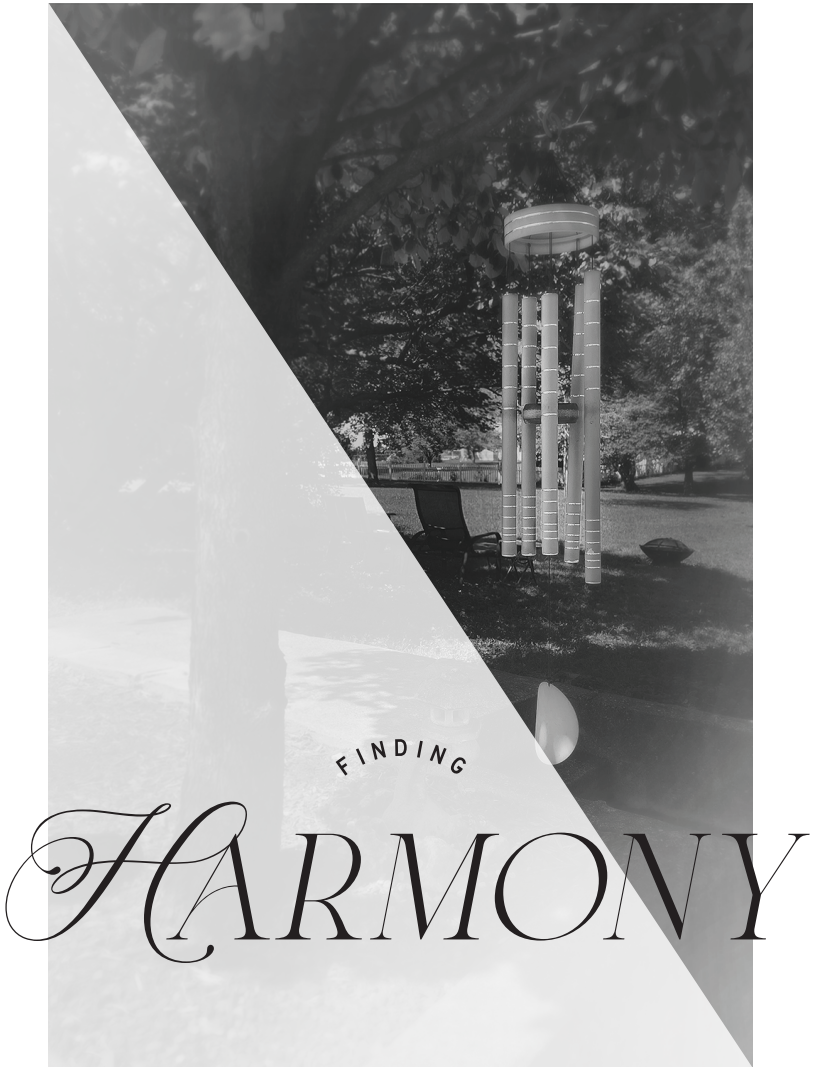


BY RACHEL HELDEN



FINDING

HARMONY

EMOTIONAL HEALING
AFTER PREGNANCY LOSS

For My Angel Babies
Adolyn, Harmony & Roland

Works by Rachel Helden

Finding Harmony: Emotional Healing After Pregnancy Loss, 2022

Free Way: An Adventure Through Loss, 2021

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A Love Letter To You

Dear _____ ,
(*your name*)

This little zine is my love letter to anyone who has endured infertility, pregnancy loss, or infant loss. I've experienced three recurrent miscarriages and have found it to be so devastating, changing the very core of who I am. However this ordeal came about for you,

I am so sorry for your incredibly great loss and all you've been through. My heart aches with yours, as only someone who has been through it can. Your angel baby(ies) matter (whether dreamed of or physically here for a time). You matter and your story matters, my love.

Finding Harmony was the natural title I finally came to, Harmony being the name of my angel baby from my second and most traumatic miscarriage. How can one approach the realm let alone the idea of harmony after enduring the loss of a child, in some cases even the dream of one? Is it even possible?

For the most part I won't be diving into detailed specifics of my own story, but hope to speak to the universalness in these life experiences. There are also journal prompts in each section for you to explore your own loss which I pray you find healing. Take your time and let yourself be held by these pages if you feel led. We're in this together, dear one.

With Love,
Rachel



I Could Do Anything

If I could do anything, what would it be?

Really take a moment to sit with this one. What would you do if you could do anything? Writing may not be your strong suit, or even something you've done in a long time. But let's give this a try. Walk slowly. Write your response here once it comes to you:

At the many crossroads I've come to in life, this question usually arises at some point. The prospect can be both exciting...

"I could do anything!!!"

and it can also be terrifying...

"I could do anything...!? Where do I even start?"

Before pregnancy, I felt pretty invincible. Even though things didn't always turn out how I hoped, there was still good in the world, still joy. After pregnancy, and the repeated loss of it prematurely, those heights of "doing anything" seemed to be only the naive musings of a child.

"Actually I can't do anything, I can't even do this one basic thing a woman's body is created to do, supposed to do."

That's just the thing of it though—pregnancy and giving birth to a living being is the farthest thing from being elementary or simple. It is a miracle! Everything must line up just so, so that a baby arrives to the world healthy and whole. There are a lot of complicated factors in the process, some of the most difficult being infertility, miscarriage, stillbirth, infant loss, and abortion.

Family planning turned out to be one thousand times more challenging than I ever imagined. Anyone can take birth control until they feel “ready” to have a baby, but that doesn’t mean that card will be handed to us without great trepidation and expense on our part. There may be intense suffering, like none we’ve ever experienced mentally, physically, spiritually, and in every other way possible. This has been true for me, at least.

One of the biggest heartaches of this whole thing is how lost other people can seem when it comes to offering support (if they even offer it at all). This is expected to be a private trial, it’s too messy, so keep your feelings behind closed doors because you’re making everyone uncomfortable. The topic of conversation is quickly changed or you notice people’s eyes glaze over because you’re talking about it... again. And again and again and again. Or perhaps you have prescribed to the expectation. You’re in hiding, those tears only reveal themselves in private.

Infertility, pregnancy and/or infant loss, and grief of this kind is a trauma and traumatic event in and on the body. This is not something to walk off or be over in a few weeks. Many times we have been poked and prodded, taken medications, shots, undergone painful procedures, recovery, and more. Not to mention the rollercoaster it can send us on when the hope of starting a family seems to be fading. For many, if they truly feel into the experience, it’s one of the hardest things a person will ever go through. I know for me, my pregnancy losses stack in with the greatest losses of my life so far—my father’s death, my divorce, and my three miscarriages. I don’t make the order of things, it is what it is.

Even if you find yourself at your lowest of lows, and this can happen at different moments day to day, say when a friend delivers close to your due date, you get invited to a baby shower, or find yourself aimlessly walking the baby aisle of a store. Or this moment may have been building, all of those tender moments melting together, and you are at the absolute end of your frayed rope. This was written for you.

I have found myself in these places so many times it makes my head spin to think of them. Friends posting pregnancy or baby arrival announcements, 1, 2, 3 etc. month-old photos, or even family photos of birthdays, holidays, and other special occasions. On major holidays I learned to veer clear of my phone or computer and stay off all social platforms. Similar lesson to Father’s Day the first few years after my dad died. If I didn’t have the opportunity to compare myself with the barrage of smiling faces, I could begin to find healing—deep down.

Or maybe it's running an errand and simply seeing a very pregnant person... back to my hole of shame I'd go. And one of the hardest is trying to squirm away from comments like,

"You can always try again", or any form of "at least"... statement.

"At least you have a wonderful partner to get through it with."

"At least you weren't very far along."

"At least you have a career to focus on."

There is no consolation prize for *almost* having a baby.

Another painful one is when people expect you to be happy for family members or friends who are pregnant or who have had babies. Even to feel pressure to be more joyful in your own subsequent pregnancy(ies) after loss. Something does not compute for them. I have to believe they have no idea of the scale of damage they are doing.

