

**viewpoint** JEN MABE



So many words spoken in anger  
now seem **utterly unimportant.**  
I never said what really mattered.

# Too late for 'I'm sorry'

THE MINUTE I HEARD HIS VOICE, I knew why he'd called.  
Long before he awkwardly squeezed out the words, I knew what he was going to say.  
There could be no other reason for his call, and deep inside me, I knew this day would eventually arrive.  
I just didn't expect it so soon. But even as he painfully broke the news — "I'm sorry, Joy passed away" — there was no denying that the day I knew would eventually arrive was here.  
Joy and I had shared the stereotypical lesbian relationship in the beginning.  
As soon as we met, we spent every waking hour with each other, and by Week 2, we were practically living together.  
There was the "I love you" on the sec-

ond or third date, and the obligatory talk of pets.  
There were introductions to friends and coworkers, cute text messages to each other's phones at random times of the day, and of course, unexpected gestures of romance.  
THEN, A MONTH INTO OUR relationship, things took a more serious turn than I ever anticipated.  
Joy was hospitalized for the first time with internal bleeding.  
From the start she'd been honest about being sick.  
I knew she'd had a liver transplant as a teenager, and I knew there was always a chance something could go wrong.  
But until that first hospitalization, it was never completely real.

Joy was hospitalized three times while we were together, and every visit to the emergency room threatened to be her last. But she proved each time just how much of a fighter she was.  
Eventually, our relationship ended, and we both moved on with our lives. Last I heard, her health was very good, so it still came as a shock to be hearing our friend's voice on the other end of the phone so soon.  
Late nights in the emergency room, digging my car out from under two feet of snow just to get to the hospital, sleeping at the office to be close by just in case, countless hours spent at her bedside in the ICU — so many memories came rushing back.  
The days of living on nothing but coffee, cigarettes, Vivarin and dedication suddenly don't feel like so long ago.  
Though it's been over two years, my heart still aches like it was yesterday.  
I'M NOT THE GRIEVING WIDOW HERE. At the time of her death, Joy was not my girlfriend, but her death has evoked a deep sense of loss.  
So many words that were spoken in pain and rage now seem utterly unimportant and immature.  
The words that really counted—"I'm sorry"—were ones I never spoke and will always regret.  
Our breakup was in no way simple and even less amicable, but still over the two years since, I've thought a great deal about her. Was she healthy? Was she happy?  
In my experience of lesbian relation-

ships, there are two endings: You are bitter enemies, placing mutual friends in the middle and acting like 5-year-olds; or you become very good friends.  
The stronger the emotions during the relationship, the more likely you will revert to a child when it ends.  
That was what happened with Joy and me, and I'll readily admit, that was largely my fault.  
Joy's death has taught me a few things. In the end, so much of what seems important at the time doesn't really matter, like fighting over who keeps the dining room table or when to pick up the bookshelves. It doesn't matter who broke up with whom or which one of you cried more tears.  
Whatever the slight, real or intended, what truly matters is saying, "I'm sorry."  
What truly matters is that, at least for a time, we loved and cared for each other very deeply. So deeply, in fact, that after two years and zero contact, her death still saddens me to the core.  
Joy died thinking I hated her, and I will live with that for the rest of my life. The truth is, I loved her too much to hate her.  
I hated the way our relationship ended. I hated how that made me feel. But I didn't hate her. Perhaps now she knows in death what I never had the maturity, strength and courage to say in life.

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