***Option B: Facing Adversity, Building Resilience, and Finding Joy***

Sheryl Sandberg and Adam Grant

**Introduction**

Dave was my rock. Like all married couples, we had our ups and downs. Still, Dave gave me the experience of being deeply understood, truly supported, and completely and utterly loved. I thought I'd spend the rest of my life resting my head on his shoulder.

Eleven years after our wedding, we went to Mexico to celebrate our friend Phil Deutch’s fiftieth birthday. Friday afternoon, we were hanging out by the pool playing Settlers of Catan on our iPads. For a refreshing change, I was actually winning, but my eyes kept drifting closed. Once I realized that fatigue was going to prevent me from securing Catan victory, I admitted, “I’m falling asleep.” I gave in and curled up. At 3:41 PM, someone snapped a picture of Dave holding his iPad, sitting next to his brother Rob and Phil. I'm asleep on a cushion on the floor in front of them. Dave is smiling.

When I woke up more than an hour later, Dave was no longer in that chair. I joined our friends for a swim, assuming he'd gone to the gym as he'd planned. When I went back to our room to shower and he wasn't there, I was surprised but not concerned. I left the room and went downstairs. Dave wasn't there. I walked out to the beach and joined the rest of our group. When he wasn't there either, I felt a wave of panic. Something was wrong. I shouted to Rob and his wife Leslye, “Dave isn't here!” Leslye paused, then yelled back, “Where’s the gym?” I pointed toward some nearby steps and we started running.

We found Dave on the floor, lying by the elliptical machine, his face slightly blue and turned to the left, a small pool of blood under his head. We all screamed. I started CPR. The ride in the ambulance was the longest thirty minutes of my life.

After what felt like forever, I was let into a small room. The doctor came in and sat behind the desk. I knew what that meant. When the doctor left, a friend of Phil's came over, kissed me on the cheek, and said, “I'm sorry for your loss.”

Someone asked if I wanted to see Dave to say good-bye. I did- and I did not want to leave. I thought that if I just stayed in that room and held him, if I refused to let go, I would wake up from this nightmare. When his brother Rob, in shock himself, said we had to go, I took a few steps out of the room, then turned around and ran back in, hugging Dave as hard as I could.

And so began the rest of my life. It was-and still is-a life I never would have chosen, a life I was completely unprepared for. The unimaginable. Sitting down with my son and daughter and telling them that their father had died. Hearing their screams joined by my own. The funeral. Speeches where people spoke of Dave in the past tense. My house filling up with familiar faces coming up to me again and again, delivering the perfunctory kiss on the cheek followed by the same words: “I'm sorry for your loss.”

“No one ever told me,” C.S. Lewis wrote, “that grief felt so like fear.” The fear was constant and it felt like the grief would never subside. The waves would continue to crash over me until I was no longer standing, no longer myself.

I called Adam Grant, a psychologist and professor at Wharton. Two years earlier, Dave had read Adams book and invited him to speak at SurveyMonkey, where Dave was CEO. That evening, Adam joined us for dinner at our home. Adam studies how people find motivation and meaning, and we started talking about the challenges women face and how Adam’s work could inform the issue.

Adam flew back across the country to convince me that there was a bottom to the seemingly endless void. He wanted to tell me face-to-face that while grief was unavoidable, there were things I could do to lessen the anguish for myself and my children. He said that by six months, more than half of people to lose a spouse are past what psychologists classify as “acute grief.” Adam convinced me that while my grief would have to run its course, my beliefs and actions could shape how quickly I moved through the void and where I ended up.

I don't know anyone who has been handed only roses. We all encounter hardships. Some we see coming; others take us by surprise. It can be as tragic as the sudden death of a child, as heartbreaking as a relationship that unravels, or as disappointing as a dream that goes unfulfilled. The question is: When these things happen, what do we do next?

I thought resilience was the capacity to endure pain, so I asked Adam how I could figure out how much I had. He explained that our amount of resilience isn't fixed, so I should be asking instead how I could *become* resilient. Resilience is the strength and speed of our response to adversity- and we can build it. It isn't about having a backbone. It's about strengthening the muscles around our backbone.

Since Dave passed away, so many people have said to me, “I can't imagine.” They mean they can't imagine this happening to them, can't imagine how I am standing there talking to them rather than curled up in a ball somewhere. I remember feeling the same way when I saw a colleague back at work after losing a child or a friend buying coffee after being diagnosed with cancer. When I was on the other side, my reply became, “I can't imagine either, but I have no choice.”

I had no choice but to wake up every day. No choice but to get through the shock, the grief, the survivor guilt. No choice but to try to move forward and be a good mother at home. No choice but to try to focus and be a good colleague at work.

This book is my and Adam's attempt to share what we've learned about resilience. We wrote it together, for the simplicity and clarity the story is told by me (Sheryl) while Adam is referred to in the third person. We don't pretend that hope will win out over pain every day. It won't. We don't presume to have experienced every possible kind of loss and setback ourselves. We haven't. There is no right or proper way to grieve or face challenges, so we don't have perfect answers. There are no perfect answers.

Psychologists have studied how to recover and rebound from a wide range of adversity- from loss, rejection, and divorce to injury and illness, from professional failure to personal disappointment. Along with reviewing the research, Adam and I sought out individuals and groups who have overcome ordinary and extraordinary difficulties. Their stories changed the way we think about resilience.

This book is about the capacity of the human spirit to persevere. We look at the steps people can take, both to help themselves and to help others. We explore the psychology of recovery and the challenges of regaining confidence and rediscovering joy. We cover ways to speak about tragedy and comfort friends who are suffering. And we discuss what it takes to create resilient communities and companies, raise strong children, and love again.

