Praise for *How Will I Ever Get Through This?*

"The best work I know on positive psychology and grief is Lucy Hone's."

—Dr. Martin Seligman, bestselling and award-winning author of *Learned Optimism* and *Flourish*

"*How Will I Get Through This?* is the book we always needed. An invaluable education, a constant companion, and a brilliantly necessary resource that will transform how you relate to life's unexpected losses, changes, and challenges entirely and for the better. Lucy Hone takes readers firmly and compassionately by the hand, lets them know they're not alone, and walks them through the moments, questions, and feelings we all encounter but were never taught what to do with or how to navigate. This book is a gift to the world, and to humanity. It belongs on every bookshelf because what it helps and heals belongs to every person."

—Lauren LaRusso, LPC, LMHC, author of *Beyond Infidelity*

"Lucy's insights are practical, wise, and deeply human—they stay with you long after you read them."

—Chelsea Pottenger, author of *The Mindful High Performer*

"Compassionate without sentimentality and practical without platitudes, *How Will I Ever Get Through This?* is a landmark book on grief. Dr. Lucy Hone offers a scientifically grounded, deeply humane guide for navigating loss and finding strength, meaning, and renewal on the other side."

—Tasha Eurich, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Shatterproof*, *Insight*, and *Bankable Leadership*

"With scientific grounding and in a profoundly human manner, *How Will I Ever Get Through This?*, brings Lucy's characteristic candor, compassion, and action-orientation to help us explore living losses. I cannot recommend this book highly enough. It is honest, generous, deeply wise, and filled with the kind of insights that stay with you long after you close the final page. Lucy Hone is one of the most trusted voices in the field of resilience, and this book solidifies why."

—Jillian Coppley, president and chief programs & services officer, VIA Institute on Character

How Will I Ever Get Through This?

EVIDENCE-BASED TOOLS TO HELP YOU HEAL FROM HARDSHIP, GRIEF, AND LOSS

Dr. Lucy Hone

New York Amsterdam/Antwerp London
Toronto Sydney/Melbourne New Delhi

An Imprint of Simon & Schuster, LLC
1230 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY 10020

The reader should consult his or her medical, health, or other competent professional before adopting any of the suggestions in this book or drawing inferences from it.

The author and publisher specifically disclaim all responsibility for any liability, loss or risk, personal or otherwise, which is incurred as a consequence, directly or indirectly, of the use and application of any of the contents of this book.

Originally published in Australia in 2026 by Allen & Unwin

First Simon Element trade paperback edition May 2026

SIMON ELEMENT and colophon are registered trademarks of Simon & Schuster, LLC

INTERIOR DESIGN BY KARLA SCHWEER

Manufactured in the United States of America

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Library of Congress Control Number has been applied for.

ISBN 978-1-6682-2789-3 (pbk)
ISBN 978-1-6682-2790-9 (ebook)

"The great thing in this world is not so much where we stand, as in what direction we are moving: sometimes we sail with the wind, sometimes against it—but sail we will, not drift nor lie at anchor."

My sister first shared this variation of Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr.'s quote with my brother when he was sailing around the world many years ago. He then sent it to me in an airmail letter, at a time I needed some hope. Throughout the years, whatever's happened, the knowledge that we will sometimes sail with the wind, and sometimes against it, has connected me to them and reminded me to keep going and trust that I'll find a way through.

In 2021, our brother, Andrew, died from a rare form of early-onset dementia. I dedicate this book to him and his family, my sister, Esther, and her family, and my own dear family.

For all that we've had, all that we've lost, and all that we have still. Let's keep on sailing.

