

Stillbirth & After
One personal story

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Spring of 2019 started quite early for me. It began with a splash of joy in late January, you know, just little things like thinking about getting a tattoo. Then Spring boomed in all its glory in February, in every aspect of my life: my work, motherhood, the way I dress, a new haircut and becoming a vegetarian. I also got inspired to do something new. I just didn't know what it was yet.

I was watching and reading interviews with Alan Cumming at the time, and I came to hear about his book "Not My Father's Son", in which he wrote about his childhood with an abusive father, how he dealt with it in real time and later as a grown man. What struck me the most was the example that he himself gives, just by the way he lives his life and the way in which he talks about his experience. **Talking and not being silent anymore.**

This was it! This was exactly the something new I was looking for! This was what I wished I could do; tell my story and maybe, through telling it, I would be able to help break the silence surrounding traumas and dealing with them, and help others.

So on March 1st I stopped everything I was doing, sat down and wrote my stillbirth story. I wrote it as if on a mission and finished writing within two and a half weeks.

On March 8th, I celebrated my 44th birthday. I got the book "Not My Father's Son" as a present. The book quickly became my close friend. Although I went through different traumas than Alan Cumming had, the book echoed so much of what I went through and never talked about with anyone.

The book showered me with inspiration to talk about my experience. By being open about our traumas we validate our own personal story but we also help others in their own similar struggles. We demonstrate that although we go through horrors and sadness in our lives, we possess the strength to shine and live the lives we think we are worthy of.

I owe Alan Cumming so much.

The album “There Will Be No Intermission” by Amanda Palmer was released on March 8th, 2019, as I was writing my story. This was the perfect soundtrack for writing this story. I felt all these songs long before I heard them. Once I heard them, they became parts of my heart and made me feel safe. It is impossible for me to separate this album from my story.

Sometimes inspiration comes from unexpected directions. I decided not to overanalyze it and ride these waves of inspiration as best as I could.

There was nothing out of the ordinary in my pregnancy with Ayelet. Everything was going well. I had a very big stomach and a very active baby inside it. She moved a lot, and at some points we would actually have conversations, just the two of us: I would ask something and in return, she would kick or stretch her arms, or whatever it is that babies do inside the womb.

This was my second pregnancy, I had an almost 4 year old boy at home who was, and still is, my pride and joy- Shahar. It seemed like the right time to add another child to our family.

It took me a while to accept my role as a mother. Having Shahar was nothing like I thought it would be.

In 2001, I lost my mother suddenly and in 2004 I lost my father to cancer. I was heartbroken. I was very close to both of them. These two experiences left me feeling like nothing could surprise me anymore. I had seen death very closely I felt immune to life. Having Shahar was one surprise after another! It made me realize I was not immune to life at all.

It took me a while to adjust to this new title of mine, "mother".

We decided to try for our second child but things didn't go as quickly as they did. It took us 8 long months to get pregnant.

And as I said, everything was fine with the pregnancy. All the check ups were good. We were all excited to have a girl, including our boy, and we couldn't wait for the new addition to our lives.

On September 6th, 2010, I had a cold and I spent most of the day sleeping in bed. I was on my 37th week (+ 3 days). That evening, I realized that I was not sure I had felt the baby move all day, so I did all the things that are suggested; eating something sweet, lying on my side and so on. I still wasn't sure I felt anything, so I went to the hospital to check, you know, just to make sure everything was ok.

I went in and lied on the bed while the nurse connected the monitor. He was having some difficulty so he went to ask someone to help him. He came back in with a doctor, which seemed strange to me. The doctor tried to find a heartbeat and had a serious expression on his face. He went outside.

He came back in with another doctor.

I looked at them and started feeling horrified. At the same time, I heard the nurses clearing the room of other patients.

Finally I said, "so many doctors in one room can't be good. What's wrong?" One of them said "are you here alone?" I nodded. He said "I'm sorry, but your baby has no pulse."

I felt shock.

I felt horror.

Then I started crying. I felt betrayed by my body, by my baby, by life.

How could this be?

I couldn't stop crying. One of the doctors, the only woman there, held me.

