

#PERSPECTIVE

A new beginning: The story of a 'blended' family

"Are his sons going to stay with you?" was the question by someone very dear to me. An innocent question meaning no harm and yet I cringed. My response was, "My sons are staying with me, yes."

If I want to be grammatically correct, the 'sons' in question are my step-sons. And, I have two biological daughters. But my boys are just my boys, just like for my husband, the girls are his girls. The children just think of each other as brothers and sisters. Children especially, just know how to love naturally. They are naturally receptive to someone who cares for them and when they do, they do not separate with step — love within a family knows no steps.

I lost my husband, the father of my girls, in my mid-thirties. Once I became a widow, the first conscious thought I had about the term is that it is the one marital status which you have no choice over; it is just something that happens to you (unless you are a murderer, that is).

And the grief that came in waves was



the most shocking physical pain I had ever endured. Yes, the emotions felt like physical pain. In fact, it still does. They come unannounced like sparks or thunder. When I have a moment with the girls that I want to share with him, when there is something in my life I want to tell him about, when it is a random stupid joke that I know he would love, when I remember a happy moment we shared, and even through remembering memories of arguments or hard times in our marriage, the pain I feel is still gut-wrenching.

Yet, I have found deep, profound, and all-encompassing love in my marriage now with the father of my four kids. I will admit that until it happened to me, I did not think that grief and love can co-exist. But once it happened, I realised that it is not a competition, one does not need to win over the other. And love is expansive.

My new blended family makes people curious and somewhat unsettled about how this must all be working out. And not always in a negative way. How does this feel?

Suddenly being a parent to pre-teens (now teens). How did we navigate through



this, to begin with? How were the kids introduced? Do we differentiate between the kids? And many more. All valid questions.

Some people also look at this as a betrayal, like I did not honour my late husband's memories, and there are others who straight up come and tell me directly that now it must not hurt anymore. Since I have moved on.

Such a peculiar term, this moving on.

And no, I am not offended. I get it.

Picture this. Imagine a couple who loses a child. Everyone can unanimously agree that no pain can be greater than that of parents losing a child, right? Then imagine this couple has other kids or has another new baby. Would you now expect that they no longer mourn the child they lost? No. Neither would you think that they do not have the capacity to love their other kids.

The example may be farfetched, but the feeling is similar.

Grief is very complex, and it does not come with an expiry date, it does not exist in a realm of its own where it does not touch anything else. No, it in fact becomes

webbed into your reality. A constant part of all new things that come into your life and changes you into a new you. The face of grief shifts to a softer one that is not as visible as it used to be, and this is where the confusion happens. People see you laugh and think, ahh! It's over! But the reality is, new love does not negate what you have lost. New love just surprises you by showing you the capacity of your heart.

Parenthood, in particular, takes you places you never expect. I always tell people, that only with pets and kids do you realize how much love your heart can expand into. I think in my beautiful family, in our own little or big ways, we all came from pain and got together to take care of each other. Even the kids. We are all healing - perhaps not all our woes - but healing into the concept of "us".

In this journey, I have discovered that

different than it did before, I just cook a lot more, I get hugged a lot more, and I scream at them to clean their rooms a lot more. And I am blessed to say that I know for sure their father feels the same way too.

Amongst the kids, never once have I seen them being confused about whether to address the other as step-brother/sister or not. I will say that in my case it was a blessing that they were two boys and two girls that came together as a family. So, each set just got a new kind, the boys got a set of sisters, and the girls got a set of brothers.

I never thought of it before, because I never needed to, but this whole notion of what a perfect family should be like, who has decided this? What is a broken family anyways? Just biological parents who aren't together. I know many parents who are together and are constantly hurtful and resentful towards each other. I would rather argue that a perfect or ideal family is one where there is respect and positivity, regardless of the number of parents raising the kids, regardless of the marital status a parent has.

Whether you believe in destiny or religion, you cannot deny that life happens in its own course. And, with loss I have learned surely that our love and connection with those around us is where meaning in our life comes from. And even more so, it taught me to remind myself constantly that there is no ever after.

Everything in life is fluid. There will be more love, more pain, more loss, and more happiness and we will all take it as it comes. Life is beautiful and happy now.

I have four kids. My daughters have two fathers; my sons have two mothers. And no, it does not feel like a "blended" family. It just feels like my family. It feels perfectly natural to be in our home. Ours is like any other home. This is not my happy ending. Just my new beginning.

By Tasnuva Hasan
Photo: Tasnuva Hasan



you get to trust a person easier when you see them as a parent. You get to see a lot more about who they are when you see how they raise their children, how they interact with their children, and what they teach or want to teach to their children. I had always been very transparent with my girls, in my happiness and in my pain, I share it all. The only difference I now see is that I get the perspective of boys.

Motherhood itself does not feel any