I now know that it is possible to experience post-traumatic growth. In the wake of the most crushing blows, people can find greater strength and deeper meaning. I also believe that it is possible to experience pre-traumatic growth- that you don't have to experience tragedy to build your resilience for whatever lies ahead.

I am only partway through my own journey. The fog of acute grief has lifted, but the sadness and longing for Dave remain. I'm still finding my way through and learning many of the lessons included here. Like so many who've experienced tragedy, I hope I can choose meaning and even joy- and help others do the same.

**Chapter 1. Breathing Again**

We plant the seeds of resilience in the ways we process negative events. After spending decades studying how people deal with setbacks, psychologist Martin Seligman found that three P’s can stunt recovery: (1) personalization- the belief that we are at fault; (2) pervasiveness- the belief that an event will affect all areas of our life; and (3) permanence- the belief that the aftershocks of the event will last forever.

Hundreds of studies have shown that children and adults recover more quickly when they realize that hardships aren't entirely their fault, don't affect every aspect of their lives, and won't follow them everywhere forever. Recognizing that negative events aren't personal, pervasive, or permanent makes people less likely to get depressed and better able to cope.

I immediately blamed myself for Dave's death. The first medical report claimed that Dave had died of head trauma from falling off an exercise machine, so I worried incessantly that I could have saved him by finding him sooner. My brother David, a neurosurgeon, insisted that this was not true: falling from the height of a workout machine might break Dave's arm, but it wouldn't kill him. Something had happened to make Dave fall in the first place. The autopsy proved my brother right: Dave had died in a matter of seconds from a cardiac arrhythmia caused by coronary artery disease.

Even once I knew Dave had not died from neglect on a gym floor, I still found other reasons to blame myself. Dave's coronary artery disease was never diagnosed. I worried that he had complained of chest pain but we had missed it. I thought endlessly about his diet and if I should have pushed him to make more improvements. And it helped when Dave's family reminded me that his eating habits were much healthier whenever he was with me.

Adam explained that by blaming myself I was delaying my recovery, which also meant I was delaying my kids’ recovery. That snapped me out of it. As I blame myself less, I started to notice that not *everything* was terrible. My son and daughter were sleeping through the night, crying less, and playing more. We had access to grief counselors and therapists. I could afford child care and support at home. I had loving family, friends and colleagues; I marveled at how they were carrying me and my children- quite literally at times. I felt closer to them than I ever would have thought possible.

Child psychologists and grief experts counseled me to get my son and daughter back to their normal routines as soon as possible. So ten days after Dave passed away, they went back to school and I started going to work during school hours.

My first days back in the office were a complete haze. I had worked as the chief operating officer of Facebook for more than seven years but now everything felt unfamiliar. In my first meeting, all I could think was, *What is everyone talking about and why on earth does this even matter?* Then at one point I was drawn into the discussion and for a second- I forgot. I forgot about death. I forgot the image of Dave lying on the gym floor. I forgot watching his casket being lowered into the ground. In my third meeting of the day, I actually fell asleep for a few minutes. As the days turned into weeks and then months, I was able to concentrate for longer. Work gave me a place to feel more like myself, and the kindness of my colleagues showed me that not all aspects of my life were terrible.

The hardest of the three P’s for me to process was permanence. For months, no matter what I said, I felt like the debilitating anguish would always be there. Most of the people I knew who had lived through tragedy said that over time the sadness subsides. They assured me that one day I would think of Dave and smile. I didn't believe them. When my children cried, I would flash forward to their entire lives without a father. Dave wasn't just going to miss a soccer game… but *all* the soccer games. *All* the debate tournaments. *All* the holidays. *All* the graduations. He would not walk our daughter down the aisle at her wedding. The fear of forever without Dave was paralyzing.

My dire projections put me in good company. When we're suffering, we tend to project it out indefinitely. Studies of “affective forecasting”- our predictions of how we'll feel in the future- reveal that we tend to overestimate how long negative events will affect us.

Seligman found that words like “never” and “always” are signs of permanence. I tried to eliminate “never” and “always” and replace them with “sometimes” and “lately.” “I will *always* feel this awful” became “I will *sometimes* feel this awful.”

I also tried a cognitive behavioral therapy technique where you write down a belief that's causing you anguish and then follow it with proof that the belief is false. I started it with my biggest fear: “My children will never have a happy childhood.” Staring at that sentence on paper made my stomach turn but also made me realize that I had spoken with many people who had lost parents at a young age and went on to prove that prediction wrong. Another time I wrote, “I will never feel okay again.” Seeing those words forced me to realize that just that morning, someone had told a joke and I had laughed. If only for one minute, I had already proven that sentence false.

A psychiatrist friend explained to me that humans are evolutionarily wired for both connection and grief: we naturally have the tools to recover from loss and trauma. That helped me believe that I could get through this. If we had evolved to handle suffering, the deep grief would not kill me. I thought about how humans had faced love and loss for centuries, and I felt connected to something much larger than myself- connected to a universal human experience. I reached out to one of my favorite professors, Reverend Scotty McLennan, who had kindly counseled me in my twenties when my first husband and I divorced. Now Scotty explained that in his forty years of helping people through loss, he has seen that “turning to God gives people a sense of being enveloped in loving arms that are eternal and ultimately strong. People need to know that they are not alone.”

After a few months, I started to notice that the fog of intense pain lifted now and then, and when it rolled back in, I recovered faster. It occurred to me that dealing with grief was like building physical stamina: the more you exercise, the faster your heart rate recovers after it is elevated. And sometimes during especially vigorous physical activity, you discover strength you didn't know you had.

