

Reading the Experts, Writing My Story, & Expressing Grief in My Studio

Lauren McGovern

READING

I remember listening to the audio version of *Life after Loss: A Practical Guide to Renewing Your Life After Experiencing Major Loss* by Bob Deits en route to New York City, a long trip from my home in the mountains and during the first December without my younger son. He died by suicide at age sixteen. I was rigid and brittle, holding my breath so I wouldn't break apart. Then, the narrator explained, "Certain points in time after a major loss stand out with special significance." The three-month marker, he said, "is often one of the most difficult times of all... the full impact of the loss is upon you." I snapped to attention. Validation that the bag of shock and fear I'd lugged around every day since September was morphing into something else helped me feel a mild sense of relief. I bought a physical copy of the book and found my

Along the Shore

way to other grief experts, like *What's Your Grief* creators Eleanor Haley and Litsa Williams, Megan Devine, Lucy Hone, and David Kessler. They've provided goal-setting and reflective exercises along with practical tools about how to reframe the loss in order to grow *with* grief.

WRITING

I've maintained a writing practice since my early years—winning the giant Hershey's candy bar in first grade for a five-sentence story (the plot is lost) to crafting poetry, autobiographical fiction, and plays throughout middle and high school. I wrote and edited for my college newspaper and later, I squeezed freelance writing gigs into the margins of my life, stuffing the tiny gaps around my job and family.

I wrote articles for parents and educators or reviews; I'd established a career as a mental health professional and worked as a school counselor when I wasn't writing. After my son died, I shifted to writing personal essays and creative nonfiction. In those early weeks and months, though, I used the resources I'd found to make a lot of lists and charted a new course for myself, including a pivot from counseling to teaching and launching a personal website.

ART & HEALING

My studio space, atop a narrow set of spiral stairs, is a small loft that's yielded enormous healing results for me.

Over a decade ago, I learned to make fused glass and metal clay jewelry. During those initial days after losing Owen, I set to work on a series of textured O-shaped pendants I wear regularly. I turn to the art supplies I've gathered over the years to construct whatever I envision to attend to my grief: sketching, painting, designing collages.

My attempts to stitch myself back together into a functioning person in the first eighteen months of bereavement also included monthly massages, therapy sessions focused on post-traumatic growth, a meditation practice, grief yoga, and any outdoor recreation opportunity the seasons offered.

The creative life I've built continues to expand through this grieving process, adding layers and depth to the advice I absorb and the artwork I produce. I'm all about sharing.

Along the Shore



Lauren McGovern lives in the Adirondacks. She is a teacher at North Country School in Lake Placid, NY. Her writing has appeared in *Greater Good Science Center Magazine*, *What's Your Grief*, *The Brooklyn Review*, *Indelible Lit*, *Coffee + Crumbs*, *Oh Reader*, and *Gordon Square Review*. Visit laurenmcgovern.online.