

# Sometimes losses rearrange the world

May 20, 2023 Updated 2 hrs ago



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Managing Editor

Grief is something I thought I understood.

Between the tragic and untimely deaths of Mitch Sneed, which changed my life impermeably, and Lee Hamilton, who was my best friend's boyfriend when he passed, I thought I had learned how to handle things. I thought I knew how to be strong.

But as I reflect back on the last month, I now know grief is something I'll never truly understand.

On April 15, there was a mass shooting in Dadeville and it felt like the worst two weeks of my whole life. I attended babies' funerals and listened as mommas shouted for their children. I watched as friends cried and teammates sobbed; I heard preachers talk about how amazing these kids were in life.

We worked round the clock for two weeks straight, covering the shooting from every angle and giving survivors a chance to tell their stories. (We aren't done either.)

May 1 marked the start of the third week after the shooting; it seemed like maybe finally things would go back to at least a semblance of normal. Then I got a call that evening that changed everything.

My little brother-in-law died Monday, May 1. He was 21 years old.

As I write this column, it's the start of the third week since his death and I can't fathom ever getting back to normal.

Grief has taken on a whole new meaning over the last month. It's a physical pain in every part of your body. It's a pendulum swinging at your heart, smashing into it over and over again. It's the waves on a beach, coming forever — “big ones, really close together.” It's standing up and feeling like your legs are about to give out. It's feeling like nothing will ever be the same again.

Someone described the Dadeville massacre as our community's Sept. 11, and the death of my little brother, Sgt. Dylan Gentry, is our family's Sept. 11. Our lives will never be the same.

My husband's family is not exactly good with words. Let's just say — Charles got through his brother's eulogy with only three curse words, and I was fairly impressed.

But my other brother-in-law, Wayne, the middle brother, recently sent a text message to the family that resonated with me; he somehow put into words what I, the writer, have been trying to say.

“In this world, we can be taught everything but how to live without the ones we love, the ones in our heart,” Wayne wrote. “Sorrow and grief is not aged nor has an expiration date. There are losses that rearrange the world — deaths that change the way you see everything.”

Losses that rearrange the world.

Sit with that for a second. Losses that rearrange the world.

We've experienced far too much of that lately. The Dadeville massacre certainly rearranged the world for Tallapoosa County and the death of my little brother has quite literally rearranged ours.

I know most of you didn't know Dylan, so I want to let you know he was basically just like Phil Dowdell. He had a smile that was almost too big for his face. Dylan loved life, and he was so passionate about his future. His family and friends meant everything to him. He was an athlete, a soldier, an amazing brother and so, so much more.

I wish I could end this column with some wise, sage advice about how to deal with grief, but I'll be honest — for the last month, I've had absolutely no idea what I'm doing.

But what I do know is you never know what day will be the last. You never know what the next moment is going to bring. It's easy to say it when times are hard, but it's not always easy to follow through. Let Dadeville be a lesson. Let my brother's tragic death be a lesson.

I've been listening to Cody Johnson's “Til You Can't” daily, and I'll just leave you with a line from that song.

“Don't wait on tomorrow 'cause tomorrow may not show. Say your sorries, your I love you's, 'cause man you never know.”

Lizi Arbogast Gwin is the managing editor of Tallapoosa Publishers Inc.