The whole medical team was compassionate but she was the one who stayed with me until my husband Oshik came. She answered my questions and knew when to let me be alone with my tears.

And this crying, that wouldn't stop, this refusal to believe that I have met death again. I had been meeting life for the past 37 weeks! What was death doing there?

I remember calling my husband, crying that he should come quickly. "What happened?" he asked, and I whispered "there's no pulse".

My mind started racing. It was probably something I did or didn't do that made my baby die, and I couldn't help it, it just came out - I asked the doctors "is it my fault?" All three answered right away "no".

But how could I believe them? When a baby comes out alive and well, it is all my doing, but when the baby dies inside me, it's not all my doing?

I didn't drink enough water during the pregnancy, I knew it. It's probably something I ate or something really important I should have done but didn't.

I told the doctors this. They kept saying "it is not something you did or didn't do".

“It’s Not.
Your.
Fault”.

After the stillbirth I wrote:

“All the doctors advised against a c-section. They talked about risks for me, but they were mainly thinking about the next baby. One of the doctors told me that she knew I couldn’t imagine another baby at that point, but that’s what they (the doctors) are there for, for thinking about the next birth. They understood that it is difficult, but I really should trust them on this one. She said that sadly, this is not the first time or the last time they will meet with stillbirth, so they know what they’re talking about.

I didn’t doubt that but I was afraid. Remembering I had a c-section 4 years earlier with Shahar, I was afraid of a rip in my uterus because of the pitocin. I was scared I would die, afraid that I wouldn’t see Shahar and Oshik ever again.

I was afraid to die.”

I went from moments of needing to do something to help myself, to moments of just breaking down and crying. I called my brother, called my therapist (whom I hadn’t seen for years at that point), and then I got this one call I can’t forget. I don’t remember the whole conversation, but I remember the last bit : “don’t worry, you will have another baby soon”. I remember this made me furious! I just lost a baby, I didn’t want to think

about the next one! How could anyone not honour the baby I had just lost? How could anyone not acknowledge that my baby was here with me for 8 and a half months? How could anyone think of another baby to replace the baby girl I just lost so quickly?!

Although I realise that this was said from a loving place and in attempt to console me, it was the most inappropriate thing to say at the absolute worst time possible.

In The Delivery Room

Oshik and I were moved to a delivery room, which we stayed in for the next 2 days. Two miserable days. We went in knowing we'd come out of there without a baby.

I was given drugs to induce birth and was offered drugs to help me sleep in between. I took them once but I mostly wanted to stay with Oshik as he was going through this thing with me. Yes, I was going through agony, physically and emotionally. He wasn't going through the physical part but he, too, had just lost a child. He was waiting to see her just as I was. Going through this as a couple is so important in my eyes, because you really are in this together. For better or worse.

During those two days, we had conversations about Shahar and life, cried together, our hearts breaking over and over again. We decided to give her the name we chose for her, Ayelet. She was with me for 37 weeks and 3 days. She was alive inside me. She deserved to get her name.

We also had to talk about burial. According to Jewish religion, my Ayelet was not a baby yet, she was a fetus. As such, she didn't deserve a funeral and burial.

What an awful thought that is to have while you're waiting for labour.

I couldn't believe that my baby would just be thrown into a grave with other babies who died too early. Such an unbearable thought. I was thinking that we should buy a grave and have a funeral.

But then I thought of my parents' graves. I don't visit their graves simply

because I don't believe they are there. I believe that when someone dies, a little bit of their soul is placed in the hearts and souls of those who loved them. My parents are with me all the time, everywhere I go. This is not conditioned by a visit to the cemetery.

And my baby? A big part of her soul will always be a part of mine. How could it be any different?

And then **the stillbirth** started.

From the moment those painful, body and spirit crushing contractions began, I shut my eyes tight and didn't see anything anymore.

I didn't know where I was, all I knew was that I was screaming for a c-section and they did not give it to me. I begged Oshik to do something, but he couldn't do anything.

I couldn't believe this was happening to me.

It is impossible not to focus on these contractions and the pain, and the screaming, and the false encouragements ("here she comes") and more deceptive cheers ("any time now") and more empty encouragements ("good Yael, good!").

