

I KID YOU NOT

To lose a lover

It's easy to forget what you've got when you've got it, but death has a way of reminding you

by Beren deMotier

I've just recovered from my semiannual session as a single parent.

Fortunately for me and our offspring, this is not the normal state of affairs around our house. Though it could be argued that as a housewife, stay-at-home kind of mom I do take on the lion's share of say, dirty diapers (all 7,811 of them), still I'm no single mom. These times on my own always reaffirm my heartfelt respect and kneeling awe of single parents.

They also reaffirm how much I would miss her if she were gone.

It's not that I'm pining for the wife when she's away. We've been together more than 10 years now, and we could use the occasional break. God knows we've earned it. It's just that when she gets on that plane, underneath I always fear that I'll never see her again. That something will happen. That it was the last time.

I had a phone call this summer. It was early one day and I was full of the minutiae of daily life: a shower here, a breakfast there, a load of laundry

you've got it. Easy to see greener grass, easy to imagine that real love is like love in a Brontë novel or the latest flick. It's not easy to stay in love. Hard even sometimes to remember in the thick of it that this is what life looks like when you get what you want, blemishes and all.

If I were to lose my wife, this would be the greatest pain of all, I think: the lost times spent foolishly fighting over the garden, over a misunderstanding, over an outbreak of PMS. The entire third year we spent furious with one another but doggedly determined to stay together. The lost time never to be regained.

I hate to imagine those feelings amid the convoluted business of death. What with insurance agents, city, county and state bureaucracy and families—please, save me from families in a crisis. Not that I begrudge anyone their feelings, I'm far too P.C. for that. It's just that I've witnessed firsthand how a death in the family can get everyone's knickers in a twist, with ugly results. Being gay may be the final straw, but the camel's



heading down the chute. When the phone rang I thought it was the neighbor calling about a play date for our young daughters, getting them together so that we, the two at-home lesbian moms on the street, could get together for a good natter.

Instead it was a colleague, a friend, calling to tell me that his lover had died. It was sudden, unexpected, and there had been no preparation or time to adjust. Just when life should have been going on, his lover's body had failed him and he was gone.

My friend told me he'd called to remind me to appreciate my wife.

Loving someone is always a risk, of course—emotionally, physically, sometimes financially. When you've found someone you trust, who trusts and loves you back, it seems like it must last forever. And if there is to be an end, a split, it will be one you can fight over, grapple with and work through until there can be friendship, peaceful separation or undying enmity. At least there is closure.

But to lose your lover suddenly, there can be no opportunity to clear the decks. You are left without knowing how to find the bills or whom to contact about the dental appointment. There is no other half who remembers the nephews' birthdays, your sister's shoe size, and a hundred little things you'd given to him for safekeeping—parts of your life he carried with him in his heart and mind. And you always knew were safe there.

Are no longer.

And it's easy to forget what you've got when

already hit the floor once you have a nuclear-family-of-origin involved. If you thought everyone was cool with your relationship with Martha, just wait and see what happens should Martha pass away. You too can become a punching bag for an entire family's collective psyche, a common enemy on which to vent decades' worth of suppressed emotion. For there is no death without trauma drama.

I just hope I don't have to deal with it anytime soon.

Sometimes at night during those long business trips, when our two children are safe in their beds (or more likely in our bed since they become little limpets in her absence) I'll putz around the kitchen, wasting precious hours I could be working or relaxing without guilt. It's funny, our evenings are spent most often with me working, or her on-call for her job, or with my Friday night standing date with the bills. And yet, I know she's there. I know that I only have to walk through the kitchen and across the dining room to her office, and that she'll be willing to drop anything to give me a few minutes. I know that if I'm busy doing my thing and haven't poked my nose in her business, she'll end up checking in. I'll have to positively kick her out to get anything done. Hard to imagine losing that without the chance for a fight.

So tonight I'll remember what my friend said, and I'll appreciate my wife and give thanks for her safe return, for my parental reprieve, for our continual co-existence, for our daily beating of the odds. I'll remember.