Shockingly, one of the things that helped me the most was focusing on worst case scenarios. But during the early days of despair, my instinct was to try to find positive thoughts. Adam told me the opposite: that it was a good idea to think about how much worse things could be. “Worse?” I asked him. “Are you kidding? How could this be worse?” His answer cut through me: “Dave could have had that same cardiac arrhythmia driving your children.” Wow. The thought that I could have lost all three of them had never occurred to me. I instantly felt overwhelmingly grateful that my children were alive and healthy- and that gratitude overtook some of the grief.

Dave and I had a family ritual at dinner where we go around the table with our daughter and son and take turns stating our best and worst moments of the day. When it became just three of us, I added a third category. Now we each share something for which we are grateful. We also added a prayer before our meal. Holding hands and thanking God for the food we are about to eat helps remind us of our daily blessings.

Psychologists asked a group of people to make a weekly list of five things for which they were grateful. Another group wrote about hassles and a third listed ordinary events. Nine weeks later, the gratitude group felt significantly happier and reported fewer health problems. People who enter the workforce during an economic recession end up being more satisfied with their jobs decades later because they are acutely aware of how hard it can be to find work. Counting blessings can actually increase happiness and health by reminding us of the good things in life. Each night, no matter how sad I felt, I would find something or someone to be grateful for.

I also deeply appreciated our financial security. Both my daughter and my son asked me if we were going to have to move out of our house. I knew how lucky we were that the answer was no. For many, an unexpected event like a single hospital visit or a car repair can undo financial stability overnight. Sixty percent of Americans have faced an event that threatened their ability to make ends meet and a third have no savings, which leaves them constantly vulnerable.

We all deal with loss: jobs lost, loves lost, lives lost. The question is not whether these things will happen. They will, and we will have to face them.

Resilience comes from deep within us and from support outside us. It comes from gratitude for what's good in our lives. It comes from analyzing how we process grief and from simply accepting that grief. Sometimes we have less control than we think. Other times we have more.

I learned that when life pulls you under, you can kick against the bottom, break the surface, and breathe again.

**Chapter 2. Kicking the Elephant Out of the Room**

In college, most people have a roommate or two. Some have three or four. Dave had ten. After graduation, the roommates scattered across the country, seeing one another only on special occasions. In the spring of 2014, we all got together for their twenty-fifth college reunion. The families had so much fun that we decided to spend the Fourth of July together the next year.

Dave passed away two months before the trip. I thought about skipping it. The prospect of spending the weekend with Dave's roommates *without* Dave seemed overwhelmingly hard. But I was grasping to hang on to the life we had to gather, and canceling felt like giving up another piece of him. So I went, hoping that it would be comforting to be with his close friends, who were also grieving.

Most of the trip was a blur, but on the last day, I sat down for breakfast with several of the roommates, including Jeff King, who had been diagnosed years earlier with multiple sclerosis. Dave and I had discussed Jeff’s illness many times with each other, but that morning I realized that I had never actually spoken with Jeff about it.

*Hello, elephant*.

“Jeff,” I said, “How are you? I mean, really, how are you? How are you feeling? Are you scared?”

Jeff looked up and surprised and paused for a long few moments. With tears in his eyes, he said, “Thank you. Thank you for asking.” And then he talked. He talked about his diagnosis and how he hated that he had to stop practicing medicine. How his continued deterioration was hard on his children. How he was worried about his future. How relieved he felt being able to talk about it with me and the others at the table that morning. When breakfast was over, he hugged me tight.

In the early weeks after Dave died, I was shocked when I'd see friends who did not ask how I was doing. The first time it happened, I thought I was dealing with a non-question asking friend.

Sometimes these friends are self-absorbed. Sometimes they're just uncomfortable having intimate conversations.

I couldn't understand when friends didn't ask me how I was. I felt invisible, as if I were standing in front of them but they couldn't see me. When someone shows up with a cast, we immediately inquire, “What happened?” If your ankle gets shattered, people ask to hear the story. If your life gets shattered, they don't.

It wasn't until breakfast with Jeff that I realized I was sometimes the friend who avoided painful conversations. I had failed to ask him directly about his health not because I didn't care, but because I was worried about upsetting him. Losing Dave taught me how ludicrous that was. It wasn't possible for me to remind Jeff that he was living with MS. He was aware of that every minute of every day.

Even people who have endured the worst suffering often want to talk about it. Merle Saferstein is one of my mom's closest friends and the former education director at the Holocaust Documentation and Education Center in South Florida. She has worked with more than five hundred survivors and remembers only one who declined to open up. “In my experience, survivors want the opportunity to teach and not be shunned because they went through something unknowable,” Merle said. Still, people hesitate to ask questions out of concern that probing will dredge up trauma.

Parents who have suffered the worst loss imaginable often share the sentiment. Author Mitch Carmody said after his nine-year-old son Kelly died from a brain tumor, “Our child dies a second time when no one speaks their name.” This is why the Compassionate Friends, one of the largest bereavement organizations in the United States, encourages families to speak openly and frequently about the children they have lost.

Avoiding upsetting topics is so common that the practice even has a name. Decades ago, psychologist coined the term “mum affect” for when people avoid sharing bad news. Doctors often hold back on telling patients that their progress is bleak.

People who have faced adversity tend to express more compassion toward others who are suffering. Military veterans, rape victims, and parents whose children have died all report that the most helpful support usually comes from those who have suffered similar losses. When Holocaust survivors came to the United States they felt very isolated, so they started bonding with each other. That's why the survivor clubs formed. The only people who really understood are the people who had been through those experiences.