It was insane. I was so scared of childbirth. I never thought I'd be walking out of the hospital without my baby. And here I was - giving birth and without an epidural because who would push if not me? My baby was dead, she couldn't push her way out. It wasn't two who were working on this birth, it was only me.

And I was going to come out of that hospital without a baby.

Not the most encouraging thing to think about while in labour.

Thursday, September 9th, 01:10 AM.

Suddenly - relief.

And Oshik started crying.

Suddenly, my eyes weren't shut tight anymore, they were just closed and I could breath in and out.

And I knew what Oshik was seeing, I knew exactly why he was crying. My brain commanded my hand to touch him but my hand didn't obey. It simply couldn't.

I opened my eyes and I thought I had changed rooms because it suddenly looked as if it was showered with lights, instead of that dark room we entered two days before. Where had all the light come from??

I asked to **hold Ayelet**.

I was given this wrapped baby. Still. Quiet. And beautiful just like in my dreams.

I held her.

I felt peaceful. Bliss. Proud to hold my baby girl, even though she has no life. She would have been perfect if only she wasn't missing that one little thing that is life.

I was so peaceful that I nodded off for a few moments with Ayelet in my arms.

For the first time in two-and-a-half days I find comfort. Comfort within this baby that looks like me, with my husband's lips, and reminds me of my son so much. Comfort in this little body that, until not too long ago, was kicking

and moving and living inside me.

My chest filled with warmth and love.

And I couldn't help but smile. I knew my baby was dead. I knew she wasn't asleep.

It didn't matter.

I smiled at her, talked to her, I sang the two songs I wanted to sing to her, I talked about memories from the pregnancy with her.

I focused on her head and face. I stroked her cheeks. I smelled her. I kissed her.

I loved her.

I was all smiles and I felt content.

Not a single tear in my eyes. My heart didn't wish to fall apart. My spirit did not wish to crumble. All my being was concentrated on my beautiful Ayelet, a baby I made out of immense love with Oshik, the biggest love of my life.

Oshik took photos of Ayelet, and one short video of her and me together.

During the days afterwards, there were times I looked at those photos and cried, and times when I looked at them and was filled with love.

And for the first time in my life, I looked at photos of myself after such a difficult experience, and I thought I was beautiful.

This experience was so powerful, amazing and unbelievable. I remember showing my baby off to one of the doctors, who was reluctant to look at her.

I now remember, as I write these words, that I made him look. All the

doctors came to tell me I was a hero. Between you and me, I didn't feel like one. I just did what I had to do.

I held Ayelet for an hour, then it was goodbye and that's it.

I haven't seen her since.

Recovering

Recovering from the birth itself was painful for me. Aside from the fact that I knew I would be leaving the hospital empty handed, my whole body was sore.

I knew I would overcome, I knew Oshik and I would get through this thing that had suddenly happened to us. I just didn't know exactly how we were going to reach that point or how long it would take. I didn't know what scars this experience would leave on me. There were so many things still waiting for me that I hadn't thought about.

At that point I knew I needed to rest and I knew I needed support.

I knew I needed therapy.

I felt extremely lonely. That loneliness stayed with me for several months after the stillbirth. Ayelet was there with me for eight months and suddenly she was taken away. She was with me 24-hours a day, in my womb. Until she was no more. I found it difficult to cope with her absence. This was a new form of loneliness, one I hadn't encountered before and it made me very sad.

And, of course, all the rest was missing- taking care of her, showing her off, holding her, feeding her, clothing her, kissing her, counting her fingers and toes... all I had left from this pregnancy and stillbirth was an abyss of sadness, pain all over my body and a shattered heart.

I cried so much after arriving home. No wonder, I was in mourning. Even if we weren't supposed to sit Shiva, my heart and soul were mourning the loss of my baby girl. On September 14th, 2010, five days after the stillbirth, I wrote:

“When I cry, I am not sure what it is I'm crying about: the birth itself that was painful and difficult, the fact that I went through all this to give birth to a baby that was been dead inside me for two days and no one really knows why and maybe never will. Or maybe it's about the fact that I'm scared to discover that it was my fault after all - something that I ate, or something I hadn't noticed, or maybe something I did. The doctors were very clear with their answers regarding the latter, it was not my fault, that's what they told me over and over again. But what if it did have to do with something I did or didn't do? How will I be able to live with myself?

