



# Letters To My Mama: An Adopted Daughter's Creative Journey Through the First Year of Grief

*Cheryl Kain*

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Cheryl Kain

An accomplished singer who performed the national anthem at Fenway Park and Dodger Stadium, Cheryl was adopted at four months old by Raymond and Elaine Kain of New York. Her father died in 1984; she became very close with her mother in the years to follow, despite living across the country. Wanting to spend time with her mother while mom was still healthy, Cheryl made the difficult decision to uproot herself by moving to small-town life on Cape Cod, leaving behind her friends and work in Los Angeles.

Six years later, when her mom died on August 13, 2009, Cheryl was devastated – she'd not only lost her mother, but her best friend and roommate. She found herself turning 48, suddenly single, let go from her job, and without a map for the future. Cheryl begins writing letters to her mother as an attempt to keep the conversation going, hanging on to the one daily ritual she looks forward to, while unflinchingly visiting the dark caverns of grief, despair and heartbreak. She becomes an accidental poet and painter, expressing her “messy” feelings that can be difficult to talk about. During the first year of acute grief, she took solace in the smallest of blessings, a year of not having to be fashionably dressed, and an unimpeachable way out of unwanted social invites.

After a few months of writing letters, Cheryl discovers she wants much more than to just write her mother about the unending pain of loss. A magical moment that changes her life comes in the form of an instinct – why can't she continue to write her mom daily, and receive a letter back from her mother? It's the best way that she knows how to continue their relationship, in a way that feels real and reciprocal.

“I write to my mother, and she writes me back. I ask her questions; she answers. She still tells me to go to bed earlier, and she reminds me that no matter where she is, she will always be my mother”.

The letters reveal Cheryl's struggle in the different facets of grief – searching for the beloved, wanting to join them in death; anger, extreme fatigue, and even euphoria specific to grief. The letters remind her that her mother's love and attention continue on, and the growth of the mother/daughter relationship is no longer limited to the physical world.

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