

A Tribute to our Mothers on 9/11 and Everyday



To all mothers who have lost a child on 9/11, or anytime, through illness, accidents, suicide, overdose or separation.

All of us should give thanks to our mothers, since we wouldn't be here today if it weren't for them. Each time there's the loss of a mother, all of society suffers, since mothers are so essential to the development and nurturing of humankind. Homemade soup with rice, orzo, matzo balls, or avgolemeno, in my case, has become a metaphor in society for a mother's love, since it provides comfort and sustains us both physically and emotionally.

For each of us, there are numerous immeasurable things that our mothers do for us that even later in life help us muster up the courage to face the hurdles of everyday life and to do what's right: Going out of her way to talk with us when a friend hurts us; making sure our spiritual lives are developed; supporting and guiding us when we make mistakes, thinking of us when she's out and about getting us something special that we didn't expect; calling us just to let us know that she loves us.

I lost my father at age 32, halfway through my doctoral program. I was very close with my dad, and I had my first set of comprehensive exams a month after his passing. My mother provided the emotional support I needed to get me through my exams. Honestly,

I'm not sure I could have done it without her. She was also the one who was by my side at my wedding on Oct. 7, 2001, three weeks after 9/11, and on the same day President Bush launched his first drone strike on Afghanistan.

My now husband and I had bought our first house on June 1, 2001. I had received a grant to teach Composition and Literature at the University of Shanghai that summer and had to leave a few days after the closing. I felt badly leaving my fiancé, but it gave him a chance to work on our new house and get everything organized. I had offered to postpone my trip, but he encouraged me to go to China, since I may never again get such an opportunity.

I returned from China on August 31, 2001, with an overwhelming amount of last-minute planning and wrapping up loose ends before our wedding. Having bought a house, living and teaching in China for the summer semester, and planning a wedding, I was completely exhausted, and thankfully, my husband had finished fixing up the house.

And then the morning of 9/11 happened a little over a week later. I received a phone call from my husband and an email from my university to hunker down and that we were under terrorist attack. I immediately called my mother, and she was safe and at home. As I watched the news, all I could think of was that we were doomed, and I wasn't getting married. All the stress from buying a house, living in China, planning a wedding, and now this, came to a head. I dropped to the floor in front of the TV set, lying in a fetal position sobbing, overwhelmed with dread and emotional overload. My husband came home from work and found me on the living room floor, crying.

My mother came over later that night, after the fear of another terrorist strike had somewhat passed. She, along with my husband, assured me that I could make it through the wedding, but if I wanted to postpone, it would be OK. It was not my wedding I was mourning, it was all of the lost life, New York City and the broken families. I wasn't sure if I wanted to hold a celebration three weeks out from 9/11.

I decided to keep the wedding as scheduled, and it turned out that people were ready for a positive gathering and life celebration. Although my husband, immediate family and cousins were a great source of support, my mother provided the ultimate physical and emotional support I needed to make our wedding possible, and all other major milestones in my life since.

Even more profoundly devastating than a child's loss of a mother, is a mother's loss of a child, whether as a result of an illness, accident, suicide, overdose, separation, the loss is profound. Yet a mother still holds the child in her heart after such a loss and continues the nurturing support through her thoughts and prayers. I'm convinced that the child can still feel that connection in the afterlife or during a separation.

A mother's love is never ending and is the most sacred thing on the planet. Our mothers give everything and ask for nothing in return except for our happiness and stability. They make our fears and problems go away. They are all-giving, self-sacrificing and constantly forgiving, making their love a profound example of what it means to be a kind and loving human being.