Maybe I'm crying about Ayelet, that was so perfect at birth, the only thing that was missing was life.

Maybe I'm crying about Ayelet, whom I knew but not as I would have liked to and therefore the feeling of mourning is not whole.

Maybe I'm crying about Oshik because his expectations and hopes were shattered. He was ready to welcome a second child for at least two years and now he will have to wait at least one more.

Or maybe I'm crying about myself, for losing my baby girl, and after being a motherless daughter, and a motherless mother - I am now a daughterless mother.

Maybe I'm crying because soon we will try to get pregnant again, which will be very intimidating, and will fuel stress I'm sure, at all stages: trying to conceive, during the pregnancy and it will get worse as I reach the 37th week. What will I do if it happens again? I heard of a number of women it happened to twice. What will I do?"

I felt betrayed by women. My mom passed away and left me in 2001. In 2010, the daughter I waited for passed away and also left me.

I still had to face all those people who saw me pregnant, and now they would see I wasn't pregnant anymore. Their questions. The phone calls. Everybody saying they're sorry. The gentle questions, like walking on eggshells around me. The caution. Asking me how I'm doing, but when I ask them - "nothing's new, everything's fine, you know".

I met all of these pretty quickly. I had a feeling that everyone was looking at me - in the street, at the grocery store... It was, of course, the truth.

Everybody knew and they really were all staring at me. I felt I had a huge sign on me saying "my baby girl died before she was born". Everyone who looked at me and didn't know saw the sign on me and realised what had happened.

I have to admit that during those first weeks after the stillbirth, I didn't like all those women I saw on the street with their babies, who were probably the same age as Ayelet.

I really didn't like them.

Especially the ones who paraded around with their own mothers. As if it wasn't enough that they got to keep their baby, they also had a mother.

That felt like a million daggers in my already broken heart.

We had a neighbour who gave birth just a few days before my stillbirth. I didn't like her at all. I couldn't look at her daughter for 2 years, I think.

Why? Why did I have to go through a pregnancy for 37 weeks and 3 days?

If it ended with stillbirth- what was the point?

And why me? What was it, exactly, that I had to learn from all this?

I believe that what needs to happen happens. If it had to happen differently, it would. I also believe that there's a reason for everything. I might not find out what that reason is, but there's always a reason.

Of course this thought gives no comfort whatsoever, but it helped me realise that this was my reality. And I had a choice: I could drown in self pity, embitterment and sink further down. Or I could choose life.

I am an optimist in my core and since death was no stranger to me at that point in my life, it was clear that I would choose life, and I that I would choose to be happy. This is who I am. I also had very good reasons to live- Oshik, Shahar and myself.

Happiness is a strength. As is love.

As I wrote above, I knew I'd have to get help.

I went back to Roni, my therapist. I spent a good number of years in therapy with him before the stillbirth. Going back to him felt like going

home. I had gone through so much since I started seeing him in May 2001. He was always there for me, helping me through all the pain. I knew that our meetings would help me to heal.

During the first month of our meetings, I would sit down, cry for 50 minutes, and leave. This is what I wrote after my first session with him:

“One meeting with my favourite psychologist released everything. 50 minutes of tears, from the moment I sat down until the moment I got up. My soul was crying about my empty, baby-less arms. About the fact that my body is after birth but there’s no baby around. My arms sometimes feel as though they suffer from phantom pains, I can feel what I have lost and it is anguish.

I cried about the fact that my baby died before she was born, no matter how many times I write it or say it- it is unbelievable! I wanted her to live! Never in my mind did I think there was any other way.

And I had one secret wish, that maybe, my baby girl would bring a fragment of my mother back to me.”

The sorrow and crying washed so many other things out. But these meetings with Roni framed my mourning process, not because I needed to hold back but because I also needed to live.

After the first session, I slept six hours straight, for the first time in months. For the first time since the stillbirth, I started eating better and I could feel various tastes. After the stillbirth everything tasted the same, it was all stale. Most importantly, I started dreaming about people who are, to me, symbols of joy, creation, love for life and optimism.