Contents

LIST OF RESOURCE BUILDERS ix

INTRODUCTION xi

✲ PART ONE ✲

TEN QUESTIONS . . . FROM YOU

1 How will I ever get through this? 1

2 How did this happen to me? 17

3 What is wrong with me? 35

4 How am I supposed to accept this? 51

5 Why do I feel so physically exhausted? 63

6 Why do I feel so lonely? 75

7 Why do I cry so much? 95

8 Will I ever get over it? 109

9 Will I ever be happy again? 119

10 Who am I now? 135

REFLECTION 147

✲ PART TWO ✲

TEN QUESTIONS . . . FROM ME

11 Do you know your strengths? 155

12 Who and what do you want to live for? 173

13 Who and what is still good in your world? 191

14 Where and when could you be kinder to yourself? 199

15 Who are your 3 a.m. people? 215

16 Are you reading this situation accurately? 225

17 What gets you out of your head and back into your body? 239

18 Is that helping or harming you? 251

19 What's your resilience recipe? 263

20 How has loss changed you? 277

FURTHER READING AND RESOURCES 295

"WELCOME TO HOLLAND" 301

WANT TO KEEP WORKING WITH ME? 303

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS 305

❋ LIST OF RESOURCE BUILDERS ❋

CHARTING YOUR LOSSES TO BUILD BELIEF 11

PIECING YOUR SHATTERED ASSUMPTIVE WORLD BACK TOGETHER 21

ISLANDS OF CERTAINTY 28

UNDERSTANDING YOUR GRIEF MAP 46

BREAKING FREE FROM THE "WHAT IF" LOOP 55

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING EXHAUSTION 71

CURATING YOUR COMEBACKS—WAYS TO RESPOND WHEN WORDS HURT 84

MANAGING A GRIEF AMBUSH 99

MAPPING YOUR GRIEF RIPPLES 102

GROWING A LIFE AROUND LOSS 115

HUNTING THE GOOD STUFF 125

THE "THINGS TO LOOK FORWARD TO" CALENDAR 131

STORYTELLING TO DISCOVER THE NEW YOU 141

MIDPOINT REFLECTION 150

UNVEIL YOUR HIDDEN STRENGTHS 161

TAPPING INTO WONDER THROUGH MUSIC 170

THE MEANING AND MATTERING MANUAL 185

THE "WHAT'S STILL TRUE" LIST 198

SPOTTING YOUR INNER CRITIC: A SELF-ASSESSMENT 203

SELF-COMPASSION BREAKS DESIGNED TO BE REMEMBERED: FUCK AND SHIT 208

STICKY-NOTE MANTRAS 210

SORTING YOUR SUPPORT 221

COMMON THINKING TRAPS THAT KEEP YOU STUCK 230

SLOW-RELEASE PARACHUTES AND FAST FIXES 245

SHIFTING UNHELPFUL BEHAVIORS 257

ESCAPING THE PERFECTION TRAP 260

YOUR PERSONAL RESILIENCE RECIPE 266

TWENTY KEY QUESTIONS 273

HOW HAS YOUR LOSS CHANGED YOU? WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED? 284

INTRODUCTION

Backstage, heart pounding, I hear the one-minute countdown. A packed Town Hall awaits. I picture my husband and friends somewhere out there in the audience; he's no doubt shifting nervously in his seat. Stepping onto the famous circle of red carpet I've seen in so many TED Talks before, I take a breath and begin: "If you've ever lost someone you truly love, if you've ever had your heart broken, struggled through an acrimonious divorce, or been the victim of infidelity, please stand up if you are able to."

A murmur ripples through the room as people glance around, unsure at first. Then they begin to stand up. I keep going. "If you've lived through a natural disaster, been bullied, or been made redundant, please stand up and stay standing.

"If you've ever had a miscarriage or abortion, or struggled with infertility, please stand up."

More people rise. Some stand hesitantly; I spot a flicker of recognition on their faces as they do so. I pause, letting the evidence settle.

"If you, or someone you love, has suffered from mental illness, had a life-changing diagnosis, dealt with suicide, or endured some form of physical impairment, stand up."

By now, the room is a sea of standing figures. I watch as they look around—at friends, strangers, family members, and colleagues—taking in the silent, but suddenly very visible, truth surrounding us all.

"Adversity doesn't discriminate," I say, my voice steady. "If you are alive, you have had (or will have) to endure some tough times."

I watch as row upon row of faces take in the collective weight of human suffering laid bare across the auditorium.

I know how widespread human suffering is from an academic standpoint—75 percent of adults are exposed to a potentially traumatic event in their lifetime—but seeing it in the flesh is something quite different. That moment when I watched hundreds and hundreds of people realize that they are not alone in their suffering has never left me.

I began my TED Talk in this way to shine a spotlight on something we all know individually, but rarely confront at this scale: life hurts. Struggle and suffering are part of life; in time they come to us all. No one escapes unscathed.