Every day, every moment, every second after a pregnancy loss is hard for an undeterminable amount of time and a lot of people don't get it. I mean,

"It wasn't a real baby yet."

"Oh, you're still upset about that?"

Not to mention if you've yet to have the opportunity to become pregnant, no matter how your soul longs for it.

This zine won't have all the answers if you are one of the many who have endured this specific kind of loss. What these pages will offer are things that I found nourishing and supportive in the minutes, hours, days, months, and even years to follow after my losses. In a world that largely doesn't understand and doesn't know how to be there, you can learn to be there for yourself. Slowly but surely, you can (even if it feels impossible right now) crawl your way back to life, back to joy even. You really can "do anything". Building a family just like you thought you would may not be in the cards, but there are so many avenues and options when creating a life you love. It's not a one-size-fits-all or even most, and that's okay. However and whatever works best for you is what's meant to be.

So again, *If I could do anything, what would it be?*

Take a new look at this question and your life and begin to dream anew. Discover what's possible. (Perhaps, more than you thought.)

A Baby, Maybe

I don't know if I had ever been happier than the first time those glorious two pink lines appeared on a pregnancy test. I realize this isn't the case for everyone. Before meeting my current partner, getting pregnant had always terrified me. I was not ready due to my own growth and circumstances in life until I was in my mid-thirties (which is arriving a little late to the baby making game).

We hadn't planned to get pregnant, but we weren't preventing it in any way, figuring it would be a happy occurrence and surprise if it happened. I thought I might be sterile, only having gotten pregnant once in all my years and miscarried at about six weeks. But then, both of our eyes lit up when that second line began to appear before the three minute mark.

A flood of tears, both elated and scared rushed forth with a force I had not anticipated. Both of us an excited jumble for days—weeks! Just as the news was beginning to settle and feel real, planning how we'd share the news with our families, we miscarried at ten weeks. It was traumatic, hemorrhaging with multiple trips to the ER, a pill to bring on miscarriage, and when that didn't work fully, my first D&C a week later. (Dilation and Curettage is a surgery to remove tissue from the uterus. In my case, the leftover “products of conception”.)

This is not the picture of pregnancy or having a baby that I had in mind. It is no ones—unless it has unfortunately already happened to you. I was in for a long healing and recovery time and about to battle demons I had never experienced at that magnitude. It all came roaring towards me in full color: severe depression, self-harm, crippling anxiety, suicidal deviations... these

were my new companions. These are what my pregnancy and loss gave birth to. The most horrible nightmare, and we were not prepared at all.

It wasn't until I shared our miscarriage publicly that the stories began to roll in. I would guesstimate at least 30-40% of the women I knew and loved intimately had been through a similar ordeal. I was floored.

"Why didn't you ever tell me?" I asked a few of them I'm closest to.

"One doesn't speak of such things."

"It felt like a battle that was best kept a secret."

"I was embarrassed."

"We hadn't even told anyone yet. How do we suddenly tell everyone we're not pregnant when they didn't know we were?"

"Who really wants to know about that?"

I heard these types of answers over and over.

What? How is this a private battle if nearly half of the women I knew had been through it? I came to find the answer—shame. Self blame is one of the first unwanted companions to show up at the party.

Maybe I ate the wrong thing.

Maybe that workout or walk was too strenuous.

*I drank a cup of coffee (or) a glass of wine before I knew I was pregnant,
I bet that's why.*

How did I cause this?

What did I do wrong?

How could I have been so stupid?

...I killed our baby.

These were thoughts I had and more in the months to follow. When I finally began to stumble onto an up curve, my partner and I decided to try again, and miscarried again. This time at eight weeks. If I wasn't low enough already, this one kicked me while I was down. There was no more room for hope, only misery and the pain of recovery after a second D&C.

These were mere months apart, November and March. We were told by our first doctor it was just a fluke. This happens to a lot of people. The odds of it happening again were slim to none. Well, looks like we slipped into that rare and unfortunate group.

I only tell the details of my personal story to support you in accessing yours. However it came about, whatever happened, and why you picked up this zine are now forefront. How did your experience(s) make you feel? Alone, rejected, angry, heartbreakingly sad, inconsolable? Or perhaps you hid it, tried to work it away, or ignore it?

I have come to find that around one in every four recognized pregnancies ends in miscarriage. One in four! This is what it's considered when the loss of a baby happens before the twentieth week of pregnancy. And this is if you're even able to get pregnant, as infertility is a struggle for many hopeful parents. About one in one hundred sixty pregnancies ends in stillbirth (occurring after twenty weeks of pregnancy). Infant deaths are more rare, but if there are support groups for it, plenty of people have gone through this incredible heartbreak. Perhaps your experience is an abortion(s), whether medical or elective, feelings could surface in the aftermath that you weren't expecting. Not only family and friends confirm it, but the numbers prove we are not alone. You are not alone. I am not alone.

Take a few quiet minutes to pause. What is the first thing that comes to your mind about your experience? How does that make you feel? Where do you feel it in your body? It is real, let it be heard on the page. This is your story, for your eyes only. Breathe, take your time, and be gentle with yourself.

Dark Night(s) Of The Soul

**This chapter may be hard to read or triggering on an assortment of levels, but I can't write about this kind of loss without talking about just that. Come to this portion when you're ready and in a safe place to take it in.*

No one could have prepared you for this and no life experience thus far has been this shade of painful. It aches, not just the natural wound of losing the dream of a baby, but the heart feels as if its draining slowly of all that is good. Hope seeps out through tears until it's seemingly gone.

I wish I had written this portion while it was happening to me, although at the time, I don't think I was functioning on that high of a level. Truly, even to write. I stayed in bed at least 95% of the time. The curtains were drawn and everything in the world felt dark. I'd hobble to and from the bathroom, holding onto walls and doorframes as I went, bent over at the waist from the pain. Excruciating pain. I had never felt anything like it physically—as if all of my internal organs housed inside my belly had been scraped out.

Family came and delivered meals, tried to talk with me, and even cleaned my bathroom because they knew how traumatic it had all been. Eventually I would completely overhaul that bathroom and redecorate to try and change the space where much of it happened. As I viciously ripped wallpaper from the walls I realized, “this is part of my healing process”. I had to destroy what was there and make it fresh, just like I was trying to do internally.

I remember straws in my drinks. I couldn't bother lifting my head enough to gulp, so I let myself sink into a stack of pillows under me while turning my head ever so slightly to sip. In the first days I couldn't eat, wouldn't eat. My diet was warm veggie broth with some salt for flavor and an assortment of water and juices. I didn't deserve food. Look what I had done. I went and ruined everything. My body sabotaged our dreams of creating a family. Now all that was left was a heap of bones that could barely move enough to get out of bed. Back and forth, from bathroom to bed. My first trip to the kitchen wouldn't be for another week or two. The blackness behind my eyelids was how everything felt. Nothingness—no reason to try, no motivation to do or say anything.

Crying was sometimes the only activity worth occupying substantial amounts of time. All while thinking,

I'm ripped apart on the inside, destroyed.

I have nothing left.

They took my baby! (I remember screaming this after my first D&C.)

The longer you sit or lay, the more the thoughts of,

Will I ever be able to have a baby? come to mind.

Will I ever move past this?

What is the point in living anyhow?

There was really no consoling me, just a loop of flashbacks to spotted underwear and wiping to the horror. And the cramping—Oh my God. In the ER I heard someone tell my partner that I was virtually laboring to get it out. This once beautiful baby that was forming was now harmful, even toxic, to my body and had to be released. How can something so perfect turn on a dime to such a degree? Now for my safety, they had to remove “it”.

Flashbacks to your own experience may come to you, too. My memories were unrelenting, wouldn't let me sleep or think outside of the experience at all. I was cocooned in my tiny knotted, very private, nest of grief. Perspective only went as far as the corners of my bed. What a send off, what a burial, what a waste. No memorial, just gone.