Adam was certain people wanted to talk about it but they didn't know how. I was less sure. Friends were asking, “How are you?” but I took this as more of a standard greeting than a genuine question. I wanted to scream back, “My husband just died, how do you think I am?”

All over the world, there is cultural pressure to conceal negative emotions. In China and Japan, the ideal emotional state is calm and composed. In the United States, we like excitement (OMG!) and enthusiasm (LOL!). As psychologist David Caruso observes, “American culture demands that the answer to the question ‘How are you?’ is not just ‘Good’…. We need to be ‘Awesome.” Caruso adds, “There's this relentless drive to mask the expression of our true underlying feelings.” Admitting that you're having a rough time is “almost inappropriate.”

Not everyone feels comfortable talking openly about personal tragedy. We all make our own choices about when and where and if we wanted to express our feelings. Still, there is powerful evidence that opening up about traumatic events can improve mental and physical health. Speaking to a friend or family member often helps people understand their own emotions and feel understood.

I finally figured out that since the elephant was following me around, I could take the first step in acknowledging its existence. At work, I told my closest colleagues that they could ask me questions- any questions- and they could talk about how they felt too. One colleague said he was paralyzed when I was around, worried he might say the wrong thing. Another admitted she'd been driving by my house frequently, not sure if she should knock on the door. Once I told her that I wanted to talk to her, she finally rang the doorbell and came inside. I was happy to see her…. and not just because she brought Starbucks.

Until we acknowledge it, the elephant is always there. By ignoring it, those who are grieving isolate themselves and those who could offer comfort create distance instead. Both sides need to reach out. Speaking with empathy and honesty is a good place to start. You can't wish the elephant away, but you can say, “I see it. I see your suffering. And I care about you.”

**Chapter 3. The Platinum Rule of Friendship**

When we hear that someone we care about has lost a job, started chemo, or is going through a divorce, our first impulse is usually “I should reach out.” Then right after that impulse doubts often flood our mind. “What if I say the wrong thing?” “What if talking about it makes her feel self-conscious?” “What if I'm overstepping?” once raised, these doubts are followed by excuses like “He has so many friends and we're not *that* close.” Or “She must be so busy. I don't want to bother her.” We put off calling or offering help until we feel guilty that we didn't do it sooner… and then it feels too late.

A woman I know lost her husband to cancer in her fifties. Before this tragedy, she used to speak to one of her friends every week; then, suddenly, the calls stopped. Almost a year later, the widow picked up the phone. “Why haven't I heard from you?” she asked. “Oh,” explained her friend, “I wanted to wait until you felt better.” Her friend didn't understand that withholding comfort actually added to the pain.

For friends who turn away in times of difficulty, putting distance between themselves and emotional pain feels like self-preservation. These are the people who see someone drowning in sorrow and then worry, perhaps subconsciously, that they will be dragged under too. Others get overwhelmed by a sense of helplessness; they feel there's nothing they can say or do to make things better, so they choose to say and do nothing.

I was lucky to be surrounded by loved ones who not only showed up but often figured out what I needed before I knew myself. For the first month, my mom stayed to help me take care of my son and daughter… and take care of me. At the end of each endless day, my mom lay down next to me and held me until I cried myself to sleep. I never asked her to do it; she just did. The day she left, my sister Michelle took her place. For the next four months, Michelle came over multiple nights each week, and when she couldn't, she made sure a friend filled in.

Needing that much help was awful for me, but just entering the bedroom that I used to share with Dave made me feel like someone had knocked the wind out of me. Bedtime became the symbol of all that had changed. The grief and anxiety built throughout the day to that moment when I knew I'd have to crawl- and I mean crawl- into bed alone. By showing up night after night, and making it clear that they would always be there when I needed them, my family and friends were my button.

My closest friends and family convinced me that they truly wanted to help, which made me feel like less of a burden. Every time I told Michelle to go home, she insisted that she wouldn't be able to rest unless less she knew I was asleep. My brother David called me from Houston every single day for more than six months. When I thanked him, he said that he was doing it for himself because the only time he felt okay was when he was talking to me. I learned that at times, caring means that when someone is hurting, you cannot imagine being anywhere else.

It's hard to understand- or even imagine- another person's pain. When we're not in a physically or emotionally intense state, we underestimate its impact.

There’s no one way to grieve and there's no one way to comfort. What helps one person won't help another, and even what helps one day might not help the next. Growing up, I was taught to follow the Golden Rule: treat others as you want to be treated. But when someone is suffering, instead of following the Golden Rule, we need to follow the Platinum Rule: treat others as *they* want to be treated. Take a cue from the person in distress and respond with understanding- or better yet, action.

Specific acts help because instead of trying to fix the problem, they address the damage caused by the problem. “Some things in life cannot be fixed. They can only be carried,” therapist Megan Devine observes. Even the small act of holding someone's hand can be helpful. Psychologists put teenage girls under stress by asking them to give a spontaneous public speech. When mothers and daughters who were close held hands, the physical contact took away some of the daughters’ anxiety. The daughters sweated less and the physiological stress was transferred to the mothers.

Anger is one of the five stages of grief famously defined by psychiatrist Elizabeth Kubler-Ross. In the case of loss, we’re supposed to start in denial and move to anger, then to bargaining and depression. Only after we pass through these four stages can we find acceptance. But now experts realize that these are not five stages. There are five states that don't progress in a linear fashion but rise and fall. Grief and anger aren't extinguished like flames doused with water. They can flicker away one moment and burn hot the next.

I struggled with anger. A friend might say the wrong thing and I would react way too strongly, sometimes lashing out- “That is just not helpful”- or bursting into tears. Sometimes I caught myself and apologized right away. But other times I did not realize what I had done until later on, I imagine, at all. My anger scared me- and made me need the comfort of my friends even more. I needed friends who let me know that even if I was difficult to be around, they would not abandon me.