On an average Tuesday afternoon in February 2011, I was standing at the kitchen sink, washing up after lunch. Suddenly, the whole house started to shake violently. The fridge leaped across the room, windows buckled, cupboards burst open, and glasses and crockery flew to the floor. The walls shuddered and the floor bounced. Several long moments later,

I found myself clinging to the sink, staring around in utter horror at the carnage.

In just twenty-two violent seconds, Christchurch, New Zealand, was decimated by a 6.3 magnitude earthquake. Buildings crumbled; 185 lives were lost.

The chaos of the day was immense. Confusion reigned as families, friends, and colleagues endeavored to find one another amid the destruction. Later, the sense of overwhelm, as the enormity of the rebuild task became apparent, was palpable.

As a Londoner, I'd had no experience of earthquakes and was totally unprepared for what happened, or what was to come. After the first, less damaging earthquake in September 2010, and the huge devastation of the February quake, more than 11,000 aftershocks and two further major events would rock the city. But everyone was unprepared: these quakes were the first surface-rupturing earthquakes of that magnitude in over sixteen thousand years in the area.

There's no doubt it was a sad time for Christchurch—February 22 was the deadliest day in New Zealand's peacetime history—but, in the weeks and months that followed, I struggled to grasp why I continued to feel so upset. While many of our friends had lost their homes and loved ones, I was one of the lucky ones. Yes, our house cracked and things were smashed, but our home was still standing. Our eldest was supposed to take the fated number three bus through the center of town that afternoon—it was crushed by a collapsing building, killing eight passengers—but somehow didn't. Our other two kids were physically protected at their school, just meters away from tumbling cliffs and deadly rockfall. My builder husband, Trevor, and his teams helped scores of people in their damaged properties, and

worked for hours to rescue a woman trapped in her pancaked house. The kids and I did have to leave our home because of the lack of power, sanitation, and other essential services for some weeks, but we at least had a home to return to. And my work was in high demand.

So why did I feel so miserable? The sadness I felt for Christchurch was huge, but given we'd come through the quake relatively unscathed, I didn't feel I had earned the right to grieve.

When the big Christchurch earthquake hit, I put my doctoral research on hold and worked with the local schools, not-for-profit organizations, government departments, and search-and-rescue teams to help their people cope in the post-quake world. Working closely with the disaster response teams during this time helped me understand and process my feelings. One of them explained that grief doesn't only stem from death—any significant loss can trigger grief. That simple explanation gave me permission to grieve. I learned that you don't have to lose some*one* to experience profound loss, and that naming it as loss can be both validating and healing.

This completely transformed my understanding of grief. I realized I wasn't just sad for the lives lost, or the destruction of our city; I was grieving a shattered sense of safety, a loss of the way things used to be. The cracks in our home mirrored the irreparable fractures in the way I had assumed life would unfold. Recognizing this brought clarity and, eventually, comfort.

Before I had experienced the earthquakes and their aftermath, it had never occurred to me that people might grieve anything

other than the death of a loved one. We'd already lost my dear mum years earlier, so I thought I knew grief. But living in that city, at that time, taught me how helpful it is to identify the losses involved in any significant change or transition, and to acknowledge the grief that accompanies them. Understanding I was grieving and had a right to do so was a landmark moment in my adult development. Understanding that, as humans, we don't just grieve when we lose some*one*, but when we lose some*thing* of value to us, came to be a cornerstone of my professional practice in the years ahead.

Of course, tragically, in this life we experience death losses, too—the type of grief I've come to know only too well.

It was a bright, sunny morning, the last day of May 2014. I've still got a photo from that morning: a faded picture of our beautiful twelve-year-old daughter, Abi, and me in the bathroom with face masks on. Even now, all these years later, the unsuspecting innocence captured in that moment hits me hard.

The car was packed, ready for a long weekend exploring the rugged hills and pristine lakes of the country's South Island: three families, three 4WDs packed full, fourteen bikes, three blissful days off-grid lay ahead.