This may be the most difficult question:

What was your loss experience like? What happened to you and/or your baby(ies)? Take all the time you need with this one, sweetheart.

I've met a few women who were able to salvage what was left of their baby or what they thought could have been their baby if they were too early to tell to give them a proper ceremony. My third miscarriage happened at a Catholic hospital and after the D&C they had an open plot in a cemetery. If there was enough to save, they would bury our sweet boy there. So my partner and I went to visit, spread out a blanket to sit on and I laid down resting my head in his lap, watching a million tiny white flowers that sprouted up from the lawn rustling in the wind around us. We imagined each of them represented a tiny life, like our baby, who was possibly laid to rest there.

That's when the collectiveness hit us for the first time.

"Look at how many!" I exclaimed.

We were not the first couple or family to visit that sacred place, perhaps someone else had once been right where we were. Before visiting, our experience had felt so isolating and lonely. The adornments of candles, children's toys, and action figures on the single headstone memorializing the place told us many people had been there before.

Little pocks and turns in the dirt looked like either a mole had a home there, or maybe, that's the last place they buried some remains. I wondered if that's where our baby was, right under that spot of upturned earth. I thought about digging up whatever was under it with my bare hands, but then again, what good would that do?

What lengths has your experience taken you to and through? How has it changed you?

Try, Try Again

In the aftermath of it all, we're left to try to reassemble the pieces of our lives. Daily tasks like laundry, dishes, buying groceries, and keeping a clean house begin to slip and the catch-up game feels near impossible. Extra things like eating well, exercise, and seeing friends also begin to crumble. I mean, we can't even keep up with the essentials. It's like a reverse order pick-me-up. Soon it feels impossible to even get out of bed. A general depression and numbing may start to set in, for both the baby you lost or may never have, and for all the other parts of life that can't and won't go back together again. If you have a job or other children, the busyness may keep you going for a while, but damage can happen if you never face your feelings around your loss. It took me a long time to finally figure out that we're actually attempting the impossible. Just like any grieving process, there is no "returning" or "getting back to normal". Everything in your world has changed so the way things fit together will be different as well.

I had a thriving yoga and meditation practice before the first of my two miscarriages in the last year. I was in the middle of Yoga Teacher Training when it happened. All of a sudden, for the first time in my life, I couldn't even make it down to my mat on the floor to practice. I had to do my final teach from a chair. For the first time I was incapable and it really messed with my mind.

You may note stark changes in yourself and in your patterns—those pieces of your life that are no longer normal—anything but. What are some of these changes? Free write for a moment to clear it all out. Sometimes I don't even realize something is a block or issue until it flows from my pen. (Make a list if that's more comfortable for you.)

So then, now that we have some points that don't feel quite "right" or "normal" anymore, how do we begin to reassemble? There's a resifting happening, and that's alright. It can be a very healing and necessary process, leading to greater fulfillment on the other side.

First things first, what would feel good to you? If you made a list, which item stands out as the first you'd like to regain? Right now for me, it's a movement practice (any movement). I may not be able to balance on my head for minutes on end like I once could, but there are still ways I can find to connect with myself.

I could return to swimming laps since it's something I once enjoyed and is more gentle on my system. It's an all-over workout, too. Or maybe I could begin to visit city parks near me during the day to go on light walks if the weather is nice, or find a nearby gym or community center with an indoor walking path or treadmills to get me going. I am literally working through one of my own dilemmas in this very moment, and that's how it's done. Just begin to think through the different options and steps to a new solution.

Take a moment to think/talk/write through one piece of your life that no longer seems to fit anymore, but you miss. How can you take a few small steps toward change?

What's the worst that can happen? You try to enact these steps and they don't click together like you planned? At least you're one step closer. We'll never know until we try. We may fall, but a fall is not a fail. It's no big deal, no great loss. *We know great loss.* No, this is just a bump in the road. Slowly pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and continue on. What direction next? Let your intuition continue to guide you.

For me, I enjoyed getting back in the pool for a time, but then winter came and leaving the gym with wet hair was not so fun... (COLD)! So I think the

next step is walking the track or treadmill inside when it's too cold out. Or we have an old stationary bike downstairs I could try. I have tennis shoes and some new stretchy pants I just got. Looks like that will be my new "walking at the community center/biking downstairs" uniform.

What are some resources you already have available to you?

I once heard a talk about pairing hard things with pleasurable things. Not that I need to get a banana split after each time I go for a walk, but what's another enjoyable thing I could pair it with? Maybe when I get home I make myself a yummy fruit smoothie or take 15-30 minutes for a deliciously warm bath. Pair the difficult task with something fun or relaxing so you're more apt to do the hard thing.

What are some enjoyable activities you could pair with your next step? Setting aside time to read a good book? Crafting or creating something? Cooking a meal for yourself and/or someone you love? You decide.

I should note in these early phases of reworking and resettling, try to keep from zoning out with too much screen time (which only you know when that

limit is reached). I've begun my first attempts at cutting this back. It became an escape for a while with various games, social media apps, and shows but it's beginning to be unfulfilling. What once soothed me now keeps me up at night and gives me more of a headache than anything. It can be counterproductive to our healing to have so much stimulation. Although it's good to stay connected with friends, family, and world events, right now we're trying to reconnect with ourselves. All of that will reemerge later, in due time.

Dear Elusive Companion,

Purpose.

What becomes of our hope for the future or even today? We thought our purpose was shifting into parenthood, and although we are parents even if our little one(s) only came to visit for a short while or remain a dream in our heart, our purpose feels different than we planned if we had been able to hold our baby in our arms.

How did you see your purpose changing upon your babies arrival? How had you dreamed "everything would change" as people say having children does? What did you think life would be like? Take your time with this one.

Whew. Take a big deep breath, take a few if you'd like. Take a self-love break. Get up and make yourself a cup of tea, coffee, or grab a chilled glass of water, and perhaps a snack. While you're at it, think of what you felt your purpose

was before your loss, before you were even trying or pregnant. Did you have dreams you aspired to but never gave yourself the chance to try? Now may be the perfect time to begin daydreaming about those things again. Allow yourself to revisit who you were before your challenges with becoming pregnant or pregnancy, and who you'd like to be now and moving forward.

Once you return, with an open heart, write a few thoughts, dreams, or aspirations that came to mind.

To be completely honest and transparent, I had a really hard time self-starting after each of my three losses. When all feels lost, why even try? What's the point?... Your wellbeing is the point. Your soul, that creative and inspired well within. Taking away your purpose is the absolute last thing your sweet baby would have wanted for you. Try to shift the thoughts of desperation and utter loneliness to,

How would I live if my baby were here, alive and well?

"I'd want to be the best parent and version of me possible."

Take another look at that second part...

"I'd want to be the best version of me possible."

There's still a way to fulfill part of our Mommy/Daddy dream and life—to live as fully as we would if our child (or children) were here. I like to think of it with anyone I've lost, I get to live a life they cannot, so I want to make it count. Not even just for me, for them. Our babies can still be our purpose, even if in a different way than we had hoped.

Once we've reframed our current state with this new perspective, how do your thoughts on purpose change?

We can manifest purpose in our lives as well. If we call in purpose to our lives, with a little effort, it can land. There were many healing tips and tricks I learned or read about along my journey, but none of those help unless we are willing to enact them ourselves. Once they become practice, which can be very rocky at first, and even throughout, it can lead us to some really amazing new places.

I'm not saying this comes without challenges, there are always other options. There are the numbing things we can choose, a colorful array of harmful addictions, each a ruse to try to remove or hide from what we're experiencing. The problem is, it's always there under the surface at best. If we face what hurts, embrace our fears, and find new ways of coping, we are headed for a much brighter tomorrow, even if the short run is hard. I truly believe beauty can be found in the hardship, and joy can burst forth amidst the storm.