These signs from the subconscious were so important. They gave me proof that my strength was still with me, that it had never left.

During the second month we started talking more (and I cried less), processing and re-living this whole experience again and again, each time on different levels. This was not easy, because Roni is a very thorough psychologist. I found that it was necessary if I want to heal and fully recover. I already knew this to be true from my past experiences with Roni. I went to see him for three months. I felt I could go on without the sessions after three months. Another good sign.

As I was going to my therapist, I also went to acupuncture sessions. I studied Chinese Medicine, my day job was and still is helping practitioners in their professional journey. I felt that my body needed help to heal as well, not just my heart and soul. Chinese Medicine and philosophy offer a helpful point of view on life, which helps me live my life better.

Writing about my experience helped me a lot. At that time I had a mommy blog in Hebrew and I posted parts of my writing there. Writing in my own journal was very healing, but posting to the blog, using Facebook to share it and knowing that there are people out there that read my writing, was liberating on a very deep level.

I had been writing for many years, either on a blog or a journal. For me, writing was a powerful contributing factor to my healing process.

One day, a man contacted me through Facebook. He wrote that he was very moved by what I wrote and that he and his wife went through stillbirth a few years back as well. His wife contacted me a few days later. We wrote to each other a little bit and then she offered to meet with me. I, of course, agreed.

There was something about meeting a woman who went through the same thing that felt as though someone had lit up a candle in my very dark heart. I saw a woman who went through all the anguish, grief and sadness I did, and now, here she was, having a great life, filled with laughter and joy. I wanted that too!

In other words, I had living proof that I could recover from this and I could have more pregnancies in my future.

There was hope.

One other thing that helped me through the later stages of healing was a project, that when I look at it now, was literally occupational therapy.

Shahar was about to celebrate his 4th birthday. Planning this event started buzzing in my head, mainly because I have decided I would jump at any reason to celebrate and Shahar's birthday was the best reason to celebrate.

I found a website called [Bakerella](#), which introduced me to Cake Pops. But what really got my attention were Cupcake Pops. They looked magical, joyful and fun. So I decided I would make them for my son's birthday.

I had rehearsals, trial runs, I converted measurements, a friend sent me ingredients from the USA... the Cupcake Pops project kept me busy for hours and days.

The result was very satisfying: 43 Cupcake Pops, each hand made by me and they were perfect for everyone; for Shahar, for the kids at the party, and for myself.

This little project helped me as a distraction, but also with finding pure joy, which was something I needed more and more in my life.

The Autopsy

11 weeks after the stillbirth, we got Ayelet's autopsy results. This was one of many decisions we had to make during those two days waiting for the stillbirth to begin. Should we try to find out what happened? Or maybe we should leave it?

We decided to have an autopsy:

We received the results of Ayelet's autopsy.

She had a new, additional name now- fetus no. 10-50-057.

This was just the first line and already I started shedding tears. Again, they made up a nickname instead of using her actual name.

With every line, my crying intensified. I read:

'Weight- 3450 gr. Length- 45 cm (head-head), 31 cm (head-buttocks)' - in my eyes, I saw how this baby, the one I held and said goodbye to, was being held by strange hands and was being measured with a tape which was used on so many other babies before her.

'Foot length- 31 cm'- the foot, one of the sweetest parts a baby could possess, that I would never kiss. Until September 6th 2010, these two 31 cm long feet were constantly kicking me.

'Head circumference- 36 cm'- the head I had resting in my arms, the same one I kissed. The head that had the face of my beautiful Ayelet.

'Chest- 34 cm'. 'Stomach- 32 cm'.

Then they looked at what they could see on the body itself. Do you know what they saw? That everything was intact. That's a phrase that repeated

itself so many times in this three page long report.

Intact. Everything's intact. At some point this phrase was just hurtful. Because if everything is intact, then why was my baby taken away from me?

Internal check.

I'm reading the report and I imagine two strangers opening my baby's body- having a look inside it just to discover that "everything's intact". They checked everything- heart, brain, digestion system, urinary system, pancreas, even the appendix. In between these words I saw Ayelet's baby body being mixed with Shahar's 4-year-old body.

