



I Mourned the Anniversary of My Parents' Deaths By Going On an Adventure

I flipped the script on what it means to mourn and went on a destination hiking trip in Tasmania to celebrate their life, instead.

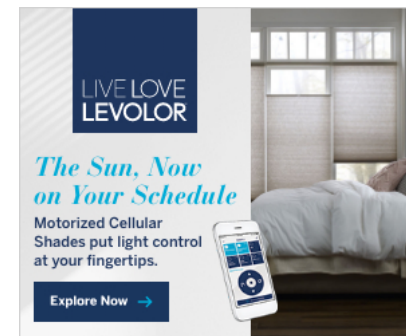
By **Judy Koutsky** | February 02, 2018



Photo: Judy Koutsky

My parents passed away two years ago, only weeks apart. While I'm glad they were able to move on together (they had been married 51 years), it was difficult for me to lose them both at once.

As expected, the first anniversary of their passing was hard, to say the least. So as the second year approached, I was determined to do something that celebrated their lives and all that they taught me, rather than wallow in grief. I wanted to put



my energy toward something that connected positive memories to them- ultimately to help me move forward in a positive and impactful way.

My parents were big travelers and they loved the outdoors, so it felt fitting to go on an adventure of my own to honor their memories. And I had my eyes on a big one.

I had always wanted to go to [Tasmania](#), an Australian state and island south of the mainland. The landscape is known for its stunning national parks and rugged mountains-a hiker's paradise. I came across an [adventure hiking cruise itinerary with a local company](#), Coral Expeditions. What really appealed to me is that while each day would be filled with challenging hikes (or bushwalks as locals call them), I could return to the ship each night for dinner, a hot shower, and a comfy bed while the ship cruised to the next spot. I didn't have to deal with navigating a foreign country on my own. Instead, all my energy and efforts could focus on the hiking and scenery. (Related: [Learn How to Plan the Most Epic Adventure Vacation of Your Life](#))

A bonus I later discovered is that due to the ship's small size (it only holds 72 passengers, max), they are able to dock in hard-to-reach spots, like Port Davey, a hiking mecca that offers stunning views of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area.

The First Few Steps Were the Hardest

From a young age, my parents took us on active vacations. We were big campers and always incorporated exercise into our trips. Whether it was hiking in the Black Hills, horseback riding in the Smoky Mountains, or white-water rafting in Colorado, it wasn't a vacation unless we were sweating (in a fun way). When I became an adult, I included active adventure in my own trips. I've hiked the Inca Trail in Machu Picchu and trekked up to Torres del Paine National Park in Patagonia, Chile. However, that was all before kids. Now, I am older and rounder, and while still in good shape, I had not gone on a multi-day hiking trip in years. Was I up to the challenge? I thought about my parents, always encouraging me to do what I was hesitant (or quite frankly scared) to take on-like moving to New York just out of college without knowing anyone, or becoming a travel writer at the age of 25 and traveling anywhere editors wanted to send me. So, I told myself this was no different. I *could* accomplish a six-day, seven-night hiking trip in some of Tasmania's most remote wilderness.

Our first hike was from Fortescue Bay to Cape Hauy in Tasman National Park, which has some of the most stunning cliff and beach scenery found anywhere in Australia.

As we started our hike at 8 a.m. I started talking to one woman named Jean (my mother was Jeanne) who was 32 years older than me. She had the sweet and

kind disposition of my mom. Jean was in excellent shape (she bushwalked regularly back home, she told me) and had no problem with the steep incline.

As the trail grew steeper and the sun grew hotter, I peeled off my layers (I felt like I was the only one sweating) and started massaging my burning calves. The last hike I had gone on was a good six months back and it clearly showed. Several of my fellow travelers passed me, but Jean was nice enough to match her pace to mine as I told her about my mom-talking and reminiscing made the climb feel easier and time go quicker. The sweat was pouring down my face, the sunscreen dripping into my eyes, my thighs groaned with every step uphill, but Jean encouraged me on, just as my own mom would have. We finally reached the top of the Cape and were rewarded with stunning views. Jean and I shared an orange before tackling the long hike down. (Related: [This Cycling Instructor Pedaled Through Tragedy After Losing Her Mom to ALS](#))

Pushing Past Sore Muscles

Truth be told, because this was an adventure cruise (as opposed to camping at night), I didn't expect hard-core hiking. But I went to bed that first night feeling sore from head to toe. Not only my tired calves and my aching thighs but my triceps, my back, even my neck. But it was a good pain; the I've-been-working-out-and-pushing-myself pain. Plus, all the physical exertion quieted my mind. Instead of thinking of all the things I missed about my parents, I had to concentrate on the walk in front of me, making sure there wasn't a hidden tree root (or wombat) in my path. At home, if I felt anxiety or a feeling of being overwhelmed, I would head to the gym to clear my mind. Here, hiking-and using my energy for something rewarding-really helped me to stay in the moment. To not look back at the what-ifs (did I spend enough time with my parents while I could?), but to remember the good times, like all the camping trips we went on as kids, all the adventure activities, like rafting down the Colorado River or horseback riding in the Smoky Mountains.