Nourish Your Soul

I realize everyone has different perspectives and beliefs when it comes to having a "soul". What I'm talking about here is the fundamental need to care for yourself, most especially in the wake of such heartache. For months I used to write, "Nourish Your Soul" on each Sunday in my calendar. Seeing it reminded me to make one small move toward being gentle with myself and my process. This wasn't usually an all day event, it could be as simple as taking the time to make myself a cup of tea or hot cocoa, calling a core friend for a lift, or going for a walk in the sunshine. No matter your spiritual or religious affiliation, taking one day out of the week to rest is a relief for our body's rhythm, especially right now.

This is a concept to carry with us every day when we've endured all we have. It's those small moments of caring for yourself like you would care for those you love most in this world. "Self-care" has become a commonplace idea, this goes beyond that. We must continually pull from that well because our cup has been emptied.

Your role in the lives of other people may shift in this moment of self reflection and reckoning. As they say, “No one can pour from an empty cup”. This is a time to rest, refuel, and regain some ground that has been lost. This may look like more than normal time in solitude. A prayerful wandering, an exploration into what new avenues you may be called to continue walking on. How can we hear those callings if we don’t quiet ourselves and our surroundings? It’s a delicate, fragile time of healing. Spots of our heart can be so soft and only we have true access to those parts. Take your time and love on yourself more than normal. The dream of life you had that you’re now grieving will take time to get through. In what ways have you felt your soul (or spirit) grieving? What part of you has been lost?

Nourishing your soul could also look like a bubble bath with salts or oils, a candle lit, a drink with some fruit and/or chocolate. Yes, all in the bathroom with you! My tub can be so lined with care items I have a hard time knowing where to begin, which is a great problem to have. The bath has often been my favorite place to journal, read, or listen to soft music as well. My partner got me a bath pillow during my time of deep healing, and now I could never go back. A small luxury, and absolutely necessary when being good to my heart. Maybe take extra care and give yourself a mani/pedi after finding a new color at the store that speaks to you. Or if you have the means, go get pampered at a nail salon and take a friend along.

Speaking of services like this, massage, acupuncture, chiropractic adjustments, energy healing like reiki, and finding a class or trainer at the gym may be supportive to your spirit. Not all healing will be gentle. If your body is ready, you may enjoy the release of getting the anger out in a kickboxing or spin class. Yoga always seems to be my choice, and you can choose the pace. From slow, like restorative, or a faster muscle building class.

Always feel into what you need right now, that's the most important thing.

Other supportive notions for me have been my robe and slippers. I have a fuzzy robe for winter and a silky one for summer. I've been known to wear only this all day long. If I'm home, especially home alone, why not? It feels delightfully decadent. I also have mugs with pink hearts and another with "hello gorgeous" written in golden script on the side. I feel extra loved and special when using them.

Encouraging books, podcasts, and calming music are all helpful when soothing the soul. Sometimes I would be up to listen to other people's stories, other times, my own was all I could handle. Each day, minute, and moment will look different—gauge accordingly. Visiting a local crystal or gem shop can be inspiring. You can search for a "metaphysical" shop as well. I've found particular stones to be comforting, such as amethyst for grief and rose quartz to promote self love. The best stones or spiritual items are the ones that call to you, then find out what their meanings are and what they can be used for.

Sometimes nourishing my soul looks like excusing myself to the bathroom when I feel flooded or overwhelmed in a relational situation. I still employ this tactic. Say someone is talking about babies, asking if I want to try for more children, or even just talking about milestones their own children are going through. All sharp reminders of my grief. Don't subject yourself to these claustrophobic moments if you're not ready to confront or discuss them in public yet. Simply excuse yourself to the bathroom or go outside for some fresh air. It may be a little awkward timing wise, but it is worth the little jolt if it's all feeling like too much.

Creating healthy boundaries with family and friends where they need to be instilled for you to feel more safe and secure are also of utmost importance. Your grief journey can look however you need and want it to. It's all your own creation. Even though no one needs to give it to you, know that you have full permission to care for yourself however you best see fit. Protect your precious heart. If a relationship or situation is not working for you, find a way to create space for yourself. A bit of distance from what ails you can refresh your perspective and help you to keep moving.

At times, you may get stuck. This is completely normal and has happened to me far more than only one occasion. If you're able in these moments, reach out to a safe person for support, whether that's someone you know well or through an organization you trust. There are times we must help ourselves, we must find assistance with our battle. When you are ready (and sometimes even when you don't feel as though you are), reaching out is the only way.

Imagine you're in a deep pit. That is grief. Right now your hands are

wrapped around yourself in an embrace, which is completely understandable and okay. You take all the time you need there. You will, however, have a hard time getting out of it until you reach your hands up, either to climb out your own way or notice the hands waiting to help you up. Other people can't be everything for you on your journey, but they are a gift when you're ready.

How can you begin to forgive yourself today? For the messiness, the slow days, the guilt, and rage... all of it?

Also know you may waffle and get up just to fall back down. This has been all of life for me, really. The starch of a full life is resiliency, the ability to get back up and continue walking on even if you don't know where you're going. I believe in you and know you are so capable. A teacher of mine when I was young used to preach the lesson of perseverance. It's such a good principle to fall back on. Say it with me,

"I've made it through hard things before. That strong human is still in there somewhere. I can get through this, too."

What are some practical ways you can begin to nurture your soul and spiritual self? Begin with one small step today.

Growth Is A Process

Here are a few of the nearest and dearest practical ways of working through this experience that I found supportive. The way you bring these into your life may look different, and that is wonderful. Use what works, leave what doesn't, and feel free to change things to work best for you. Perhaps it will even inspire you to develop new avenues for yourself outside of this list.

NAMING YOUR BABY(IES)

I named the second baby I miscarried after seeing a road sign on the way to the hospital, Harmony. We didn't know if it was a boy or a girl yet, but my partner and I felt this was a gender neutral name, as well as a feeling we were hoping to one day achieve again.

I hadn't named my previous miscarriage but was suggested this idea by a friend. This brought up a well of emotions when I considered it. I was able to realize the gravity of that loss for the first time. It helped me to name that baby, Adolyn, a name I had always dreamed of naming my first baby (assuming it would be a girl) when I was a child.

With my third miscarriage, I asked my partner if he'd like to name the baby. "Roland", he decided. It was a name he had liked but probably wouldn't make the cut if we had any living children one day. After genetic testing was done, we discovered in fact, yes, it was a boy.

Does your angel(s) have a name? I've met many people who call them by their last name (Baby Smith), some number them (Angel Baby 1, Angel Baby 2) if they've had multiples, or even refer to their babies by a nickname like "Nugget". If you've yet to become pregnant, is there a name, word, or phrase you could consider naming your experience? Naming your baby(ies) or experience may bring up more pain for you, in which case you don't have to do it if you don't want to. It supported my partner and I, and perhaps one day it will for you, too.

CREATE A MEMORIAL AREA IN YOUR GARDEN OR HOME

We hadn't planned to do this, but on one of our first outings after our miscarriage of Harmony, my partner and I found ourselves wandering through a hardware store, no reason to be there, just something to do away from the house. We came upon a display of wind chimes and began playing with them, moving them to hear their different sounds. In the same moment we looked at one another, and my partner suggested we get the one we liked best for our baby. It was one of the best spontaneous decisions we've ever made. Now we hear her sing to us all the time. At first it was painful, a

reminder of all we lost, but after some time has separated us from the event, hearing her sing makes us smile and brings us joy to think of her.

A family member had a cement lantern in the yard of their new house left by its previous owners. They were going to get rid of it, but I asked to keep it since I thought it was pretty. After we lost Roland we had a friend over one day and he mentioned that lanterns like that traditionally are a way of remembering someone who has passed on. So my partner and I decided that would represent him.

They sit together in a little corner of our garden now, the chime hanging in a tree above the lantern. Each time we pass by we can greet them,

“Good Morning, sweet babies. We love you.” It’s nice to have a private space where we can see, hear, and talk to them.