Lots of people nicely tried to assure me, “You will get through this,” but it was hard to believe them. What helped me more was when people said that they were in it with me. Phil Deutch did this time and time again, saying “We are going to get through this.” When he was away, he sent emails, sometimes with just one line: “You are not alone.” One of my childhood girlfriends sent a card that read, “One day she woke up and understood we are all in this together.” That card has hung above my desk ever since.

As the worst of the grief faded, I had to restore balance in my friendships so they weren't one-sided. About a year after Dave died, a friend seemed distracted and upset. I asked what was going on and she hesitated to tell me. I pressed and she admitted that she and her husband weren't getting along, But she knew that if she compared her situation to mine, she shouldn't complain. I joked that if my friends couldn't complain about their partners, I wouldn't have any friends. I wanted those close to me to know I was there to help carry their troubles too.

As time passed, I felt especially grateful to my family and friends who continued to check in and show up. On the six month anniversary of Dave's death, I sent them a poem, “Footprints in the sand.” It was originally a religious parable, but to me it also expressed something profound about friendship. The poem relates a dream of walking on the beach with God. The storyteller observes that in the sand there are two sets of footprints except during those periods of life filled with “anguish, sorrow or defeat.” Then there is only one set of footprints. Feeling forsaken, the storyteller challenges God: “Why, when I needed you most, have you not been there for me?” The Lord replies, “The years when you have seen only one set of footprints, my child, are when I carried you.”

I used to think there was one set of footprints because my friends were carrying me through the worst days of my life. But now it means something else to me. When I saw one set of footprints, it was because they were following directly behind me, ready to catch me if I fell.

**Chapter 4. Self-Compassion and Self-Confidence**

**Coming to Grips with Ourselves**

Self-compassion isn't talked about as much as it should be, maybe because it's often confused with its troublesome cousins, self-pity, and self-indulgence. Psychologist Kristin Neff describes self-compassion as offering the same kindness to ourselves that we would give to a friend. It allows us to respond to our own errors with concern and understanding rather than criticism and shame.

Self-compassion is associated with greater happiness and satisfaction, fewer emotional difficulties, and less anxiety. Both women and men can benefit from self-compassion, but since women tend to be harder on themselves, they often benefit more. As psychologist Mark Leary observes, self-compassion “can be an antidote to the cruelty we sometimes inflict on ourselves.”

Blaming our actions rather than our character allows us to feel guilt instead of shame. Humorist Erma Bombeck joked that guilt was “the gift that keeps giving.” Although it can be hard to shake, guilt keeps us striving to improve. People become motivated to repair the wrongs of their past and make better choices in the future.

Shame has the opposite effect: it makes people feel small and worthless, leading them to attack in anger or shrink away in self-pity. Among college students, the shame-prone were more likely than the guilt-prone to have drug and alcohol problems. Prisoners who felt ashamed were thirty percent more likely to commit repeat offenses than those who felt guilty. Elementary and middle school kids who felt shame were more hostile and aggressive, while guilt-prone kids were more likely to diffuse conflicts.

Turning feelings into words can help us process and overcome adversity. More than a hundred experiments have documented the therapeutic effect of journaling. It has helped medical students, patients with chronic pain, crime victims, maximum security prisoners, and women after childbirth. Writing about traumatic events can decrease anxiety and anger, boost grades, reduce absences from work, and lessen the emotional impact of job loss. Health benefits include higher T-cell counts, better liver function, and stronger antibody responses. Even journaling for a few minutes a few times can make a difference.

Labeling negative emotions makes them easier to deal with. The more specific the label, the better. “I'm feeling lonely” helps us process more than the vague “I'm feeling awful.” There are some caveats.

Journaling became a key part of my recovery. I began on the morning of Dave's funeral, four days after he died. “This is unthinkable. I have no idea why I want to write all of this down- as if I could forget any detail.”

Over the five months following Dave's funeral, 106,338 word support out of me. I felt like I couldn't breathe until I wrote everything down- from the smallest detail of my morning to the unanswerable questions of existence. If I went even a few days without journaling, the emotions would build up inside me until I felt like a dam about to burst. At the time, I didn't understand why writing on an inanimate computer was so important.

**Chapter 5. Bouncing Forward**

“When we are no longer able to change a situation,” psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor Viktor Frankel observed, “we are challenged to change ourselves.”

Psychologists have studied hundreds of people who have endured all kinds of trauma: victims of sexual assault and abuse, refugees and prisoners of war, and survivors of accidents, natural disasters, severe injuries, and illness. Many of these people experienced ongoing anxiety and depression. Still, along with these negative emotions there were some positive changes. Up to that point, psychologists had focused mostly on two possible outcomes of trauma. Some people struggled: they developed PTSD, faced debilitating depression and anxiety, or had difficulty functioning. Others were resilient: they bounced back to their state before the trauma. Now there was a third possibility: people who suffered could bounce *forward*.

Adam told me about post-traumatic growth four months after Dave died. It didn't sound real to me. Too unlikely. Sure, there might be people who could grow from tragedy, so you could hold this out as hope to someone who had just lost her husband. But it wasn't going to happen for me.

Adam understood my skepticism and admitted that he didn't even mention this possibility for the first few months because he knew I would dismiss it. But now he thought I was ready. He told me that more than half the people who experience a traumatic event report at least one positive change, compared to less than 15 percent who developed PTSD. Then he did something super annoying: he quoted me to me. “You often argue that people can't be what they can't see,” Adam said. “That girls aren't studying computer science because they don't see women in computer science. That women don't reach for leadership roles because they don't see enough women in leadership roles. This is the same thing. If you don't see that growth is possible, you're not going to find it.” I agreed I would try to see it. And I had to admit that post-traumatic growth sounded a lot better than a life filled with sadness and anger.

