

A sunrise in Astoria, viewed from the Port of Astoria.

Aaron Breniman photo

CONTACT US

Erick Bengel | Features Editor  
ebengel@dailyastorian.com

# WEEKEND BREAK

THE DAILY ASTORIAN • FRIDAY, JULY 13, 2018 • 1C



FOLLOW US  
facebook.com/  
DailyAstorian

## THE SUNRISE OF MY MOURNING

After losing my mother, the importance of time and being truly present with loved ones becomes clearer

By AARON BRENNIMAN  
For The Daily Astorian

Last fall, I wrote about the mother-son trip I took to the Astoria area to celebrate my mom's birthday. We talked, shopped, dined, nutured and rested.

Last week, I picked up her ashes.

In December, I wrote: "Nobody expects their parents to live forever, but in the mundaneness of day-to-day life intentional time together can get lost," and "I realized that the most important gift I could ever give her was my time, as she had given me hers for so many years. Fully focused, attentive time."

I remember thinking so many times over the past year: Cherish this — you won't always have the opportunity to do so.

During the week of her passing, I had cleared my calendar to be in Cannon Beach with a group of friends for the 56th annual Sandcastle Contest. I realized later that I had really cleared that time to walk my mother home. She passed away on June 15 due to complications from a stroke.

In the time since then, I've begun my grieving. I've cried more than ever before, and I now see everything about my mother, and the impact she had on every area of my life, in a new light. As I've started the sunrise of my mourning, I've moved through these moments largely present, strengthened by a faith and peace beyond understanding. I've reflected on this new phase, revisiting many places we explored last fall, this time while watching an explosive sunrise to mark my mourning.

I'm fairly young-ish; I turned 40 a week after she passed — a birthday I chose to celebrate who I am today because of who my mother was. These are the many gifts she's given me that will live on, that I never fully received until she'd passed.

I've moved from spiritually focused during dark, quiet nights alone in hospital rooms, to tactically supportive roles doing whatever needs to be done for my father and family, to just now beginning to have space and bandwidth to take in the loss. Mourning's sunrise is just beginning.

I've read and read, including the words of French literary theorist and philosopher Roland Barthes' "Mourning Diary," which he wrote on scraps of paper daily for two years following the death of his mother in 1977, and theologian and novelist C.S. Lewis' "A Grief Observed," a work that gives context and comfort to my tornado of new emotions. And the "Losing Your Mom" CareNotes brochure a friend picked up for me in which Peggy Heinzmann Ekerdt writes:

"This is what we lose when our mothers die. We lose the person who rejoices in our accomplishments and agonizes in our struggles; the person who thinks we should win every race, woo every beau or belle, and succeed at every job; the person whose first urge is to protect, shelter, and guide us; the person who knows what is best for us, or thinks she does; the person



Courtesy Aaron Breniman  
Susan Breniman, who passed away last month, carries around baby Aaron in her backpack.



Aaron Breniman photo  
Last fall, Aaron Breniman took his mother, Susan, on a trip to the Astoria area for her birthday. Here they are at the Peter Iredale shipwreck at Fort Stevens State Park.

who brags about us in our absence and offers advice in our presence. In sum, we lose the person who is our biggest fan and our most ardent defender."

These words have provided perspective and a springboard into my mourning. As have the little things I've discovered in the past weeks — like the stories and memories of people near and far whose lives had been impacted by who my mother was and how she lived, their words driving me to tears held tightly

between pain and pride.

And other simple things, like finding all the links to my writings in my mom's internet "favorites," or rereading her words written in texts or emails or listening to the final voicemail she left.

And through it all, I've come to know, even more so than before, that life isn't about money or things, job titles or promotions, and the grass will wither and the flowers fade. Life is about the time and love we give to family, friends and

strangers — like my mom always did. And it's about being fully present in these moments with others, because we never know when we'll run out of tomorrows with the ones we love.

As it says in 1 Corinthians: Love never ends.

Aaron Breniman is an outdoor recreation enthusiast and freelance writer working on his first book. Contact him or find him on the socials via [aaronbreniman.com](http://aaronbreniman.com).

**LIFE IS ABOUT THE TIME AND LOVE WE GIVE TO FAMILY, FRIENDS AND STRANGERS — LIKE MY MOM ALWAYS DID. AND IT'S ABOUT BEING FULLY PRESENT IN THESE MOMENTS WITH OTHERS, BECAUSE WE NEVER KNOW WHEN WE'LL RUN OUT OF TOMORROWS WITH THE ONES WE LOVE.**