Say you don’t have a yard to plant in or create your memorial area, you can create a sacred space or memorial shrine in your home. It doesn’t have to be permanent, just to get you through the hardest days. Sometimes I refer to this as my thankfulness area. We inherited a corner cabinet when my partner bought his grandparents house. There’s not enough space to really display anything, but tiny mementos that remind me of people who I’ve loved and have left this world can have a place to shine. This space is also available for some of my greatest joy items too. From cards filled with words that mean the world to me, dried flowers from events, meaningful crystals and stones, items that remind me of our babies, and anything else I hold dear.

At its base there are two shelves that close with a little door over the front. For a long time I hid my most treasured items there, like those positive pregnancy tests from the babies we lost. During a time in my life when I traveled a lot, I had a box of keepsakes like this to remind me of my dad who had passed away recently at the time. It’s nice to have a private spot you can go to whenever you want to remember. You could find a beautiful box or even paint/collage one from a craft store to put your memories in if you’d rather not have them on display. I also put together a little photo album with our babies ultrasound pictures, paint samples we had picked for the nursery, and butterfly cutouts I made. Just knowing it’s tucked safely away makes me feel better somehow.

What’s something you already have or could get that can represent your angel(s)?

HOUSEPLANTS! (AND PLANTS IN GENERAL)

Speaking of gardens, purchasing plants for inside our home helped me tremendously. I could still embody a Mama Earth energy and support something living to grow. An important note here: Avoid getting one plant to represent your baby(ies). If the plant dies (which can happen with plants and does to me

still) this can be a tragic loss, a symbolic losing of them all over again. Nope, let's not go there. Get a few plants, not representatives of your baby, but a reminder that you are capable of helping things grow as you yourself are growing and changing each day. It's profound to "see" this happening.

Some hearty plants that are easier to care for, in my experience, are:

- *Heartleaf Philodendron*
- *Snake Plant*
- *Satin Pathos (Silk Pathos)*
- *Zanzibar Gem (ZZ Plant)*

Also, check at your local plant or hardware store for houseplant sprays and powders to help with insect control. We had gnats everywhere when we first started and this helped keep them at bay. Try not to overwater (love too much) and this can be greatly avoided. My partner and I decided on a weekly watering schedule each Sunday so we don't forget. Collectively, they bring a lot of life to our home.

We also did some changes to our landscaping outside when the weather was nice. Even transplanting something from one part of the yard to another was a fun activity. In the Spring I planted a bunch of annual seeds that blossomed all summer long. As I watched butterflies and hummingbirds visit the flowers, I was reminded how new life continues on.

PS—We debated getting a dog or cat at one time, and plants were our compromise. We knew we still wanted to try to have children and didn't think it fair to try to replace that desire with a pet. Plus, I barely had the energy to care for myself and a few plants let alone an animal. Yet, this could be another option for you to consider. Perhaps having a furry, feathered, or scaled companion from the animal kingdom would be a great choice for you.

MAKE A "PRAYER/GOD JAR" OR "WISHING TRAY"

I had a mason jar a friend gave me and I made it into a prayer/God jar. Whenever I had a request or need like, "I miss my baby, I want a baby, My heartache won't let up, I'm sad today," etc. I'd write it on a slip of paper and put it into the jar. It took a load off my heart and mind to write it out and give it away. Once it was in the jar, it wasn't my concern anymore. I had surrendered it in a physical way, out of my body, and into the jar. It would be taken care of.

I also made a Wishing Tray. One at a time, usually one for each week, I'd write down a dream or wish I had. "I wish my book could be done, I want to see something beautiful and new in nature, I would love to make a cake from scratch," etc. I'd write out whatever it was, and fold it up to put in the tray, knowing it was my wish for the week. Maybe I wouldn't do that thing that week, but since I let the Universe know my intention, I trusted it would

bring those things to fruition one day. At the end of the week I'd burn the piece of paper. *And so it shall be!*

CARVE OUT SACRED SPACE & TIME

I enjoy having a bookshelf or small table to hold sacred ritual items. This will definitely look different for everyone, depending on your beliefs. I integrate a lot of things. This area in my home has encouraging self-help and soulful books, my Bible, trinkets from my travels, oracle and tarot cards, mala beads, photographs of important people and moments in my life, a bluetooth speaker for music, incense, sage and palo santo wood, candles... anything that lifts my spirit up. I try to come to this place often, most especially if I'm having a hard moment or day. I can recenter and find alignment in myself, my body, and with what I call God, but you may call something else (Universe, Spirit, Energy). It's a place to get quiet with yourself, meditate, pray, reflect, and calm the mind, body, and spirit. Find what lifts you up.

CREATING/CRAFTING

Oh, this is a love of my heart! Making things of all kinds has been so healing for me. I'm naturally a creative being, but even if you feel you don't have this gift, it can still be a wonderful outlet. It doesn't matter how it turns out. What's important is the feeling you have while making it. It was also a great distraction when I couldn't think of anything but my losses.

For me, this started with color by number pages and kid projects from the dollar store. No real brain activity or thought needed, just color where it says to color, paint what needs painting. I often gave them to someone who I thought may smile upon receiving it. These items were by no means amazing, but they gave me joy while making them.

Other modes I found to be enjoyable outlets were cross-stitch kits, collage (on anything... coasters, bookmarks, cards), making vision boards out of magazine clippings (a vision board is putting a vision for yourself and your future down on a piece of paper), painting on small canvases with cheap paints, taking pictures and videos of nature with my phone, anything and everything. No rules or limits! These creations were my self-made form of art therapy, purely to help me through that specific moment.

You could even make things specifically for your baby(ies) or for those little ones you're still hoping for. One specific item I made for our family is a string of bells that hangs on the back of our front door. I've always liked the welcoming sound of bells as you enter a space, and decided to string six together, representing everyone in our home... including our angel babies.

If you walk through any craft store you'll find hundreds of possibilities. It's okay to start small. Other ideas could be jewelry making, playing with kinetic sand, putting a lego kit together, knit/crochet a scarf, find a puzzle to put together and frame it if you'd like, flower arranging (I made a wreath for the outward facing side of our front door that I love)... let your creativity run wild.

HOME IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

Most of these fixes were cosmetic for us, as neither my partner or I were ready to take on big projects like lighting or plumbing. I painted a lot of interior spaces in our home after our miscarriages. I no longer had to worry about fumes, so I painted our kitchen cabinets, made the living room a new color, freshened up trim, and probably most important, I redid the bathroom a lot of my trauma happened in. It's a relatively inexpensive way to change a space. Your home can transform just like you are.

My partner also did difficult labor projects like taking down our back porch that needed to be removed. As he slung that sledgehammer, I knew his porch removal was parallel to my bathroom revamp—cathartic. We also took out old carpet in the basement and enjoyed making other improvements around our home together. We were a team, even in the hardest of times.

CHOOSE UPLIFTING MEDIA

Soft (often instrumental or worship) music, uplifting podcasts, light-hearted movies, self-help or spiritual books and audiobooks... (I tried to keep my focus on positive titles or things pertaining to grief so I could face it delicately, yet head on.) A great time to listen is while doing those craft or home improvement projects. A surprising one was also watching documentary films that showed someone overcoming things.

"If they could do that, maybe I can overcome this."

Something to note: I learned quickly to stay away from true crime or conspiracy theory titles and overwhelming music as I found noticeable spikes in my anxiety.

WRITE IT OUT

I have filled journals with my feelings. In *The Artist's Way* by Julia Cameron, she suggests committing to writing three pages every morning, known as morning pages. These are meant for your eyes only, a brain dump. It helps to get all of the yuk out. I heard once that as humans, we ruminate on the same loop of ten thoughts at any given time. Once we finally put down one of those tapes we pick up another to fill its spot. What if we got all of those thoughts out first thing in the day so we could go on to live an expansive new day with new thoughts and opportunities? Yes, please!

