mum's zest for life by saying 'yes' to every opportunity. It's during

HOW TO COPE WITH LOSING A LOVED ONE

Everyone says 'time's a healer,' but grief can last a lifetime and there's no right way to grieve, just ways that may help you cope. 'It helps to express our feelings,' says Lianna Champ, author of *How to Grieve Like a Champ*. 'Find someone who will listen without telling you what to do, or how you should be feeling.'

As for losing a loved one, it's normal to feel angry. 'Being confronted with death when you're forming your perspectives on life is breathtakingly hard,' says Charlene Neuhoff, senior psychologist and mindfulness practitioner at The Indigo Project. 'We spend a large chunk of our lives learning how to endure suffering in an honourable way. Losing a parent so young forces you to start this work early.'

If you know someone who's lost a loved one, it's important to recognise grief isn't measurable. 'People often feel the need to stop talking about their loss after the one to two-year mark,' says Neuhoff. 'This delayed isolation can be painful. Let them know they can talk to you at any time, even if it's years down the track.'

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those indescribable moments where I can feel her energy the most. I recently came across a beautiful passage from Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh in his book *No Death, No Fear*, who, like me, considered the loss of his mother 'a serious misfortune' until he discovered the connection he had with her through his encounters with nature. 'Together my mother and I were leaving footprints in the damp soil,' he writes. 'All I had to do was look at the palm of my hand, feel the breeze on my face or the earth under my feet to remember that my mother is always with me.'

Gazing up at the night sky after hiking around Uluru last month, and seeing a shooting star for the very first time, I know mum and I are still together – and always will be. Mother's Day is never an easy time for me, but I'd rather have had those 21 amazing years with her than none at all.



A MOTHER'S LOVE: BABY ZARA AND HER MUM, JOANNA IN 1990.

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