

Your Life Is Still Here

You are moving toward your life. And your life is still here.



There may have been a time when you thought moving forward would happen after something changed. After you understood what happened. After your child explained. After you knew whether the estrangement was permanent. After you stopped hurting so much. After the conversation. After the apology. After reconciliation. Then you would know how to live.

But perhaps you have begun to discover something difficult and important. Some of those things may happen. Some may not. And your life is happening now.

You Were Waiting for a Beginning

When something important remains unresolved, life can begin to feel provisional. You go to work. Buy groceries. Walk the dog. Pay bills. Meet a friend for lunch. Plant tomatoes. Do all the ordinary things that make up a life.

But underneath them may be a feeling of waiting.

When this gets resolved, I'll be able to settle down. When I understand what happened, I'll be able to stop thinking about it. When my child calls, things can finally become normal again.

It can feel as though your real life is waiting somewhere on the other side of the estrangement.

But this is your real life. Not the life you would have chosen. Not necessarily the life you expected. The life that is here.

You Don't Have to Resolve Everything First

Throughout this series, we have encountered things that may remain unfinished. Questions without answers. Memories containing both love and pain. Relationships that changed. People who disappointed you. Things you regret. A future you expected and did not receive. Hope for reconciliation. Perhaps there are still conversations you would like to have. Perhaps there always will be. Moving forward does not require cleaning all of that up first.

Human beings rarely get that kind of completion. We live while things remain unfinished. We carry contradictions. We change our minds. We learn things too late. We forgive some things and struggle with others. We miss people. We hope. We grieve. And we make dinner.

Life has always contained all of this. Estrangement simply makes the unfinished parts harder to ignore.



The Pain Can Come With You

One of the most persistent ideas about grief is that eventually we should get over it. Perhaps you have been waiting for the day when thinking about your child no longer hurts. Maybe that day will come. Maybe the pain will change instead. Perhaps it will become less frequent. Less sharp. More familiar. Perhaps some days it will barely be present and then something unexpected will bring it rushing back. You do not have to know.

Because participating in life does not require reaching a particular level of painlessness. You can be sad and interested in something. You can miss your child and enjoy dinner. You can grieve and laugh. You can have a difficult morning and a good afternoon. You can carry pain without making pain the measure of whether you are healing correctly. The goal is not to become untouched by what happened.

It is to become increasingly available to what is happening now.

Put Down What You Can Put Down

There are things you cannot simply put down. Love. History. Memory. The fact that this person is your child. Perhaps hope. But there may be other things you have been carrying because you believed you had to. The investigation. The imaginary conversations. The need to make everyone understand. The responsibility for another adult's choices. The belief that enjoying your life means you have given up. The requirement that you know how the story ends. The question you have already asked a thousand times.

Some things can be put down without being solved. You may pick them up again. That's okay. You can put them down again, too.

Let Attention Return to Your Life

Estrangement can consume extraordinary amounts of attention. Even when you are doing something else, part of your mind may remain occupied with the relationship. Replaying. Anticipating. Remembering. Imagining. Waiting. There is no reason to judge yourself for this. Attention naturally moves toward what feels unresolved and important.

But attention is also part of how we participate in life. What do you notice when some of it becomes available again? The friend sitting across from you. The dog doing something ridiculous. The first tomato ripening. A book you can't put down. A problem you enjoy solving. Music. Weather. Work that matters. Someone who needs something you know how to give. Something beautiful you almost walked past. These things are not distractions from your real life.

They are your real life.

You May Have to Learn What You Want Again

When so much energy has been directed toward one relationship, the question *What do I want?* can feel surprisingly difficult. Perhaps you don't know. That's all right. You don't need a reinvention. You don't need a bucket list. You don't need to turn estrangement into the inspirational event that finally taught you to live your best life.

Some things do not need to become blessings in disguise. You can begin much more quietly. What sounds good for dinner? Who would you like to see? Is there somewhere you'd like to go this weekend? What have you been curious about? What needs tending? What have you been postponing? What gives you a little more energy than it takes?

Participation often returns through ordinary choices long before it becomes a new vision for the future.

Some Relationships Will Remain. Some Will Not.

As you begin participating more fully in your own life, you may notice that other relationships look different, too. Some people will grow with you. Some will surprise you. Some relationships may deepen because you are more available to them. New people may enter your life. And some relationships may no longer fit.

Perhaps you changed. Perhaps you finally recognized something that had always been there. Perhaps maintaining the relationship requires you to abandon too much of yourself.

Loss does not obligate you to hold more tightly to every remaining relationship. You can be grateful for what a relationship was and recognize what it is. You can love someone and have limits. You can release what is no longer



reciprocal. You can allow new relationships to become important without asking them to replace anyone. A life becoming larger will sometimes require discernment about what belongs in it.

Hope Can Walk Beside You

You do not have to give up hope for reconciliation. Perhaps your child will call. Perhaps you will speak again. Perhaps years from now the relationship will be different. Leave room for that possibility if you want to.

But hope does not need to walk in front of you, pulling you toward one particular future. It can walk beside you. You can hope and still make plans. Hope and form new relationships. Hope and change. Hope and become someone your child does not know. Hope and enjoy your life.

If the future changes, you will meet it when it arrives. Until then, there is today.

Your Child Can Matter Without Being the Organizing Center

This may be one of the hardest distinctions of all. Someone can remain profoundly important to you without remaining at the center of your attention. Love does not require centrality. Neither does grief. Your child may always occupy a unique place in your life. There may be no substitute for that relationship.

There does not need to be.

But one relationship - even one this important - does not have to determine the shape of everything around it. It does not have to decide whether holidays are meaningful. Whether friendships deepen. Whether you travel. Whether you laugh. Whether you trust. Whether you create. Whether you contribute. Whether you become curious about tomorrow. Your child can remain part of your story without becoming the organizing center of every chapter that follows.

There Is No Betrayal in Being Alive

Perhaps somewhere along the way you absorbed the idea that suffering proves love. That continuing to hurt proves the relationship mattered. That vigilance proves you haven't given up. That moving forward means leaving someone behind.

But you do not honor love by refusing life. You do not prove that your child mattered by making sure nothing else matters quite as much again. You do not protect the possibility of reconciliation by remaining unchanged while you wait.

You are allowed to live. Not someday. Not after you have answered every question. Not after the pain disappears. Not after you know how the story ends.

Now.

Your Life Is Still Here

Look around. Not metaphorically, if you don't want to. Actually look. There is a room around you. A day outside the window. A body carrying you through it. People somewhere in the world who know your name. Things that need doing. Things that can wait. Something you care about. Something that might make you laugh. Something you haven't learned yet. Something you haven't seen. Perhaps someone you haven't met.

There is more life here than grief sometimes allows us to notice. You do not need to feel grateful for the estrangement to be grateful for something else. You do not need to stop missing your child to become present to another person. You do not need to close the door.

You simply don't have to stand in it.

Turn around. There is a whole house behind you. There are rooms you may not have entered for a long time. Open a window. Call someone. Make something. Rest. Go outside. Pay attention.

Begin wherever life is asking for your participation. And if grief comes with you, let it come. If love comes, bring that too. If hope insists on tagging along, there is room. You do not have to leave any of them behind. You are not moving away from your child.

You are moving toward your life. And your life is still here.



THE ESTRANGEMENT SERIES ENDS HERE

Your Life Is Still Here

Love, hope, and grief may come with you. None of them has to become the organizing center of everything that follows. Turn toward the life that is here.