Aside from the books I write, I throw away many of these journals once I've made it through a whole notebook. Out with the old, in with the new. I know a lot of people keep them to look back on and see how much they've grown since then, but most of the time, my heavy grief is not something I ever want revisit or read again. Sometimes I'll even burn it in a bonfire. You'll find your own rhythm and groove, too.

POSITIVE AFFIRMATIONS

Writing can also look like making little notes to yourself. I've put some of these up around my home or in my car at different times when it felt supportive. Right now I have one on my desk lamp that simply says, "Grounding, I am here, I am safe. Give Yourself Permission." On my dry erase board and calendar I'll write encouraging things like, "You're doing amazing, sweetheart." It's lovely to receive this kind of boost from yourself.

Some are found items that spoke to us, and some are things I've heard or read from different sources and written down. These little phrases have the power to turn a moment, sometimes even a day, around. One above our kitchen sink says, "My mind is calm, powerful, and positive." Another on the refrigerator says: "You are responsible for the energy you bring into this room." We have a stone next to our coffee maker that says, "You Rock". We've also taped up fortunes from fortune cookies and tea bag tags with sayings on them like, "Get ready to do something daring" and "Kindness is the light of life".

By our candy jar is a note I wrote to my partner, "Sweets for the Sweet". This is another gift if you share living quarters. When I had roommates in the past I liked writing notes like, "Hope you have a great day" or "There's fresh juice in the fridge!" Now my partner and I leave notes like, "Good Morning, Sunshine. I love you." and "I am so proud of you and all you're doing. You inspire me every day." These small traditions we started helped us through the dark days.

WALKING — EXPLORING NEW PARKS IN YOUR AREA

My partner made a point for us to begin visiting different city and state parks near us. It can be nice to have a different view than just your street or neighborhood. We've also enjoyed day and weekend trips to places in our state. In the past I found a lot of healing in national parks as well if you have the opportunity to go or live near one. Check their website for "free park days" if you're on a budget.

FIND A SPECIAL PLACE TO REMEMBER YOUR BABIES

Sculpture gardens and even cemeteries can be quiet places of reflection. The hospital where we had our last D&C buries remains in a group plot

where families can go visit their little ones, as I mentioned previously. Some organizations have spaces dedicated to pregnancy and infant loss. We bought a memorial brick at an Angel of Hope statue provided by *Share Pregnancy and Infant Loss, Inc.*, an organization I will mention in the resource section. These memorial sites can be found nationwide and are a wonderful place specifically created to go and remember your baby(ies). I have found myself at the foot of a few of them. These are wonderful places to “visit” our babies in a sense.

FIND A SUPPORT GROUP OR EVENT(S) TO ATTEND

There are organizations that tailor to the needs of parents in grief—non-profits, departments in hospitals, and national groups. We have attended annual walks and many support groups that were in-person, offered through Zoom, or even online chats. There is something out there that will be the right fit for you.

SEEK OUT A PROFESSIONAL THERAPIST WITH FERTILITY/ PREGNANCY LOSS/ANXIETY/WOMEN'S HEALTH SUPPORT SPECIALTIES

I cannot say enough about this. When I was hitting a wall, despite everything I tried to do to help myself, this resource was invaluable. Reach out to your doctor, a friend who may know someone, a spiritual organization, or a community group that specifically deals with these issues. There are so many ways of remembering. What ideas stand out to you from this list? How can you make them your own? What's the first one you'd like to try?

**I will be sure to include some of my favorite resources for each of these suggestions at the back of this book. I hope they support you in some way.*

Balancing A Relationship And Loss

You may find that your relationship with your partner has changed tremendously after all you've been through. Going through grief due to infertility, or after pregnancy and/or infant loss is sure to transform each of you, and in so doing, how you relate to each other as well. I've heard it said

these experiences can make or break a couple, and I consider this to be true. It took us to the very edge of breaking individually, even collectively, but thankfully by whatever grace was left in this world, I can honestly say each experience brought us closer together and made us stronger. It was actually my partners idea to include this chapter, and it's a huge piece of this whole thing.

It's definitely not always pretty. Grieving alongside each other as well as together can get super complicated. There were a lot of times where we did not and could not understand each other. Those were hard times. Often we'd separate to cool down a bit, figure out what exactly we were feeling, and merge back together to discuss where we were coming from. In the heat of the moment our discussions didn't always go so well, although we battled through a few uncomfortable arguments. It can be challenging to communicate your needs when you're trying to figure out how you're feeling about it all.

There is also the element of intimacy, or lack of it. For us, it was more of a reshaping of intimacy. The power of touch in the worst and best of times could mend my heart in ways I never knew it could, his too. Although sex was not the same after of our losses, we began holding each other in a new and comforting way. We could cry together, be our truest most authentic selves, and feel one another from the inside. A symbolic way we did this was by closing our eyes and putting our foreheads together. We would occasionally do this before he would leave for work or when we were having a hard time connecting. There was a transference of energy, an opening for understanding that his thoughts are not my thoughts, and vice versa. We were trying to see each others version of the world. We found that there are many ways to "make love".

There are some who may not have this element of a partner in their life currently, and if your experience already made headway in driving you and your beloved apart, I am so sorry, honey. This is what happened with my first miscarriage years ago, and it was something that stung deep down for a long time—a burden I was to bear alone, or at least separate from who it happened with.

How has your experience affected your relationship with your partner?

My last two miscarriages were in the past year with my current partner. The experience has been so different going through it hand in hand. We definitely had different ways of wading through it. For me this looked like a lengthy and painful physical and emotional healing journey, lots of alone time, writing, reading, and all of the suggestions that came in previous chapters to this to support me through it. My partner threw himself into his work as one of his main coping strategies, staying busy, along with shouldering the responsibilities of our household. His outlets sometimes looked like yard work, hanging out with friends, or playing video games to escape. But often, our healing modes crossed over.

In our journey of healing together we often went on hikes through nature (even very light and easy ones in the beginning stages for my sake, my stamina and body not capable of what it once was). Later we took day and weekend trips to natural areas or quirky places near us, no farther than three or four hours away. We discovered state parks and landmarks we'd either never been to or hadn't explored in ages. We also discovered holiday light shows, small town oddities, and even found Walt Disney's hometown. You'd be amazed what your own state or surrounding area has to offer that you never knew existed!

Most of the movies and shows I mention at the back of this book we watched together, learning about new things and intentionally finding reasons to laugh. My partner has a gift in the humor arena, thank goodness. When I get too "in my head" or spin my wheels on a certain thing he can always make the most of a situation through laughter. Although I've cried more than I ever have before this year, with the exception of the year both my divorce and dad's passing happened, I also laughed harder and more than I think I ever have. We found pockets of joy continually and all throughout. The positivity of our relationship saved us.

We also made a habit of playing cards and talking about things as we did so. This helped to neutralize emotions and took some of the pressure off of those heavy discussions. I always carry a deck in my purse now and we often play while waiting for food at restaurants, with friends, or anytime the opportunity arises... Kings in the Corner is our favorite. It's a light-hearted simpler game so conversation can flow more easily or can become competitive if you so desire.

Bonfires with friends and family or often just with each other provided mesmerizing therapy, making and sharing good food together, and enjoying date nights of whatever we wanted to do made us into the best of friends. Communicating even when battling through rough spots, having patience with each other, ourselves, and the process, as well as taking notice in how we were grieving differently became pillars to guide us through.

Sometimes it's in the little surprises you can offer one another—a treat or trinket from the store that reminds you of them, a new pet name, sending a funny meme or video to make them giggle, slow dancing in the kitchen while you hum your favorite tune, love notes to each other, singing of any kind, or doing something spontaneous and unexpected add fun into even the tough times. Another great idea was given to us as a wedding gift from a couple friend. They gave us two notebooks, one for my side of the bed and one for his. These are to write notes in to each other whenever we feel like it, and it's fun to have that collection to look through from time to time.