Two phone calls, ten hours apart, changed our lives forever. The first came just as we were about to leave home: Abi's friend Ella ringing to ask if she'd like to ride in their car. We said yes, of course. Abi and Ella were inseparable: they went to school together, played sports together, prowled the local village on Friday afternoons together, traipsed constantly in and out of

each other's homes and cars. We dropped Abi off on the way out of town, watching her scamper away to meet Ella: no big goodbyes, not even a peck on the cheek. A hastily shouted "see you later" and off she went. Only we never did see her later, not alive at least.

We'd driven south, arrived at the lodge, and had just begun dinner when the second phone call came. The owner approached our table nervously. "A policeman is on the phone," she said, looking at Trevor and me. "He wants to speak to one of you." And so it begins.

There'd been an accident. The policeman couldn't tell us more on the phone, but said he was on his way to see us. Twenty long, agonizingly slow minutes later, we had been ushered into the owner's office, the two of us sitting in front of the officer, trying to process what he was saying. Our beautiful, one-of-a-kind Abi, Ella, and Ella's mum, Sally, a dear friend of mine, had all been killed in a tragic car accident. Dead. Not injured, not even on life support, but actually dead. Killed. Instantly. Car. Stop sign. Accident. Killed. Dead. Gone. All three gone.

The words failed to make sense. Our bubbly, ebullient Abi, gone from our world forever. Our gorgeous, teeny-weeny girl—who, just that morning, was playing at being the teenager we expected her to become with her ridiculous face masks—taken in a moment of madness. All that life no more. Even now, over a decade on, it's impossible to fathom.

In all honesty, I can hardly remember the awfulness of those first agonizing moments, and don't particularly want to. I know my world tilted, shifting off its axis.

So I know the loss of death and the grief it carries, just as I know and appreciate the impact of living losses, too.

Both before and after Abi's death, my career has focused on one question: Why do some humans cope with stress, uncertainty, and change better than others? I've studied well-being science and resilience research since 2009: first in the United States with my mentor, Marty Seligman, arguably the world's most famous living psychologist, then via a PhD at Auckland University of Technology.

My Christchurch earthquake disaster recovery work partway through that PhD taught me more about resilience than I'd ever gleaned from textbooks. Learning about this stuff in shiny Ivy League lecture halls is one thing; running community events when there aren't enough buildings left standing to host them, with ongoing shakes interrupting your train of thought and sending everyone to their hands and knees, is quite another.

Until the earthquakes, my focus had been on research, writing, and publishing. But in the post-quake recovery, I discovered the power of sharing this material in person. That shift—from writing about resilience to presenting it face-to-face, helping workplaces and communities navigate stress, loss, and uncertainty—expanded the reach of my work, bringing it to new audiences. But it did something else, too. Taking my ideas beyond the page allowed me to engage in two-way conversations, speeding up the feedback loop and deepening my own learning.

I had almost completed a series of research studies into psychological flourishing when Abi, Ella, and Sally were killed. I wasn't convinced how useful any of what I'd learned would be when the girls first died. Many times I asked myself, *How will I*

ever get through this? Even with all my training, I, too, wondered how we'd survive. I just knew we had to, somehow.

Their untimely deaths reshaped my world, and my work. Everything I had learned about resilience was tested, redefined, and deepened.

When Abi died, I dug into resilience psychology, looking for what might help—not just for me but others, too. I explored contemporary bereavement research, looking for insights to help me understand the experience. Sharing what I learn has always been instinctive; I guess it's how I make sense of the world. Within ten days of Abi's death, I was writing a blog. Within eighteen months, that blog became my book *Resilient Grieving*.

I could never have predicted where this deep fascination with human resilience and coping with loss would lead: how that book would spark a TED Talk; that Covid would send that talk viral; or that all of it would shape my career in profound ways. What I do know is this: whether through writing, speaking, or designing courses, sharing what I've learned and helping others find their way through loss is what gets me out of bed in the mornings.

Beyond my big public projects, I also love the work I do delivering training to groups—whether in person or virtually—because it lets me stay in conversation with people, hearing directly what resonates and what doesn't. The privilege of working at scale, rather than one-on-one, is that I can spot broader trends: which questions keep cropping up, which tools are downloaded most, which slides are photographed, which strategies people gravitate toward, which phrases stick. I love seeing people learn from each other, testing new ideas together, and refining my material in real time. Through research projects, live training, social media, and AMAs ("ask me anything" sessions), I have an ongoing dialogue

with people worldwide. I am constantly humbled by people's willingness to share and experiment alongside me.

