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May 6, 2019

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On May 2, our son, Nick, turned 31. Nick is autistic, so that date is also the anniversary of the first day of the rest of my life as a Special Needs Mom. What that meant for me was that the list of things I had learned about being a mother from raising his precocious older sister, Chelsea, had to be torn up and tossed out the window. The instruction manual that came with Nick turned out to be written in a language that I seem to be taking a lifetime to learn. I still often feel like a bumbling tourist in whatever fascinating but mystifying country that is.

May 3 marks another equally life-altering anniversary for me: 31 years since the day I died. Twenty-one hours after Nick was born, I suffered a deadly eclamptic seizure and four vasal spasm strokes. What that means is my brain â?? trying to protect itself from the toxemia coursing through my body â?? slammed shut all major conduits, and I died.

My soul went to the light for around 20 minutes (though since time is relative to this planet, it felt like a much longer visit), then returned to a body badly damaged from the experience. I was paralyzed on my left side. I had shredded my tongue and the insides of my mouth. And the pain was so great, I admit to reaching towards the ceiling with my right hand, begging God to let me have a do-over, to suck my soul straight back to heaven.

But I had made my choice to come back to care for Chelsea and Nick, and that was that. I have written about this experience before (see [here](#) and [here](#)), but the lingering effects of my time there on my life here can be encapsulated into one basic question, I think. Here it is: When someone dies, why do we all say rest in peace?

We see it all the time, yes? On headstones: Loving Mother, Daughter, Friend. RIP.

On social media, when someone of note dies, everyone writes: RIP Mr. Whomever.

Or when a friend's family member passes, we all seem to write something like: I am sorry for your loss. I hope they rest in peace.

Well, I don't hope they rest in peace.

I hope they run and play!

If there is one thing my short trip to heaven taught me, it's that the last thing death means is that we are done, through, finished. Just the opposite. Death is the

beginning. Or at least one more fresh start in an evolution of them.

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Since May 3, 1988, the phrase rest in peace just seems odd to me. When I die, I fully intend to soar, to float, to dance, to fly and, hopefully, to get busy. When someone I love passes away, I am assured that they are not only in a place of love — including the total knowledge, acceptance and understanding of every choice we may perceive as sin here — but they are finally free of the limitations and diminishment of their earthly bodies. They are returned to themselves, and to God. They are home free.

When people die, yes we miss them, and yes we feel a hole where they used to be, and yes grief can be terribly painful. But death should also be a celebration, experienced with the same breath-holding awe of watching fireworks light up the night sky. When my Mom died, she left her alcoholism-destroyed brain and body behind. Like a butterfly shedding its cocoon, she exploded out and away, shimmering with the vibrant colors of her true self into eternity.

And while my Mom may indeed have initially opted for a bit of rest — some cosmic rehab to repair the torn places on the opalescent fabric of her soul incurred during her lifetime here — and hopefully gained some perspective and peace about those choices, I would be surprised if she rested in peace for very long. I can't imagine that her fiercely intelligent, funny and artistic nature could tolerate laying on some heavenly chaise lounge infinitely. I picture her enjoying that respite for a while, but then tossing aside her celestial sunglasses and book, and getting busy.

I guess there are a lot of reasons people hope that they and their loved ones rest in peace forever. Life is very often hard and confusing and unfair. Scripture tells us that the crown of thorns of suffering we endure here will be replaced by one of jewels there. So a lot of us put up with some very painful stuff because we look forward to a seriously luxurious place of relaxation and reward on the other side. We are just plain worn out, and dang it, we want to rest. In peace. For as long as we want. Maybe forever.

And perhaps that is a choice we can make, or is made for us, once we are there. We can stand in the line under the sign that reads "Perpetual Peace Cruise," and be ushered gently and lovingly into that endless spa experience. We have worked hard

enough. We are done now. And we can let them take care of us, as we have cared for others.

But from my experience, I believe our souls are hardy adventurers, ready and even impatient for the next challenge. When I stood in the light and saw the future of my children, one of them disabled, my soul's choice was instantaneous. Sure, I can do that. Easy peasy. Bring it on. Let's do this. I quickly leapt back into my body, and only felt regret when I was once again encased in this pain-riddled, limited flesh.

And it forever changed the way I respect and treat my children, especially my son, Nick. He may appear to the world as different, with his odd speech and quirky movements, but I know inside him is a brave and mighty soul. At some beautiful intimate meeting between him and God, his soul chose this body, this brain, this life instantaneously: Sure, I can do that. Easy peasy. Bring it on. Let's do this.

So Happy Birthday, Nick. Thanks for 31 years of challenges and frustrations and glorious celebrations thus far. Thanks for allowing me to be part of your pit crew on the sidelines of your amazing and inspiring life. And when we leave this place, may we go ahead and rest in peace for a bit, but then spring up, restored to perfection, eternally. And together, forever, to run and play.

[Amy Morris-Young graduated from and taught writing at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles.]