

**from Deborah Maddison:**

Our past. It's a concrete block we carry around with us everywhere we go. Regardless of who you are today, who you were yesterday will always be with you. When you have been victimized, when you have lost everything, you may come to believe you have nothing left to lose. That's not true. There is always more.

What you have to lose is today's happiness, and tomorrow's happiness. Everything you do will be filtered through your loss and grief. Everyone you trust a potential to cause you pain. Everything you love, everything you hold dear...a potential for another loss.

No one sees you as yourself. Victim, survivor, advocate...whatever label and mantel you wear in someone's eyes is who you'll be perceived to be. Rare is the person that can just look into your eyes and see you for yourself. Maybe you don't even know how to see yourself. Maybe all you see are the thousands of reflections echoed in the eyes around you. Maybe you lost yourself when you lost everything else.

I try hard to carry many sides. The survivor of yesterday's pain who knows how to help others through theirs. The one who can give a voice to victims who feels no one can hear them. The girl who just wants a normal life, even if it is just through small windows of time. Someone who would rather smile than cry. Rather fight than lay down. Rather reach down and pull someone else up rather than fall down and give up. Someone, who sometimes just wants to live in the moment and let the past stay in the past. I am someone to whom terrible things happened, but those things do not define me. They merely helped to form me. What defines me is the love for life and all living things I carry in my heart and the things I do every day. That is my real legacy.

I know there are so many out there who feel the same way. Who think being broken means you are missing pieces...I say the cracks form scar tissue are stronger than the original, and those unique scars are what makes you beautiful. Everyone deserves to love and be loved. Those who have been hurt, betrayed, abandoned...probably most of all. The fact that no matter how much we're hurt we still feel for others, we still unite, stand up and help each other move forward is what really defines us all. The hardest thing in the world to do when you've been through trauma is to love again, to trust again...to enjoy even a moment of the life you are in now. Grab those small moments. Every one of them. It sounds simple but it's not. It's the hardest thing you'll ever do. It's living.