

# Lessons of Loss

*Food Network's Melissa d'Arabian reflects on the ways her mother's suicide taught her how to live*

One spring evening in 1989, I called home from college with a simple request: I needed my mom's credit card number for a GMAT prep course. But I didn't get it. I didn't even get my mom.

Instead, an unfamiliar male voice answered: "Hello?" He was an officer with the Montgomery County, Md., Police Department. We had a short conversation, but I still remember it vividly 25 years later. My mother had died by suicide.

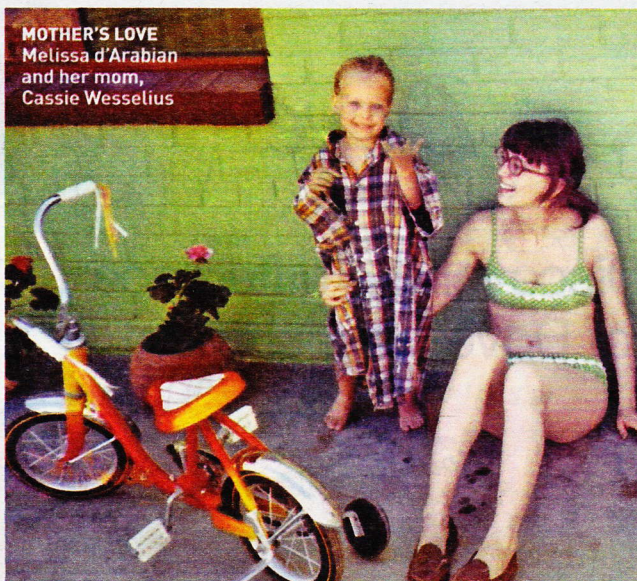
Losing my mom crushed me logistically, financially, and emotionally. But losing my mom to *suicide* almost crushed my spirit. I was 20 when she died, and it plunged me into a decade-long crisis of faith.

My 20s were a mess. But the only way out is through, and sometimes the other side is so glorious you're grateful for whatever got you there. That's how I feel about that season of my life.

Here are some of the lessons that decade taught me:

Happiness is an inside job. Of course, that's both good and bad news. Good news: I don't need a new car to make me happy. Bad news: A new car won't make me happier.

Second, I believe I have more value than I can always see. I remind myself not to



**MOTHER'S LOVE**  
Melissa d'Arabian  
and her mom,  
Cassie Wesselius

compare my insides with others' outsides, or, as a friend puts it, my blooper reel with others' sizzle reels.

Mostly, I emerged empathetic. My anger at my mom for leaving me morphed into imperfect understanding. For years, I'd seen her as the perpetrator, but I grew to see her as her suicide's victim.

Those years of reflection gave me another gift. Mom was found on April 13, but she had died on April 12. The death certificate said April 12, while the police report and tombstone said April 13. So the anniversary of her death always lingered over 48 difficult hours—a black hole of loss, a sense that

the world was diminished without my mom's warm hugs, goofy wit, and wise advice.

One year, I decided to start commemorating the two-day anniversary by creating something to contribute to the world. It takes surprisingly little effort to comfort me on these days. Making brownies for a neighbor or writing an overdue note to a relative soothes my

sense of imbalance.

In 2004, my husband and I were struggling to get pregnant. When I finally got the coveted two lines on the pregnancy test, I met with my doctor, and he told me what I already knew: I had become a mom sometime between April 12 and April 13.

The most important job I have today is being a mentor to my four young daughters. My children know that my mother died, but they don't know the details; someday soon, I will have that conversation.

Being a mom doesn't make me miss my own any less—it makes me wish she were here even more. She would have adored her many grandchildren. I live a few houses away from my sister and her five kids, so I imagine Mom might have moved here, too, and been a part of our never-ending cycle of birthday gatherings. And my Food Network career? She would have been so jazzed, probably asking weekly if I ever run into Brad Pitt. (Nope.)

Without my suicide season, I wouldn't be the mom I am today—or the wife, the woman, the friend. Most days, I like who I see in the mirror. I am pretty sure my mom does, too. **E**

**HOW TO HELP** | Nov. 23 is the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention ([afsp.org](http://afsp.org))'s International Survivors of Suicide Day. To find out the warning signs of suicide and how to help a loved one or get help for yourself, go to [parade.com/afsp](http://parade.com/afsp). And on Nov. 4 at 2 p.m. ET, join Melissa and an expert from AFSP at [facebook.com/parademag](http://facebook.com/parademag) to share your stories and ask questions about depression and suicide.