This book is the culmination of everything I've learned about resilience and loss, and the tools that have helped me, and many others, find a way to live and grieve at the same time. I've written it in response to requests from people who found solace in my TED Talk or *Resilient Grieving* and want to know how these insights apply to the hidden grief associated with living losses.

I've structured the book in two parts, each with a set of ten questions. Part One includes ten questions people typically ask when they come to me, their lives in tatters, wondering how they'll ever find their way back to hope and happiness again. Among them: *Why do I feel so physically exhausted?*, *How did this happen to me?*, and *Who am I now?*

In Part Two, the roles are reversed, with the second set of ten questions posed by me to you.

While the first ten questions emerged initially from conversations with clients, they have since been tested by science. As a researcher, I was born curious. Or maybe it's that, as a curious person, I'm a born researcher. Who knows? After years of hearing the same questions over and over from the bereaved, I wanted to see if they were used more widely, by other people, of different ages, in different places, facing all kinds of different adversities. And so, in 2024, I partnered with the team at the Institute of Wellbeing & Resilience, and the Stressful Life Events (SLE) Study was born. We posed twenty-five questions to people all over the world. As well as getting a sense of what they'd been

through and when, we inquired about the questions they'd asked themselves, how much the event had changed their beliefs and in what ways, how they'd grown as a result of the struggle to come to terms with what they'd lived through, and other questions about their grief knowledge, levels of support, and societal expectations.

From 13,600 data points in the initial survey, and follow-up written interviews involving ninety-four participants, we were able to identify the top ten questions that preoccupy people in their darkest days. This was groundbreaking work; no one had undertaken research like this or discovered these insights before.

I wasn't surprised to learn that the number one question buzzing around in people's heads is *How will I ever get through this?* I get asked that all the time. I didn't expect the second most frequent question to be *Why do I feel so physically exhausted?*, though. Next came *Who am I now?*, closely followed by *Will the pain ever end?*, *How did this happen to me?* (which I always think of as the WTF question), *How am I supposed to accept this?*, *Why do I feel so lonely?*, *Will I ever be happy again?*, *What is wrong with me?*, and *Why do I cry so much?*

Do these questions sound familiar? I bet they do.

In each chapter, I focus on one of these questions, sharing the practical strategies I've seen transform people's understanding of, and approach to, grief. My hope is that you'll find some comfort in my words, discovering that you are not alone in thinking this way and there's a constructive purpose to the constant questioning.

The eagle-eyed among you may notice that, in this book, the questions don't appear in the pecking order revealed by the SLE Study. I took this editorial decision to assist with the flow of the book, enabling me to build your knowledge of grief layer by layer, in ways I've seen help my clients make sense of what's going on.

I'm so grateful to everyone who participated in this study, sharing their stories to illuminate what they think and how they feel as they wade through life's toughest times. You'll find some of their stories shared here—with their permission, of course—and surnames and any identifying features removed to protect their privacy. The stories in the pages ahead come from many different sources: from conversations I've had with audience members as soon as I'm offstage after a keynote address; from workshops and courses; via email, social media, and even snail mail! One of the many privileges of my job is the incredible correspondence I receive from people who write to me, sharing their loss stories. People often assume this must place a huge weight on me, and are surprised when I tell them how frequently uplifting it is to read about how my correspondents' challenges have changed them, what they've learned, how their beliefs have shifted, and what helped them claw their way back to living a full, meaningful life. The richness of those insights is captured in the pages ahead.

As you get to Chapters 11 to 20 and begin to reflect upon my questions to you, I encourage you to approach them with curiosity. Each chapter covers the many coping strategies I've seen help my clients rebuild their world, piece by painstaking piece, and has activities enabling you to expand your thinking, contextualizing it to your own specific loss. You'll discover the inner strengths you have to draw from, how being real-not-perfect isn't just a fluffy platitude but a potent act of self-preservation, why some people just can't handle your grief and what to do about it, and how to cut through costly assumptions and discover the world's fastest way of establishing what's working for you and what's not.

