There are eight qualities that are the life preservers that will help you stay afloat, keep you from drowning, and comfort you when you are alone. You either already possess these qualities or need to develop them. You will need every one for when the waves of sorrow threaten to capsize you.

***Courage***

* The most important quality of the eight to possess.
* In the beginning, you may have the kind of courage that propels you into action; to keep you from collapsing, and do things you didn’t know you were capable of doing.
* Later, you need courage not only to survive, but to learn how to live again. This is the kind of courage that is willing to what life demands of you and sustains you to continue in spite of your feelings of despair, hopelessness, and grief.

***Hope***

* Courage gets you up each morning and gives you the strength to face another day.
* Hope gives you that small spark of light to hold on to when it’s dark and the storms rage.
* Hope means that things will get better, you will find moments of peace and you can make it through this journey.

***Faith/Spirituality***

* Faith and spirituality are powerful tools to help at time when you need strength and hope.
* Traumatic loss will test your faith in what you believe because bad things happen to everyone, not because God has it out for you, or that you are bad or good, but because that is the nature of life.
* You are entitled to question, feel abandoned and to become angry at God. He understands! You will face the challenge of deciding what you believe.
* When you emerge from this struggle, you will be that much stronger for it.

***Optimism***

* If you can embrace optimism, you will begin to see that what you have experienced is part of the world, but not all of it. The world is still a good place.
* By balancing your worldview with optimism and with a willingness to see life in a more positive light, it will help keep you from sinking in the pit of depression and despair.
* One way to encourage a more positive outlook is to simply take a walk. Allow yourself to take in the beauty around you, the singing birds, the majesty of the mountains, or the vibrant colors of the flowers or a sunset.
* Another is to think of a time when you experienced something beautiful and hold that memory close to you.

***Humor***

* Honor the memory of the one you love by keeping your sense of humor and remembering their humor.
* Celebrate their life by doing some things that are fun, things they would like you to do, maybe something as simple as renting their favorite movie that made them laugh.
* Studies prove that laughter is the best medicine. It releases endorphins, which elevate your mood.
* You need to balance your tragedy with the lightness of humor; otherwise you will suffocate under the burden of your tragedy.
* Laughter is not disrespectful to your loved one; it is a way to honor them.
* Laughter and sorrow can be held side by side, versus on opposite ends of the continuum.

***Patience***

* The gift of patience, gives to you if you allow it, a degree of peace in the midst of all the turbulence—an oasis of calm.
* Patience is a quality that some have in abundance, and others need to work at.
* Remember, there is nothing that will hurry things along; the process will unfold at its own pace.
* Be patient with your suffering. Don’t allow your impatience to spill out on everyone and everything.
* Try this: when you are aware of something or someone that you are impatient with, slow down, stop pushing, take a deep breath, and let things unfold at their own pace.

***Joy***

* Joy is the sister to hope, and comes directly out of pain and sorrow.
* *The difference between shallow happiness and a deep, sustaining joy is sorrow. Happiness lives where sorrow is not. When sorrow arrives, happiness dies. It can’t stand pain. Joy, on the other hand, rises from sorrow and therefore can withstand all grief.* Wangerin, (1992)
* An even greater tragedy would be to allow your traumatic loss to keep you from joy; then truly, it has destroyed you.
* When you have a even a flicker of joy, write it in your journal, tell it to someone, smile to yourself about it, and hold it close to your heart and mind.

***Compassion***

* Compassion is perhaps the most profound gift your sorrow and suffering can give you. Compassion has been called the *jewel of suffering*.
* Develop compassion for yourself first, by being present for your own feelings, not dismissing or repressing them.
* When you fully experience the depth of your sorrow, your heart opens and you are able to see and understand the suffering of others.
* Compassion will come to you, if you open yourself to it.
* When you offer your experience and compassion to others, it will begin to give some meaning and purpose to all that you have suffered.

Courage, hope, faith/spirituality, optimism, humor, patience, joy and compassion will help you walk this journey of suffering and beyond. They will make your suffering work for you, allowing it to transform rather than destroy you.

Be patient with yourself as you learn to use these eight qualities. It will take time to pass through the cold, dark winter of your life and come into the spring where new life begins to emerge.

O’Hara,  *A Grief Like No Other* (2006)