While the first hike was certainly very challenging, it was merely a warm-up compared to our second day in Maria Island, a six-hour hike up to twin mountains Bishop and Clerk. The trail went past fossil cliffs, through the forest, and scrambling up large boulders to reach the summit. We trekked up past beautiful blue gum trees, past wallabies and hedgehogs, and over a massive scree slope. Just as we were nearing the top, I felt undecided whether I would make it the last few meters. The views where I stood were amazing, and quite frankly I was tired, plus the last boulder standing between me and the very top was so large that I'd have to have someone hoist me up a bit to make it over. But my fellow hikers encouraged me to take the last leap to the very top (they, too, were hoisted). And I'm glad I did. I was afforded amazing views of the Freycinet Peninsula. Nowhere else can I feel my parents' spirit more than in a beautiful, quiet place. I know they would have been cheering me on and reveling in my summit.

Finding My Happy Place

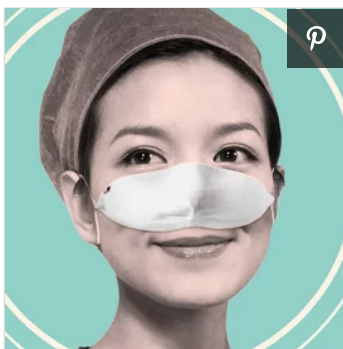
The thing about hiking, like most things in life, is that the more you do it, the better it feels and the easier it gets. By day three, my muscles no longer hurt and I was looking forward to more hikes. The next several days were great: hiking up to Wineglass Bay (one of the most popular hikes on the island), then the Fluted Cape trail on Bruny Island. Another day was spent walking up Mount Beattie in Melaleuca and Bathurst Harbor and ending with a steep climb up to Mount Gilmore in Port Davey. Each hike felt better than the last as I got to know my fellow bushwalkers, especially the women.

One of the hardest parts of losing my mom is that now that I'm a mom myself, I can no longer ask her advice about my kids and balancing work with family. So I asked these women, most of whom were roughly my mom's age. What is the best advice they would give their own daughter raising two young boys, and if they could do things differently what would it be? Each nugget of advice was dispersed while hiking; something about sharing an adventure together took the pressure off and people really opened up and gave truthful, heartfelt answers. (Related: [Hiking Through Greece with Total Strangers Taught Me How to Be Comfortable with Myself](#))

So during my seven-day hiking trip, I not only pushed myself to new fitness levels and took in some amazing scenery, but I felt like I got great parenting advice and perspective, even though my own parents were no longer with me. Celebrating their lives, instead of mourning their deaths, made me feel grateful to have them as long as I did. The physical challenges I faced in Tasmania not only helped with the grieving (it's hard to be sad or depressed, when I had all those endorphins flowing from my treks up the mountain each day), but by partaking in such an active adventure (just like the ones I took with them as a kid), I felt like they were with me on the journey and I was connected with them in the best, most positive, way.

By Judy Koutsky

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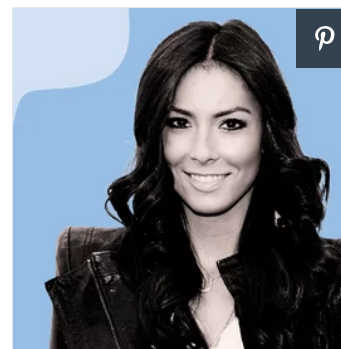
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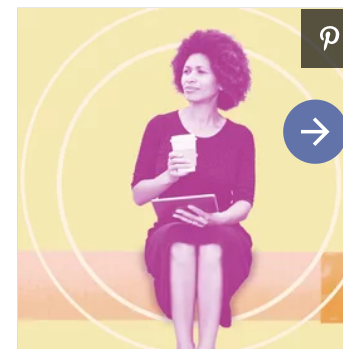
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