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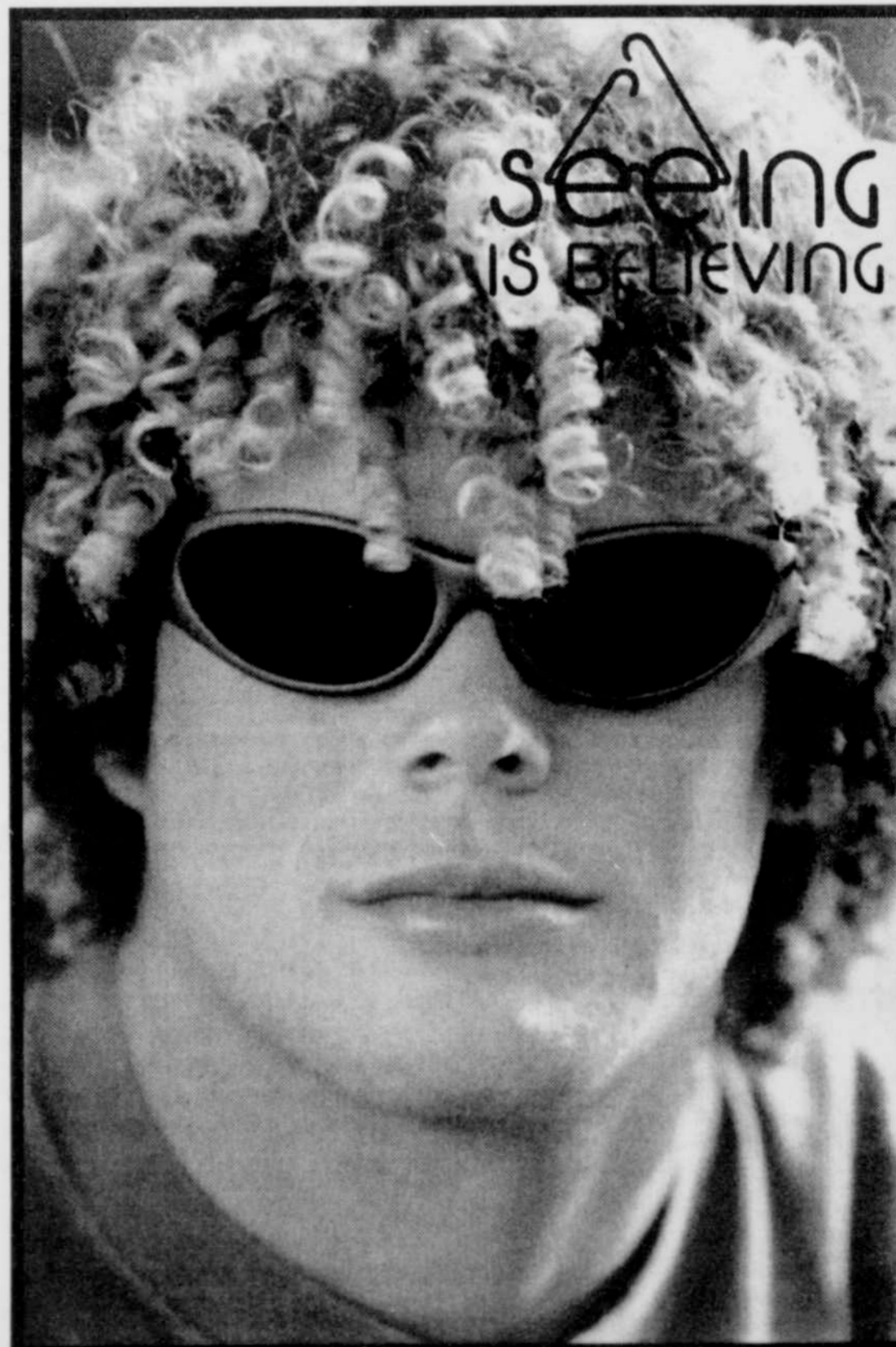


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