Sure, there's a lot of sameness in the mundane of the everyday, but don't forget to reach out to your partner for love and to give love. They can't be everything you need, a lot of that comes from yourself, but they can be a wonderful addition.

How have you and your partner grieved differently? What's one way to show them your gratitude and care today?

Braving New Roads

After experiencing recurrent losses, my partner and I began to forge ahead on the road to other options when starting a family. We are a family, just the two of us, and have always felt this way even before children. After some time, along with our angel babies, we were ready to find new avenues of adding to it.

We have close friends who have gone the IVF, fostering, and adoption routes, and began to do some digging. Many were gracious enough to meet with us and share what their lives looked like so we could begin to piece together a new picture for ourselves. We weren't recreating the wheel by any means and were by far the first family to have difficulties and road blocks

along the way. Finding a community of like individuals was so nurturing for us. It all starts with the ask. I think most people would be happy to share their story if it can be of service to relieving someone else's pain.

After extensive genetic testing on both of us and our baby from our last miscarriage, family history research, and all other doctors, appointments, and tests we were directed to, we were given the conclusion that there wasn't anything fundamentally wrong that would prevent us from having a baby. With a rare trisomy (15) which was maternal, from me, I thought that I was sending this double chromosome every time which would explain why this kept happening. Bracing myself for the worst felt easier. But no, that wasn't the case. Essentially, my doctor told us we just had to try again if we wanted another chance. After much prayer and discussion, we decided to give it one more try knowing I would be monitored extra closely as this would be a high risk pregnancy due to my previous losses and advanced maternal age, over 35. (I still can't believe this is referred to as a geriatric pregnancy. Way to lift a girl's spirits!)

What new options and avenues has your experience taken you to? How has your idea of having a family changed?

I want to offer an out on the rest of this chapter. If you begin reading and cannot go there right now, I completely understand. Feel free to skip ahead to the beginning of the next chapter. Trigger Warning: Pregnancy After Loss.

As I write these pages, I'm currently in my fourth pregnancy, the third one in a year. We tried to leave space for healing in-between each loss while at the

same time feeling the urge to move forward on our path. I was scared to try again, we both were. With our last pregnancy, I had a hard time connecting with the baby. Not bonding was a way of protecting myself. I didn't want to be heartbroken again. With this pregnancy I've felt the same way up until I began to feel her move. (It's a girl.) Then a new realization dawned on me—we may actually have this baby. I guess I was so set on something bad happening, I wasn't prepared for good news. It's like I don't know how to be happy.

I debated adding this portion of my personal story for a long while. I've read a number of titles on infertility, pregnancy loss, and infant loss and the minute they mentioned having living children, a term I was introduced to in this world of loss, I wanted to throw the book across the room. That was so far from my experience as I had no living children. I saw this window of time during this pregnancy, where I can still write from that place whether I do or don't go to term with a healthy pregnancy. I figure, I either have nine months to write before life changes, or if we have another loss, I'll need this information myself. There are many of us who are in this boat of yet to have living children. If you do, this may be different for you. And please, give your precious one(s) a kiss for the rest of us.

One thing I know for sure, the road of pregnancy after loss is no walk in the park either. Talk about anxiety. The fear of another loss is always present no matter how far along you get. I've been in so many support groups where I've heard story after story of stillbirth and infant death that I know the journey is far from over. My doctor even reminded me that this may never end. As a parent, we could worry about our children's wellbeing their whole lives.

I've never experienced anxiety to the extent I have in the past year with two miscarriages, and another pregnancy only adds another layer. I had to seek out professional help through therapy and medications that are safe to take to feel any kind of normal. The lack of sleep alone from my restless nights of "What if" thoughts were enough to drive anyone mental. My therapist only had to meet with me once to tell me she was leaning towards thinking I have PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) from this past year, especially from our experience with Harmony, and antepartum depression, which happens during pregnancy as opposed to postpartum, which is after childbirth. I had never heard of antepartum before, so this is all an education for me. You may experience some of these, among others, yourself.

Have you sought professional support for your experience? Has it or could it be helpful?

I'm grateful to be pregnant again and we are hopeful all will be well come our due date. What I'm learning to accept in myself is that it's okay to have doubts. It's okay to say "if all goes well" and "*hopefully* she'll arrive". Nothing in life is certain, this we know full well. I can't yet talk in certainties or have them put on me by friends and family as if it's a sure thing, such as later in this pregnancy or after birth, and that's okay, too. Anyone who takes issue with this, I simply need distance from right now. I can't "be more joyful" than I am and I've accepted this. I need a support system that's in my corner, or "on my team" as my partner says, that's open and understanding to both sides of how I feel. This makes all the difference and I'm glad most especially to have a partner who gets it firsthand.

I have been slower on the celebratory markers; we have yet to publicly announce online at 30 weeks, and I just began entertaining the ideas of a shower, registry, or starting to set up a nursery. It isn't easy, even major companies asking, "Is this your first baby?" when creating a baby registry. Seriously, no one in that boardroom of designers thought to raise a flag? No, this isn't my first baby, it's my fourth, so I left that box unchecked. Close friends and family find out as we interact with them. For the most part, my partner and I can more fully enjoy this private, magical part of life just between the two of us. We are hopeful for our rainbow baby, or as my sister pointed out, our double rainbow baby. I guess this is my triple rainbow, and I suppose now is the time to be hopeful if there ever was one.

What are your thoughts on having a rainbow baby? (Which is a baby born subsequent to a miscarriage, stillbirth, or death of an infant from natural causes.) I also see this as spanning to fostering, adoption, surrogacy, and any other way to bring a child into your life. If you have yet to experience a pregnancy, what are your thoughts on having a miracle baby, whether naturally or by way of fostering, adoption, surrogacy and any other way to bring a child into your life?

I'll Carry You With Me

As you may already be sensing, this kind of loss will be something you carry with you forever. It won't always feel so raw, but it's a delicate piece of any hopeful parents heart. There really is no ending. My darkest days seem to be subsiding, but I think of my babies every day still, and we just celebrated the one year anniversary of our most recent loss. I'm beginning to delight in carrying them with me, whether anyone else remembers or not. My three angel babies are a part of me, and always will be.

In what way do you already embody a Mom, Mama, and Mother Earth energy? Or Dad, Daddy, and Fatherly energy? How can you share this love of a parent part of yourself with those around you?

I hope some of what I've shared here is supportive to you on your journey. Remember, none of this is one-size-fits-all, but seek to find what speaks to you. I feel like I could write on this topic forever because there's always more to discover and say. Although I by no means have covered everything, it's a starting point. Your own explorations will continue to lead you down surprising paths—some you never dreamed you'd venture down. Yet, that's where the excitement often awaits, just beyond our comfort bubble. I'm thinking of you, dear friend, and will continue to walk alongside you, waving from afar when our paths diverge, but eventually, we'll meet at similar crossroads once again I'd wager.

When I was in my lowest of grief lows, my partner often made mention of something I will never forget.

"We are still living, honey," he'd say.

Although you may feel at times like I have, that life is over or that we died when our dreams and/or babies died, and yes, that's probably true in part, we must remember that we have survived. Our hopeful and heavenly children would want us to live and have every good and wonderful thing this world has to offer, just as we've always wanted for them.

Take heart, and carry the banner high and proud for them and all you've been through. You are courageous and so brave, even when you haven't felt that way. Even if you don't feel that way now. Little by little, we are making our way through this storm. It is trying and relentless on the soul to carry this burden day after day, but know that you are not alone. We are a sisterhood, brotherhood, human family, a tribe. We are parents in our heart of hearts no matter what our family looks like to anyone else. Family is what and whom lives in our hearts as well as those physically present. Every hope, spark of joy, and even the leaves of sorrow—it all paints the most beautiful portrait. The story of you, your life, and your unique path.

I'll be praying for you as you grow and heal. "You are still living," and you are going to make it through. Continue to look for the small moments of relief in each day and find a few things to be grateful for. Slowly but surely, the clouds will begin to part.