I often refer to a stressful life event as a BFT—bloody fucking thing—a phrase we've adopted in our family as shorthand for

life's challenges. When there are no neat words, no tidy labels to capture the dizzying array of losses humans encounter, BFT sums it up best. So, whether your loss is the end of a relationship, the shattering of a dream, or any other change so profound it feels like the ground beneath you has shifted, I see you and your BFT.

The contents of every single one of the chapters ahead—the theories, research, stories, strategies, and activities—are designed to inform and empower you to find your own path through pain, unearth your personal capacity for resilience, and nurture the strength within you. You have to be committed to doing the work, though. It's about actively engaging in the process rather than reading passively and waiting for healing to come. Get yourself a dedicated notebook and be prepared to "learn in" to the activities—Resource Builders—I've included. Some of these are reflection prompts for writing, some involve music, others are downloadable resources. Keep an open mind as you work through them. You'll also see QR codes in the Resource Builders. These link straight to a page where you can download all the activities from the book, plus extra free resources, in one handy place. Just point your phone camera at the QR code. Try things and be your own experiment—just as I was forced to in the months and years after Abi died.

Surviving devastating loss is not easy; I won't pretend otherwise. As you'll discover, there is no magic bullet, no one-size-fits-all secret code to handling unwanted change—and you may be surprised to learn that there are no set stages to grief, either. Everyone's road is different; only you can find your way.

Grief is probably the most universal human experience of all. It will shape your life, the choices you make, the dreams you have, the pain you feel, and how you see yourself and the world

around you. No one likes change or loss, but somehow we survive. Growth from adversity is real; in fact, as you'll learn in the pages ahead, post-traumatic growth is far more common than post-traumatic stress—only much less headline-grabbing. As much as we understandably rant and rail against our struggles, being forced to navigate them very often leads us to rethink the way we live, what matters most, and the role we play in connecting to that. Adversity can be the mother of reinvention.

PART ONE

Ten questions . . . from you

CHAPTER 1

How will I ever get through this?

No matter the type of bloody fucking thing (BFT) you've experienced, there'll have been a moment in which life as you knew it was gone. Maybe it was a phone call in the middle of the night, a doctor's pause before delivering the news, or the sound of the door closing behind someone who wasn't supposed to leave. Whatever form it took, you probably remember it vividly.

Then, in the stunned silence that followed, the question may have crashed in, occupying every crevice of your mind, body, and soul: *How will I ever get through this?* Soon after the shock began to subside, doubt might have overcome you. It comes with the territory of unwanted change.

Let me tell you this, though: you *can* and *will* survive this BFT. I know it might feel impossible right now. I've been there, too, barely able to imagine getting through the next day, let alone the next year. It isn't about having all the answers, but about

having hope, kindling belief, and being committed to finding your way through.

Doubt versus belief

How will I ever get through this? is the most common question people ask in the wake of life's hardest moments. I'm not saying this just from personal experience, but from my research. When we asked people all over the world navigating stress, loss, and change what their biggest concerns were, this question topped the list. Almost two-thirds of the people we surveyed said it was the first question that came to mind.

It doesn't just come once, either. Doubt over getting through is the uninvited guest that keeps barging in, hijacking your mind at 3:13 a.m. and casting a net of gloom over every single aspect of your future. I hear this question all the time, and, given you're reading this book, I'm guessing you've asked it of yourself, too.

I get it. When Abi died, I asked myself the same question. The sheer weight of grief made it impossible to imagine surviving another hour, let alone all these years without our girl. I doubted everything.

Doubt is natural, doubt is common, but doubt is actually misplaced.

Scientific studies have revealed an unexpected truth about the human capacity for coping with disaster: we are hardwired to cope. The most common response to potentially traumatic events is resilience. We are incredibly adaptable.

I'll be honest: I do sometimes encounter reservations from others about the word "resilience." I get it when people tell me they've had enough of hearing it; I feel a degree of resilience fatigue, too. But it doesn't deter me from celebrating the human

ability to adapt to, endure, learn from, and grow through hardship.

