

Teach Me How to Grieve Again

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/27748207) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/27748207>.

Rating:	General Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	Gen
Fandom:	Dear Evan Hansen - Pasek & Paul/Levenson
Relationships:	Connor Murphy & Zoe Murphy , Cynthia Murphy & Zoe Murphy , Larry Murphy & Zoe Murphy , Cynthia Murphy/Larry Murphy
Characters:	Zoe Murphy (Dear Evan Hansen) , Cynthia Murphy (Dear Evan Hansen) , Larry Murphy (Dear Evan Hansen) , Connor Murphy (mentioned) , Evan Hansen (mentioned)
Additional Tags:	Grief/Mourning , Emotional Healing , Five Stages of Grief , post-words fail , meaning Zoe/Evan are no longer a thing
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2020-11-27 Words: 1,817 Chapters: 1/1

Teach Me How to Grieve Again

by [ellethesnail](#)

Summary

They decide to keep cleaning out Connor's room the week before Christmas. Why her mom chose that timing, Zoe has no idea. Maybe because Christmas without him feels off, messy and hollow and awkward. Maybe because now, unlike the past few months, they're facing what he left behind without Evan's lies there to ease the pain.

Notes

This was for last winter's Sincerely Us gift exchange, but I wrote it before I had Ao3 so I wanted to post it here now so all my DEH fics are together. I wrote it for @kaetbab on tumblr, inspired by a prompt they gave me about Evan giving Zoe a bracelet he had found in Connor's room as a way to reconcile her relationship with the real Connor post-Words Fail.

I felt kinda icky thinking about Evan lowkey stealing a gift Connor had intended for Zoe, so I just took inspiration from the prompt and came up with this instead.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

They decide to keep cleaning out Connor's room the week before Christmas. Why her mom chose that timing, Zoe has no idea. Maybe because Christmas without him feels off, messy and hollow and awkward. Maybe because now, unlike the past few months, they're facing what he left behind without Evan's lies there to ease the pain. Whatever the reason, here they are, sifting through stacks of comic books and old journals while "Silent Night" plays in the background.

At the moment, her mom has left to start a pot of hot chocolate and her dad is in the attic in search of a spare storage box, so Zoe sits alone in her least favorite room of the house.

It's gotten better, even despite the fact that Evan's offers of healing were false. She's tried to spend more time here in the past few months, tried to look at Connor's journals and books, to bring to remembrance his humanity. She's never gone through his journals—she would hate it if anyone did that with hers, even if she was dead, so she gives her brother the same respect she would want—but she has begun to listen to the CDs they found stashed in the corner of his closet. She has flipped through the comics and let herself smile at the memories of Halloweens spent dressed as superheroes and sidekicks.

And sometimes, when she is feeling especially strong, she brings her guitar in and improvises songs. It isn't much, but it is an invitation, of sorts. Her therapist calls it "reframing the past"—not rewriting it, but seeing it in a fuller light, and welcoming the past's positive memories to affect the present instead of only acknowledging the memories that ache and bleed.

But now, sitting on Connor's rug with the geometric pattern, surrounded by half-packed boxes, she feels out of place. Like this is her mom's job, and her dad's, this act of sorting through the past and packing it away. For her, she is still unpacking it, spreading it out before her and naming which places still need to heal.

Her hands are restless. She doesn't know what goes in which boxes and she doesn't dare risk accidentally messing up whatever organization system her mom has silently established, but she needs to do something as she waits for her parents to get back.

So she scoots over to Connor's bed and scoops out the junk he had stuffed beneath it. Mostly random crumpled papers, dogeared paperbacks, and an old Hawkeye action figure back from their shared superhero phase. Zoe smiles a tiny bit at the memory of them pretending to be Clint Barton and Kate Bishop together, crafting bows and arrows out of sticks from the backyard and chasing each other around the house.

She absentmindedly shuffles through a pile of half-finished sketches when something catches her eye: an envelope amid the drawings, puffy at its center, definitely holding more than just paper inside. It's still sealed, she realizes with mild surprise, though that could simply mean it's some birthday card from Connor's least favorite aunt that never made it to the trashcan. She flips the envelope over to the front and freezes, more than mild surprise now sparking in her fingertips.

In the center of the envelope, in plain graphite, is written Zoe. It's Connor's handwriting, all uppercase, blocky and sharp. Zoe's fingers hesitate for a moment.

Everything is already so hard. Are you sure you're ready to make it even messier with whatever's in here?

But her parents could return at any minute and she knows it will be the only thing on her mind until she opens it. She flips the envelope over and breaks its seal in a clean tear.

There's an index card inside with more of Connor's handwriting. she pulls out the puffy object to find it's a tiny mesh drawstring bag, the kind that carries bracelets or earrings at a jewelry store. It's navy with a pattern of gold stars printed onto the mesh in tiny constellations.

Zoe opens the bag, curiosity overriding apprehension as she fishes her fingers inside. They find something metal at the bottom of the bag, and she takes out what appears to be a bracelet. A thin silver chain makes up the majority of the bracelet, but a silver star, no larger than the head of a thumbtack, hangs in the center of the chain as its single adornment.