Big and small organs were being measured, checked.

How could they put it all back in? How would everything be returned to me? The answer to this reflexive question was clear. And a storm of tears burst from my eyes, as if this was the first time I discovered that Ayelet died inside of me. As if only now I understood that I will never hold her and she will never be an active part of our family, she will always be just a memory.

That same day:

"Today I sat at a cafe, I have been a dark cloud for almost a week now. A few tables on my right were a young mother and her baby and she was sitting with her mother.

Great.

All could have been well, except that the young mother decided she simply had to show off her baby, like only women can - out loud, so everyone will

hear, with high-pitched annoying voices, as if babies really like that nauseating behaviour. The grandmother's encouraging her and I simply cannot believe this is happening to me.

The three of them left, and I was left in tears in the middle of the cafe, knowing that my beautiful baby girl is lying with stitches somewhere, I don't know where. I was just sitting there, with my baby-less arms, abandoned uterus and tiny pieces of my heart scattered all over that cafe, that couldn't even provide me with one decent chair to sit on.

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On September 28th I wrote: "yet again I discover that the only thing that can actually stand up to death, is life. I feel as though the only thing that allows me to mourn is my strong will to live, to be happy and joyful. From the moment I allowed grief and mourning it's full place, life started to shine in again".

It's not just mourning for my Ayelet, which I have lost forever. It is mourning for the death of hopes and dreams and desires that came along with Ayelet. Grief over the simple fact I had to go through such a thing.

3 weeks or so after the stillbirth, I noticed little fragments of life, of joy, leaking into my life. That is wonderful. It doesn't say anything bad about me. I haven't forgotten Ayelet. Her name and existence are carved on the walls of my uterus. She is a part of my soul and deep in my heart. But I

simply can not forget that I'm here, on the side of life. She is dead, but I am alive, and so is my family.

And I want to continue living, enjoying life and being happy.

This experience is with me, it is a part of who I am. But it can not be the thing that determines how my life will be like. This experience doesn't get to have the power to decide about my life.

I am the only one in charge of my life.

Our Spouses

A few words about our spouses.

They, too, go through sadness and the feeling of loss. True, they do not go through the actual stillbirth physically, they do not feel the baby inside them. But they are there all the way: at every check up, trying to answer each weird craving us mothers come up with...

My husband Oshik was waiting for Ayelet to arrive into our lives just as much as I was. He wanted to hold her and love just as I did.

The spouse's loss is as real as the mother's loss, and this needs to be acknowledged by everyone, including us mothers. Facing this loss together is important and helps deal with... well, everything.

I can testify to that. I went through therapy to work on my loss but I also worked on it as part of a couple, bonded by love and friendship in the first place. Going through this together simply helps.

I know that it's easier to clam up. The temptation to stay away from people and just be alone can be great. But sometimes, this only feeds our fears and anxieties, our difficulty and sadness. Sharing this with our spouse and other very close individuals can make a difference.

And a few words about **how we told Shahar**.

How do you explain to a four-year-old that our baby died?

We talked to a child psychologist we knew, who suggested to talk about it as simply as we could: that Ayelet will not be with us.

That's what we did. Shahar didn't even say anything I think, and he moved on.

A few days after we told him, he asked me “when will the baby come to be with us?” I said “Ayelet won’t come to be with us, my boy”. He then asked “where did she go?” I thought for a second and then the answer came out all of the sudden “she went up to be with Grandfather Yona and Grandmother Ariella”.

I saw on Shahar’s face that he immediately understood. He would draw her sometimes and talked about her with us every once in a while. But he understood the separation- we are here, Ayelet is with my parents, who passed away.

I really didn’t plan this answer. It just came out. Shahar knew that my parents were dead, that they are not with us. I shared many stories about them with him, they were such a huge part of my life, as is Shahar, how could he not know about them? It’s bad enough he can’t meet them. Somehow, knowing that Ayelet went to be with them made sense to him.

After

Three months after the stillbirth, I suddenly felt this strength in my uterus. A mighty plea to become pregnant again.

I was pregnant with my daughter Noga four months after the stillbirth.