That's when I learned about Joe Kasper. Tragically, his son Ryan died three years after the diagnosis, thrusting Joe into what he describes as “the emotional tsunami of his death. If there is anything more painful in life, I hope never to discover it.” Joe vowed not to let the tsunami pull him under. He decided to study positive psychology at the University of Pennsylvania, where Adam was one of his professors. Joe learned that post-traumatic growth could take five different forms: finding personal strength, gaining appreciation, forming deeper relationships, discovering more meaning in life, and seeing new possibilities. But Joe wanted to do more than study Tedeschi and Calhoun’s findings; he wanted to live them.

Nietzsche famously described personal strength as “What does not kill me makes me stronger.” Tedeschi and Calhoun have a slightly softer ( one could say less Nietzschean) take: “I am more vulnerable than I thought, but much stronger than I ever imagined.” When we face the slings and arrows of life, we are wounded and the scars stay with us. But we can walk away with greater internal resolve.

In the depths of acute grief, I did not think I would be capable of growing stronger. But as excruciating days turned into weeks and then months, I realized that I *could* imagine because I was living it. I had gained strength just by surviving.

My childhood friend Brooke Pallot endured an arduous adoption process filled with huge disappointments, which melted away when she finally held her baby. In the happy months that followed, Brooke met Meredith, another new mom. Meredith had struggled to get pregnant and the two women bonded over their “miracle babies.” Then one day Meredith found a small lump under her armpit. She was only thirty-four and felt perfectly healthy but had it checked anyway. A PET scan revealed that she had stage 4 breast cancer. In addition to offering Meredith her full support, Brooke felt compelled to get her own mammogram. When she tried to schedule it, her gynecologist office advised her to wait half a year until she turned forty and insurance would cover the cost. But Brooke insisted on the test, which revealed that she had stage 4 breast cancer too.

The two friends went through chemotherapy together. Brooke responded to the treatment, but Meredith’s cancer had already spread to her liver. She died three years later.

Brooke has been in remission for seven years and in addition to gaining personal strength, she has gained emotional strength. “I went through chemo and buried my young friend. That gives you perspective whether you're looking for it or not. Little things don't stress me out. I am much stronger, much more centered and reasonable now. Something that sent me spinning before I now see as relative to what could have been and I am like, ‘Ah, that's nothing. I am here.’” This is the second area of post-traumatic growth that Tedeschi and Calhoun identified: gaining appreciation.

It is the irony of all ironies to experience tragedy and come out of it feeling more grateful. Since I lost Dave, I have at my fingertips this unbelievable reservoir of sadness. It's right next to me where I can touch it- part of my daily life. But alongside that sadness, I have a much deeper appreciation for what I used to take for granted: family, friends, and simply being alive. My mom offered a helpful comparison. For sixty-six years, she never thought twice about walking, but as she aged, her hip deteriorated and walking became painful. After hip replacement surgery four years ago, she feels grateful for every step she is able to take without pain. What she feels on a physical level, I feel on an emotional level. On the day that I'm okay, I now appreciate that I'm walking without pain.

Tragedy does not always leave us appreciating the people in our lives. Trauma can make us wary of others and have lasting negative effects on our ability to form relationships. Many survivors of sexual abuse and assault report that their beliefs about the goodness of others remain shattered and they have difficulty trusting people. After losing a child, parents often have a harder time getting along with relatives and neighbors. After losing a spouse, it's common for people to argue more with friends and feel insulted by them.

But tragedy can also motivate people to develop new and deeper relationships. This is the third area of post-traumatic growth. Soldiers who experience significant losses during the war are more likely to have friendships from their service forty years later. After heavy combat, they value life more and prefer to spend their time with people who share that understanding. Many breast cancer survivors report feeling greater intimacy with family and friends.

When people endure tragedies together or endure the same tragedy, it can fortify the bonds between them. They learn to trust each other, be vulnerable with each other, depend on each other.

The fourth form of post-traumatic growth is finding greater meaning in life- a stronger sense of purpose rooted in a belief that one's existence has significance. In Victor Frankl's words, “In some way, suffering ceases to be suffering at the moment it finds a meaning.”

Many find meaning in discovering religion or embracing spirituality. Traumatic experiences can lead to deeper faith, and people with strong religious and spiritual beliefs show greater resilience and post-traumatic growth. Finding God or a higher power reminds us that we are not the center of the universe. There is much we don't understand about human existence, and there is order and purpose to it anyway. It helps us feel that our suffering is not random or meaningless.

Family and religion are the greatest sources of meaning for many people. But work can be another source of purpose. The jobs where people find the most meaning are often ones that serve others. The roles of clergy, nurses, firefighters, addiction counselors, and kindergarten teachers can be stressful, but we rely on these often undercompensated professionals for health and safety, learning and growth. Adam has published five different studies demonstrating that meaningful work buffers against burnout. In companies, nonprofits, government, and the military, he finds that the more people believe their jobs help others, the less emotionally exhausted they feel at work and the less depressed they feel in life. And on days when people think they’ve had a meaningful impact on others at work, they feel more energized at home and more capable of dealing with difficult situations.

The fifth kind of post-traumatic growth involves the ability of seeing new possibilities. Tedeschi and Calhoun found that after trauma, some people end up choosing different directions for their lives that they never would have considered before. In the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11, some Americans made dramatic changes in their careers. They joined fire departments, enlisted in the military, and entered the medical professions.