How do the words of this chapter rest in your heart? Do they feel true to you? And if not today, can you see yourself embodying them one day?

If I had one wish, hope, and prayer for myself and my family in all of this, it would be...

Resources

I am grateful for each of these resources. They entered my life right when I needed them most, and I hope they are supportive to you as well.

APPS

Audible	Insight Timer
#Bible - Verse of the Day	Mindful Mamas
Clue Period & Cycle Tracker	PictureThis - Plant Identifier
Flo Period & Ovulation Tracker	Pregnancy After Loss

PODCASTS

Sounds True: Insights At The Edge	Oprah's Super Soul
Labor Pains: Dealing with Infertility and Loss During Pregnancy or Infancy	Rainbow Baby
Love Letter	Tara Brach
Grief Out Loud	Unlocking Us with Brené Brown

FILM & TELEVISION

Inspirational, comedy, and stories of a hero's journey

<i>9to5 The Story of a Movement</i>	<i>Joan Didion: The Center Will Not Hold</i>
<i>The Andy Warhol Diaries</i>	<i>La Luna</i>
<i>Arrested Development</i>	<i>The Last Dance</i>
<i>The Beatles: Get Back</i>	<i>Love, Gilda</i>
<i>Being Elmo: A Puppeteer's Journey</i>	<i>Lucy and Desi</i>
<i>Being The Queen</i>	<i>Maya Angelou: And Still I Rise</i>
<i>Brené Brown: The Call To Courage</i>	<i>Modern Family</i>
<i>Dolly Parton: Here I Am</i>	<i>Mulan (Live Action Version)</i>
<i>Grace and Frankie</i>	<i>RBG</i>
<i>Hidden Figures</i>	<i>Seeing Allred</i>
<i>Howard</i>	<i>Waking Sleeping Beauty</i>
<i>Iris</i>	

INSTAGRAM-ERS

@bornstill
@griegtoglaciousunfolding
@itslennnie
@jocelyn.coaching
@kjr RamseyWrites
@moonomens
@morganharpernichols
@myselflovesupply
@nationalshare
@peopleloved
@pregnancyafterlosssupport
@starthealingtogether
@stillstandingmag
@thrive
@toyoufromsteph

YOUTUBERS

David Gandelman
Kelli Miguez
LeeHarrisEnergy (Energy Update)
Souls Adventures

ONLINE RESOURCES

Ann-Marie Ferry www.annmarieferry.com/essays
Calm Together www.calm.com/blog/take-a-deep-breath
Games For Humanity www.gamesforhumanity.com
GriefShare www.griefshare.org
Mercy HeartPrints www.mercy.net/practice/mercy-maternal-and-fetal-health-center-st-louis/mercy-heartprints/
Mystic Valley www.mysticvalleystl.com
Pregnancy After Loss Support www.pregnancyafterlosssupport.org
Sage Tree Therapy www.sagetreetherapy.com
Share Pregnancy and Infant Loss, Inc. <https://nationalshare.org/>
Sharing Magazine <https://nationalshare.org/sharing-magazine/>
Singing Bird Wild Feminine Life Coaching www.singingbirdcoaching.com
Still Standing Magazine www.stillstandingmag.com
Sweet Yield Studio www.sweetyieldstudio.com/community
Wellness With Ashaleah www.ashaleah.com
Yoga Buzz www.yogabuzz.org

GUIDED JOURNALS

Get Untamed: The Journal (How to Quit Pleasing and Start Living) by Glennon Doyle

The Inner Me: A Journal to Connect with Yourself and Discover What Brings you True Happiness by Editors of Chartwell Books

Your Brightest Life Journal: A Creative Guide to Becoming Your Best Self by Caroline Kelso Zook

MUSIC ALBUMS

52 Weeks Makes A Year

by David Gledhill

Be Held (Instrumental)

by Christy Nockels

Bethel's Starlight by Piano Prayer

Contemporary Worship Hits by Holy Communion Instrumental Duo

Dawn Songs by Ben Laver

Deva (The Instrumental Meditations)

by Deva Primal

Held by Trevor Oswalt & East Forest

Instrumental Songs of Worship

by The Maker & The Instrument

Movement by Beautiful Chorus

The Universe Smiles Upon You

by Khruangbin

READING RECOMMENDATIONS

The Artist's Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity by Julia Cameron

Atlas of the Heart: Mapping

Meaningful Connection and the

Language of Human Experience

by Brené Brown

Find Your Glow, Feed Your Soul: A Guide for Cultivating a Vibrant Life of Peace and Purpose by Emily Silva

The Four Agreements: A Practical Guide to Personal Freedom (A Toltec Wisdom Book) by Don Miguel Ruiz

A Garland of Love: Daily Reflections on the Magic and Meaning of Love by Daphne Rose Kingma

Grief Unseen: Healing Pregnancy Loss through the Arts by Laura Seftel

It's OK That You're Not OK: Meeting Grief and Loss in a Culture That Doesn't Understand by Megan Devine

On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief Through the Five Stages of Loss by Elizabeth Kübler-Ross and David Kessler

Simple Abundance: A Daybook of Comfort and Joy by Sarah Ban Breathnach

Strong and Tender: A Guide for the Father Whose Baby has Died by Pat Schwiebert

Tiny Beautiful Things: Advice on Love and Life from Dear Sugar by Cheryl Strayed

The Universe Has Your Back: Transform Fear into Faith by Gabrielle Bernstein

Work Your Light Oracle Cards and The Rose Oracle by Rebecca Campbell

With Gratitude

To my beloved friend, partner, and husband, Charles,

Thank you for walking alongside me in this journey, often lifting me up or carrying me when I couldn't take another step. Your understanding is unsurpassed. I ask myself often, how did we get so lucky to find each other the way we did and when we did? I thank God for you.

When I think of our experience through the depths of miscarriage, by far, the organization that has gone above and beyond for my partner and I is *Share Pregnancy and Infant Loss Support, Inc.* They were the first to call, send love notes in the mail for holidays and anniversaries of our losses, and provided outlets for us to express the pain we were in, such as support groups, memorial events, and a platform to write about our experience via *Sharing Magazine*. They also have Angel of Hope statues nationwide that are a wonderful place specifically created to go and remember your baby(ies). You can find more incredible avenues of support at <https://nationalshare.org/>.

Thank you to our families for your care, concern, and for being there for us to the fullest of your ability. Friends with a shared experience and those who gave us the gift of empathy supported us in a multitude of ways. These kindnesses from family and friends were a big motivator in my desire to give back with this project.

I'm forever grateful to Laura of Laura Grant Design for the beautiful cover, layout, and overall design of this zine. Our creative and heart roots are intertwined in so many ways to this day, and I treasure you. Please check out her work at www.lauragrantedesign.com.

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Lastly, thank you from the bottom of my heart to the Regional Arts Commission of St. Louis (RAC). The local artist grant I was generously given has helped make this a free resource for whoever may want or need it. Please discover all they have to offer the arts community at www.racstl.org.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rachel Helden is an artist from St. Louis, Missouri. She has been through three miscarriages and was in her fourth pregnancy while writing *Finding Harmony*. Her first book was released last year, *Free Way: An Adventure Through Loss*, which is an illustrated memoir about a solo road trip she took after going through a divorce and her father's passing. Never expecting to be a writer, she has found a calling in the arena of grief, shedding light on some truths of it through her personal experiences.

You can connect with Rachel on Instagram at @_photonomad_ and find out more about her work on her website at www.rachelhelden.com.

Finding Harmony: Emotional Healing After Pregnancy Loss is a little zine created for anyone who has experienced the heartache of infertility, pregnancy loss, and/or infant loss. After going through three recurrent miscarriages, Rachel found that literature was hard to come by from writers without living children. *Finding Harmony*, named for her second and most traumatic loss, includes portions of her personal story, but brings focus to the reader's experience through guided writing prompts and supportive resources.