It was an unnerving beginning of a pregnancy. I cried, I was anxious and the thought of another pregnancy and additional anxieties rattled me.

I therefore switched to the “day by day” strategy, instead of looking at forty weeks, I took it one day at a time. No thought was given to the days to come, only to today. It was a challenge, but I quickly adapted, as it was much easier to look at the pregnancy one day at a time than to consider 280 days!

I even managed to enjoy this new pregnancy. Yes, I was more cautious, and it was very precious, but I managed to enjoy it and this time it had a happy ending.

I had a c-section with Noga. I went into the OR, so nervous! The whole team was kind and reassuring and I felt in good hands. I got the epidural and as I lay down I started feeling nauseated and uncomfortable. They gave me an oxygen mask just as Oshik came into the OR, which immediately made everything better.

I could feel pressure. I was all high on oxygen and I started telling Oshik all the things I could eat after the birth but that just added to my nausea so we started talking about all the things I could do with Shahar again.

And then all the people in the room, who were working behind the curtain, said “congratulations!”

The doctor said “what a beautiful baby”. And we heard a baby crying - our baby. Oshik and I started crying and laughing at the same time.

A live baby girl came out of me!

Thirteen months after Ayelet came out with no life, here came my beautiful Noga, this bright light of happiness and joy, who kept moving even after the 37th week and third day!

She, too, carved her name on my uterus walls, but unlike her sister, she came and stayed. I am so thankful to her for that!

It felt like all the people present shared our joy and excitement. What an experience. Such a victory.

With Noga, I feel I get to fulfill many things I thought I lost after my mother passed away. I feel like basic things came back to me like feminine solidarity, a chance to compensate for things I didn't have as a child. My faith in girls came back. They are reliable - just like boys.

More thoughts

There, I sat and wrote my story.

As I was writing, I cried over the pain that is behind the words I wrote at the time and I am bewildered by the fact that I'm here, with this wish to comfort women and their spouses, those who are now facing this sad experience.

I always knew I would want to write about it but I didn't know how it would happen or when. I think that deep down, I didn't want to be identified with stillbirth. I didn't want to be "the one who went through stillbirth".

Turns out though, that **I am** the one who went through stillbirth.

The understanding that this is a part of my personal story and my deep wish to offer a painful story that has hope for the future are the reasons that made me write this.

But you know, this is just a part of my story. It is definitely not the whole thing.

I think that, when we discuss life, we are forced to talk about death as well as they are entwined. The separation, I feel, is done for discussion sake's, but in reality, life and death come together.

As we go through life, we will lose people that are dear and close to us, and in my case - a baby.

From the very beginning of dealing with Ayelet's death, I chose life. I chose to overcome this experience. This choice doesn't mean that I forget Ayelet. It doesn't mean I don't mourn her or that I am not sad that we had to part

even before we met.

This choice does not mean that I didn't love my baby.

Life is the only power that is equal to death. In my mind, choosing life allowed me to give mourning and grief its proper place, which eventually allowed for sparks of life to flash in my soul again.

I don't think grief or mourning should be preserved.

Yes, there's no doubt that we should give mourning and grief a proper place. But if decisions are being made in our lives by fear, I think that is something that should be corrected and we need to ask for help.

Stillbirth is a deeply sad experience and may hide within it many potential anxieties as parents, in future pregnancies and life in general. Stillbirth can lead to PTSD and can chain our lives to that loss for a long time.

Choosing life is, in my eyes, essential in dealing with this.

If you find yourself in need of help in your road to recovery, I urge you to find the best possible help you can get.

Stillbirth is something we must talk about and strip away its silence.

Pushing it aside, not talking about it, not allowing people who went through it to mourn properly, all these make the healing and recovery process that much harder.

I have found that this is a subject people talk about with great difficulty but, at the same time, they cannot stop asking questions and requesting details about it.

I also realised that most people don't know what to do with all that pain I was telling them about. And I heard them trying to comfort me, and it came out very strange and awkward, at least most of the time.

The reason for this, I think, is that they were really trying to comfort themselves. Because they heard my story and pictured their own child as I was talking and that is a mortifying thing to think about.