After being reminded of their mortality, survivors often reexamine their priorities, which in some cases results in growth. A brush with death can lead to a new life.

After tragedy, we sometimes missed opportunities to grow because we spend all of our emotional energy wishing for our old lives. As Helen Keller put it, “When one door of happiness closes, another opens; but often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one which has been opened for us.”

For Joe Kasper, the breakthrough occurred when he realized that his actions could be part of his son's legacy. While studying for his master’s degree, Joe created a therapeutic process called “co-destiny,” which encourages bereaved parents to view their child's life in a larger framework so that death does not become the end of the story. Parents who seek purpose and meaning from there tragedies can go on to do good, which then becomes part of the child's impact on the world. As Joe explained, “I realized that my destiny was to live my life in a way that would make my son proud. The awareness that I could add goodness to my son's life by doing good in his name motivates me to this day.”

It's not surprising that so many trauma survivors end up helping others overcome the adversity that they have faced themselves. “There is nothing more gratifying than helping someone else escape the quagmire of despair,” Joe told us. “I know this passion of mine is an area of personal growth related to my trauma. Helping others grow from their traumas reflects back to my son's life.” After undergoing a hardship, people have new knowledge to offer those who go through similar experiences. It is a unique source of meaning because it does not just give our lives purpose- it gives our *suffering* purpose. People help where they've been hurt so that their wounds are not in vain.

**Chapter 6. Taking Back Joy**

Survivor guilt is a thief of joy- yet another secondary loss from death. When people lose a loved one, they are not just wracked with grief but also with remorse. It's another personalization trap: “Why am I the one who is still alive?”

A life chasing pleasure without meaning is an aimless existence. Yet a meaningful life without joy is a depressing one. One day on the phone Dave's brother Rob gave me a true gift. “Since the day Dave met you, all he ever wanted was to make you happy,” Rob told me, his voice choking up. “He would want you to be happy- even now. Don't take that away from him.”

We want others to be happy. Allowing ourselves to be happy- accepting that it is okay to push through the guilt and seek joy- it is a triumph over permanence. Having fun is a form of self-compassion; just as we need to be kind to ourselves when we make mistakes, we also need to be kind to ourselves by enjoying life when we can. Tragedy breaks down your door and takes you prisoner. To escape takes effort and energy. Seeking joy after facing adversity is taking back what was stolen from you.

Adam suggested a new idea: write down three moments of joy every day. Of all the New Year's resolutions I've ever made, this is the one I've kept the longest by far. Now nearly every night before I go to sleep, I jot down three happy moments in my notebook. Doing this makes me notice and appreciate these flashes of joy; when something positive happens, I think, *This will make the notebook*. It's a habit that brightens the whole day.

Paying attention to moments of joy takes effort because we are wired to focus on the negatives more than the positives. Bad events tend to have a stronger effect on us than good events.

Hitting the gym- or just the pavement for a brisk walk- can be hugely beneficial. The physical health effects of exercise are well known, including lower risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, diabetes, and arthritis. Many doctors and therapists also point to exercise as one of the best ways to improve psychological well-being. For some adults over fifty who suffer from major depression, working out may even be as effective as taking an antidepressant.

**Chapter 7. Raising Resilient Kids**

When Dave died, my biggest concern was that my children’s happiness would be destroyed. My childhood friend Mindy Levy lost her mother to suicide when we were thirteen. I slept in Mindy’s room that night and held her as she cried. More than thirty years later, she was the first friend I called from the hospital in Mexico. I screamed into the phone hysterically, “Tell me my kids are going to be okay. Tell me they'll be okay!” At first, Mindy couldn't figure out what had happened. Once she did, she told me what she truly believed: my children would be okay. In that moment, nothing could have consoled me, but I knew Mindy grew up to be a loving and happy adult. Having seen her recover helped me believe that my daughter and son could too.

After the flight home- hours I can barely remember- my mom and sister met me at the airport, tears streaming down their faces, their bodies supporting me as I got into the car. My worst nightmare had never included the conversation I was about to have. How do you tell a seven- and ten-year-old that they will never see their father again?

Carole Geithner was a social worker who counseled grieving children. I called Carol on the agonizing car ride home. She suggested that I first let my kids know that I had very sad news and tell them what had happened simply and directly. She said it was important to reassure them that many parts of their lives would be just like before: they still had the rest of their family, they would still go to school with their friends. She told me to follow their lead and answer their questions and that they might ask if I was going to die too. I was grateful she had prepared me for this since it was one of my daughter's first questions. Carole advised me not to make a false promise to them that I would live forever, but rather explain to them that it was very unusual for someone to die so young. Mostly, she told me to say over and over that I loved them and we would get through this together.

When I walked in the house, my daughter greeted me as if nothing was out of the ordinary. “Hi, Mom,” she said and headed upstairs to her room. I was frozen to the floor. My son immediately realized something was wrong. “Why are you home?” he asked. “And where’s Dad?” We all sat down on the couch with my parents and my sister. My heart was pounding so loudly that I could barely hear my own voice. With my father's strong arm round my shoulders, trying to protect me as he always has, I found the courage to speak: “I have terrible news. Terrible. Daddy died.”

The screaming and crying that followed haunt me to this day- primal screams and cries that echoed the ones in my heart. Still, as truly horrific as this was, we got through it. I would never wish for anyone to gain this perspective- but perspective it is.

We all want to raise resilient kids so they can overcome obstacles big and small. Resilience leads to greater happiness, more success, and better health. Building resilience depends on the opportunities children have and the relationships they form with parents, caregivers, teachers, and friends.