Her curiosity sizzles into confusion. She puts the bag down, bracelet resting on her knee, and reluctantly picks up the index card.

Happy birthday, Zoe, the first line reads. *I don't know if you even want anything from me, but it's your birthday, so I got this. I hope it fits.*

She can tell it originally started a different way—or maybe many different ways—from the numerous indentations on the paper that show how Connor must have written something and then erased it to write something else, at least five times.

I know I suck at being a brother. I'm sorry. You don't really deserve any of this crap.

the next two lines had been erased, rewritten, and then scribbled out.

Anyway. Happy birthday. Here's to hoping your year is good. — Connor

Zoe takes a deep breath, mind trying to piece everything together. This had to have been the birthday present he never got around to giving her this year. It had been a week before school started again, before everything happened. She remembered him screaming at her the night before her birthday, pounding on her bedroom door, breaking one of its panels in the process.

He never gave her a present the next day. Zoe had figured they were done celebrating each other's entrance into this screwed up world. And then, eight days later, he was gone. No apology, no explanation, not even an actual note left behind.

Footsteps sound in the hallway, the light steps of her mom. Zoe drops the bracelet back into its pouch and stuffs both the bag and index card into her pocket. She stands up as her mom reaches the doorway.

“Here's some warm hot chocolate,” her mom says with a smile, offering Zoe a mug with a handful of mini marshmallows bobbing in the beverage.

Zoe smiles back but doesn't take the mug. "Thanks Mom, but I think I want to go for a walk. I'll be back in a little bit."

"Oh, okay." Her mom searches Zoe's face. "Are you okay, hon?"

"I'll be alright. I just . . . need to process some things."

Her mom's eyes drift from Zoe to the bedroom behind her. They unfocus for a second before returning to reality. "I understand. Make sure you dress warm; it's freezing outside. I love you."

Zoe smiles again, soft but sincere. "I will. I love you too."

Leaving her mom to continue the packing, Zoe makes her way downstairs. She stops in the mudroom to throw on her winter coat and scarf before stepping outside.

Despite her mom's warnings, it is surprisingly warm for New York in the middle of December. A few inches of snow cling resolutely to the lawn's dead grass, but the air has lost its usual bite. Zoe lets her scarf come undone as she begins to walk down the street, no clear destination in mind.

No one else has picked a winter day before Christmas to take a walk, so she has the streets of the neighborhood to herself. Without the fear of other walkers raising their eyebrows at her, Zoe finds herself talking softly as she walks. Verbally processing always helped her when she had Evan to listen. Now she just has herself, but she's starting to get used to that.

"I'm still figuring it all out," she mumbles. "I'm sorry I'm still angry, but I am. I'm sorry I don't know what I'm supposed to believe or what I'm supposed to feel or even what I'm supposed to remember, but that's what you get when you find out it's all been a lie."

She takes a breath, the air stinging the back of her throat, and tries to practice what her therapist has been working on with her. "I mean, I know it hasn't *all* been a lie." Less generalizing, more truth. She puts her hand in her pocket, feels the creased edge of the index card. "These words aren't a lie, I guess. Though after you've been told so much stuff that's not true, it's sort of hard to actually believe the real stuff, you know?"

By now she's reached the edge of the neighborhood, where the sidewalk rims her dad's favorite golf course. The snow is undisturbed here, blanketing the small hills of the course, softening all its edges.

Another thing her therapist has been working on with her: listing what she knows is true whenever she feels ungrounded, adrift like the snowflakes that have begun to fall from the sky and catch on her eyelashes. She takes another breath and lets it out in a little huff of frustration.

"I know this is true." She pulls out the index card and the bracelet's bag from her pocket. "I know it makes me feel angry, and scared, and confused. I know it also makes me feel hopeful, which makes me feel more scared. Last time I was hopeful it didn't work out so great."

another deep breath. *keep going.*

“I know now, apparently, you weren’t done with my birthday. and that makes me feel . . . weird. But okay. Because maybe not *everything* was a lie? Maybe . . . you did have things you were trying to say, or wanted to, at least. Maybe this means you were trying.”

And even though Zoe hated it every time her mom used that as an excuse for his yelling matches and threats, in the case of this little bracelet and Connor’s stiff, awkward words on a crumpled index card, she knows it’s true.

Despite the less than freezing weather, she can feel her fingers beginning to get numb from being out for so long. She knows she should start to head back, but it all still feels unfinished.

It’s not like you were going to get a sudden epiphany, if that’s what your plan had been.

“I just . . . I want *something*.” There are tears in her eyes now, smarting from the cold. When she tries to blink them away, they drip down her cheeks. “You left us nothing, and then Evan gives us everything, and that’s gone too, and I just need something *real*, something *true*—”

Zoe’s numb fingers fumble as she takes the bracelet out of its bag. She locks the clasp around her wrist. It fits perfectly, tiny silver star against her skin.

There’s not going to be any rush of closure, no montage of healing like in the movies. But that doesn’t mean there’s nothing.

“Thank you, for this.”

End Notes

you can find me on tumblr @thatfriendlyanon if you wanna say hi, see more stuff like moodboards/playlists/whatnot, or just pop by. thank you for reading! <3

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!