I guess we all have our different experiences. Some of us have bumpier roads than others but if we take a look at people all over the world, there are so many stories of hardships, pain, sorrows, violence. Death.

This is life. In my life, I had to deal with sexual trauma, being bullied in school, feeling alone, the death of my mother, the death of my father and the death of my baby girl Ayelet.

This is my share. These are parts of my life. My bundle. I dealt with each as best as I could, and there are moments in life where I find myself dealing with each on a different level. They all direct me one way - to choose joy and happiness, to fight for it. To try and live my life better than yesterday. To make more of it.

It's not always easy, sometimes it's very difficult because of work, and taking kids to classes in the afternoon, and making sure the house is clean, and remember to go to the store to get ingredients for my broccoli cutlets... You know. Life.

Those experiences are just parts on my unfolding story. There were times when my sexual trauma lead my life, through the fear it caused on so many

levels in my life. I wasn't happy with my life and that needed to change. The only way it could change, for me, was going to therapy, committing to it, working hard at it. □It's been years now that the sexual trauma I went through is not a force in my life anymore. It doesn't determine my life's choices. □The same with the other experiences I have gone through.

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I think that the death of a parent is something we are more prepared for.

The death of a baby has deeper symbolism of hope, continuation and optimism. And those are maybe still with us but they become more intimidating. How can we hope again after stillbirth? How can we try again and risk hearing again that our baby has no pulse? What optimism can

exist in a new pregnancy when we are so much more aware of all the things that can go wrong along the way?

I think that if we dwell too much on death, we miss out on life. As with dealing with other traumas, if I dwell on that and only that - I miss out on life.

And I have. For years I didn't live the life I wanted to live. I feared so many experiences that are so basic for others. I didn't start out as a fearful person, it started from being cautious, from trying to protect myself. This was okay for a while, but then caution became fear.

That's not how I want my life to be.

It's hard to change your old ways. They have been with you for so long and they even started out as defenses. But, at some point, they become obstacles mainly because we grow and change as time goes by.

If I had to make decisions based only on fear, I would have missed out on life - finding love, friendship and having a family, to name a few.

It's the same with stillbirth. If I were to give this experience control over my life, I would go back to letting fear and anxieties make my decisions for me. And then my life would be filled with sadness.

Stillbirth is a deeply sad experience. I remember reading people writing "the worst thing to ever happens to a woman happened to this woman, she lost her baby, she will never be the same, who knows if she'll ever be able to get over it".

That comment as a whole, but mainly the last bit - infuriates me. Yes, it is a horrible thing that happened to me - although I have to say, that "horrible" doesn't seem like the right word. Sad is much more suitable.

Yes, I lost my baby.

I will never be the same - well, I hope not! I don't want to stop growing and evolving. Stillbirth is a part of life and life happens. I think that evolving is the result of hard work and having hope. I am so happy I am not the same person I was eight years ago!

Who knows if I'll ever get over it??? Of course I will - and *I* know it!

We are not weak. Even if we lost a baby. We are not weak. We feel cheated, betrayed, we feel a million things. But we are not weak.

We are strong.

I have to believe that I'm strong and I can't let others tell me if I will or will not get over it.

We can heal and recover from stillbirth.

It is *our* choice.

We can actually go through days without thinking about the stillbirth and all that we have lost.

There are people who sanctify grief and loss. I think that by doing so, they miss out on all the good that could come out of their lives. If only they chose to sanctify life and joy.

It's not going to be painful forever. I promise. There will be days you won't think about it, days that you will be wrapped in laughter, joy and the day-today, little annoying things. I have learned to really appreciate those little annoyances.

But in the beginning, you need to cry, mourn and allow yourself the time to feel the pain of losing a baby.

At some point, and to each her own pace, you will see flickers of normality. Suddenly it will be easier for you to laugh and easier to breathe.

The "day-by-day" strategy can help here as well. Taking things one day at a time, or if it helps - one hour at a time. Anything we need in order to allow ourselves the time to heal.

I still think of Ayelet, some days more and some days less. Some days not at all. I sometimes try to imagine what she would look like at different ages. I remember her on September 6th of every year. I place my hands on my stomach and remember.

I still love her.