Psychologist Carol Dweck has shown that children respond better to adversity when they have a growth mindset instead of a fixed one. A fixed mindset means viewing abilities as something we’re either born with or not: “I'm a whiz at math but don't have the drama gene.” When kids have a growth mindset, they see abilities as skills that can be learned and developed. They can work to improve. “I may not be a natural actor, but if I rehearse enough I can shine on the stage.”

Today the importance of helping kids develop a growth mindset is widely recognized but poorly practiced. There is a knowing-doing gap: many parents and teachers understand the idea but do not always succeed in applying it. Despite my best efforts, I am sometimes one of those parents. When my daughter does well on the test, I still find myself blurting out, “Great job!” rather than, “I'm glad you tried your hardest.” In *How to Raise an Adult*, former Stanford dean Julie Lythcott-Haims advises parents to teach children that difficulties are how we grow. She calls this “normalizing struggle.” When parents treat failure as an opportunity to learn rather than an embarrassment to be avoided, kids are more likely to take on challenges. When a kid struggles at math, instead of saying, “Maybe math isn't one of your strengths,” Dweck recommends, “The feeling of math being hard is the feeling of your brain growing.”

**Chapter 8. Finding Strength Together**

In 1972, a plane flying from Uruguay to Chile crashed into a mountain in the Andes, split in half, and barreled down a snowy slope. For the thirty-three survivors, this was just the beginning of an extraordinary ordeal. Over the next seventy-two days, the group battled shock, frostbite, avalanches, and starvation. Only sixteen of them made it out. *Alive*.

Thanks to the popular book and movie, many of us know the extreme measures taken by the group in order to survive. Every survivor’s story shared a common theme: a key to their resilience was hope.

“We all believed that rescue was our only chance of survival,” Nando Parrado wrote, “And we clung to that hope with an almost religious zeal.” Nine days later, their supplies were depleted. The group was forced to turn to their only remaining sources of food: the flesh from the frozen bodies of their teammates who had died. The next morning, a few of the passengers heard over the radio that the search had been called off. “We mustn't tell them,” said the team captain. “At least let them go on hoping.” Another passenger, Gustavo Nicolich, disagreed. “Good news!” he shouted. “We're going to get out of here on our own.”

During long, cold, and hungry days, the crash survivors pray together. They planned projects to launch after returning to civilization: one passenger spoke of opening a restaurant, another dreamed of having a farm. Each night, two of the survivors looked at the moon and imagined that right then their parents were looking at the same moon. Another took pictures to record their plight. Many wrote letters to their families declaring their will to live.

Of course hope by itself isn't enough. Many of the passengers had hoped yet still lost their lives. But hope keeps people from giving into despair.

Resilience is not just built in individuals. It is built *among* individuals- in our neighborhoods, schools, towns, and governments. We build resilience together, we become stronger ourselves and form communities that can overcome obstacles and prevent adversity.

For my children and me, getting to know people who also lost a parent or a spouse has provided much-needed comfort. In most religions and cultures, traditions around mourning are communal; we come together to bury and remember those we have lost.

We find our humanity- our will to live and our ability to love- in our connections to one another. Just as individuals can find post-traumatic growth and become stronger, so can communities.

When their plane crashed in the Andes, the rugby teammates had already built solidarity and trust. Early on they looked to the team captain for guidance. When he didn't make it, they maintained confidence in one another. “We all have our own personal Andes,” Nando Parrado wrote long after the expedition with Roberto Canessa that led to their rescue. Canessa added, “One of the things that was destroyed when we crashed into the mountain was our connection to society. But our ties to one another grew stronger every day.”

**Chapter 9. Failing and Learning at Work**

Just as all people need resilience, all organizations do too. We see it in the companies that keep going after losing hundreds of employees on September 11th. We see it in the businesses that rebound after financial crisis and the nonprofits that regroup after losing donors. I saw it at the company Dave led, SurveyMonkey, when employees in the midst of grieving rallied around the hashtag #makedaveproud. When failures, mistakes, and tragedies happen, organizations make choices that affect the speed and strength of their recovery- and often determine whether they collapse or thrive.

One of the best ways to see ourselves clearly is to ask others to hold up a mirror. “Top athletes and singers have coaches,” surgeon and author Atul Gawande reflects. “Should you?” In basketball, Gregg Popovich has coached the San Antonio Spurs to five NBA championships. After losing in the finals one year, he sat down with the team to review every single play the previous two games and learned what they did wrong. “The measure of who we are is how we react to something that doesn't go our way,” he said. “There are always things you can do better. It's a game of mistakes.”

**Chapter 10. To Love and Laugh Again**

As I write this, it has been almost two years since that unimaginable day in Mexico. Two years since my children lost their father. Two years since I lost the love of my life.

Time has marched on and in some ways, I have too. In other ways, I haven't. I now believe what David Guggenheim told me that first month: grief has to unfold. Writing this book and trying to find meaning have not replaced my sadness. Sometimes grief hits me like a wave, crashing into my consciousness until I can feel nothing else. It strikes at predictable big events, like our anniversary, and at the smallest of moments, like when junk mail comes to the house addressed to Dave. Sometimes I'll be working at my kitchen table and my heart will skip a beat when I think for a brief second that he is opening the door and coming home.

But just as grief crashes into us like a wave, it also rolls back like the tide. We are left not just standing, but in some ways stronger. Option B still gives us options. We can still love… and we can still find joy.

I now know that it's possible not just to bounce back but to grow. Would I trade this growth to have Dave back? Of course. No one would ever choose to grow this way. But it happens- and we do.

Tragedy does not have to be personal, pervasive, or permanent, but resilience can be. We can build it and carry it with us throughout our lives.