



By Silver Rose

When I was 17, my best friend died in a car crash. I thought the world would stop. At the very least, I thought it would pause. The day after Adele was taken off life support, I was astonished that the businesses in our small town of Rockland, Mass. were open. Didn't they know? Didn't they care? I wanted to shout at passersby walking nonchalantly down the sidewalks, "Adele is dead! How can you act so normal!?" I would overhear people talking about everyday events and the buzzing in my head grew louder and louder. The buzzing was the sound of my suppressed screams.

The death of a loved one is undoubtedly the worst change we are asked to endure. Death is a constant reminder that life is inherently unfair.

I am remembering Adele more than usual because on Saturday the Rockland High School class of '71 gathered for our 40th reunion. I wasn't there but the buzz about it on FaceBook has sent me down memory lane. Anyone's High School years are generally remembered with mixed feelings. This is a time of angst when one struggles with self-image, socialization, sex, love, "fitting in," separating from parents and testing the limits, ungracefully.

The desire to get out into the world is combined with the fear of letting go. Some leave and never look back. Others will consider High School the best years of their lives. Not so with us. Our senior year was a terrible year of mourning for the 200+ members of my class and the entire school. Everyone from the principal to the janitor grieved. Each day, as we walked the hallways to change classes, we passed her memorial. In bold letters it read – Class of 1971-In Memory of Adele.

We were kids who had grown up with death hanging over our heads starting with "duck and cover" rehearsals in elementary school. We all knew someone who had a bomb shelter for the inevitable nuclear attack. Our Dads were WWII vets who came back with unidentified Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Mine would drink too many beers on a Friday night and cry at the kitchen table, shaking his head saying, "You can't imagine what it was like."

We continually brushed up against death, watching the Vietnam War waged on television. Some had brothers or cousins who went and never came back. We were the ones who held our breaths hoping it would be over before any of our friends were drafted.

In May of 1970, the year before we graduated, we watched with horror the TV coverage of the massacre at Kent State when the Ohio State Guard opened fire on unarmed college students who were protesting the invasion of

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Cambodia. When the smoke cleared, four young people were dead and nine others wounded.

Two months later, Adele, so deeply impacted by that event, would be gone herself.

Wherever we looked, past, present or future, what we saw was death. When Adele's passing brought it into our laps it was like the lid blew off what we had been holding back since first grade. Mourning her gave us permission to mourn our lost childhoods, our innocence and what had been promised to us by our country's founders: life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. We were convinced by then that it was all a lie and we graduated hard and cynical, atrophied in grief.

Her death shaped us as none of those other events had. Instead of mourning the fact that we might lose touch after graduation, most of us couldn't get away fast enough. It was too painful to hang around; we wanted to distance ourselves. Friends I'd known since first grade became shadowy memories as I drank to forget and then drank to remember and finally just drank.

These 40 years later those painful memories actually give me hope. They are proof-positive that even terrible changes can be endured and that ultimately, one can recover enough to have a beautiful life.

This morning, as I gazed at the sun rising over the beautiful waters of Hawaii I realized that instead of staying mad that "life goes on," today I am grateful that it did. And I'm so happy that I got to know and love Adele. Instead of remembering the pain, what I focus on now is a precious memory that was the essence of our friendship:

It is an August day of our sophomore year. Summer is coming to an end. The weather is perfect and the ocean is warm as bath water. The "gang" is spending the day on White Horse Beach, laughing, playing, flirting and loving each other with the pure enthusiasm of youth.

Our parents are due to pick us up in an hour and Adele and I are walking down the beach, huddled under the same towel and talking about profoundly important matters. I feel a surge of pure joy in the moment and realize just how much I love her.

Do I still miss her? Yes. But every once in a while I turn on the radio and hear *Bridge over Troubled Waters* ("our" song), and I know she orchestrated the timing to remind me that I *can* dance with her whenever I want. There is, however, a catch: I can only feel her presence in moments of happiness. I think it's because she's in such a happy place now that she's no longer willing to be around sadness, even for me.

One day I will join her. And that thought makes me happy.

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