As much as we don't like change, we humans somehow manage to find our way through. Study after study shows many, many people, like you, have been forced to endure all manner of terrible things, and have gone on to have positive life experiences. While we tend to assume that trauma leads inevitably to post-traumatic stress, the reality is more nuanced. Let's look at the science; when my mind is full of doubt, I find looking at concrete data helps separate fact from fiction. There's no doubting that experiencing trauma is common—the Australian National Survey of Health and Wellbeing suggests 75 percent of adults will experience a traumatic event in their lifetime—but studies also show that only 8 percent of people (outside the military) go on to develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) compared with an estimated 60 percent who report post-traumatic growth—that's growth emerging from the struggle and hardship, producing new insights, strengths, or perspectives. PTSD rates are certainly higher for military personnel than the general population, reflecting the extreme and repeated nature of traumatic exposures in the military, but the comparative statistics challenge the common narrative of trauma as purely destructive. Many people experience post-traumatic stress symptoms, but these usually subside within weeks or months. Adversity changes us, but for many, it also becomes a catalyst for growth.

For many years, Columbia University's George Bonanno was one of the few clinical psychologists broadcasting the untold story of human adaptability. His 2004 research highlighted that "because much of the psychological knowledge base regarding how adults cope with loss has been derived from individuals who

have experienced significant psychological problems (or sought treatment), theorists often underestimated and misunderstood resilience, viewing it either as a pathological state or as something seen only in rare and exceptionally healthy individuals." In other words, old-school researchers literally decided there was something wrong with people who didn't develop psychological disorders after being exposed to potentially traumatic events, forgetting their results were skewed by the people they were asking.

Reading this in the year after Abi died was a revelation to me. It felt like a lifeline, offering me a glimmer of hope during the hopelessness and helplessness of the early months. It reminded me that resilience wasn't just for extraordinary people, but for people like me (and you), too.

So hear me when I say, you *can* and *will* get through this. I know it's not what you wanted—you likely didn't see it coming—but you must believe me when I promise you this: you already have heaps of resources in you that are going to help you survive, and by reading this book you're going to learn a whole lot more. Yes, your world will look different, but that doesn't mean you won't have good, purposeful, happy days ahead. I do. You can, too.

Ordinary magic

Okay, so having offered you the promise that you will get through this, let's get to the "how" part. Having spent the last two decades listening to people's stories, reading, and conducting scientific research, I can reveal there's no one route to coping—it looks different for each and every one of us.

During my master's degree at the University of Pennsylvania, I learned from psychology professor Karen Reivich. I re-

member sitting in her lectures, hanging on her every word. Her groundbreaking work was part of the reason I went all the way to Philadelphia to study: she was the master resilience trainer of the US Army at the time, and played a part in the training UPenn was delivering to boost mental health in schools. There I was, waiting for the moment she would unveil the secret formula to resilience—and then she started talking about stews! While I had my doubts initially, the stew metaphor is useful because it captures an essential truth: there's no standard recipe; there's no one right way to cope. Each of us has to find our own way through life's toughest challenges. We have to create our own individual recipe of ways of thinking, acting, and being that helps us get through each moment. Some people make their stews from abundant supplies of friends, family, and faith; others lean toward purpose, exercise, music, nature, or rituals. Each person finds ways that work for them to overcome their doubts and keep going.

Imogen was one of the participants in the SLE Study. In the midst of her family's mental health crisis, including her daughter's multiple suicide attempts, Imogen found herself drowning in doubts. She describes those years as "brutal." Doubting her ability to manage or to give her daughter the support she needed, she recalls how paralyzed she felt by fear. But, she told me, "paralysis wasn't an option when we were fighting for our daughter's life." Her resilience instincts kicked in: she knew she just had to take the next step, and the next breath, and do the next right thing. "It helped to remember that I can't fix everything (or, some days, anything), but what I can do is make sure that she absolutely knows how loved she is." Realizing she couldn't help her daughter if she herself fell apart, Imogen put a self-care plan in place. She made herself lean on her friends, and found some effective

counseling. "I can't be the strength she can lean on if I fall apart—so I make myself go for that walk, drink that water, eat that veg, and talk to people. Even if it is sometimes frustrating when they give you advice and it's clear that they don't understand, it's still better than being alone."

If you're doubting how you are ever going to get through this, read Imogen's comments again. They echo a key research finding few seem to realize: resilience isn't some elusive, fixed trait or superpower that some people have and others don't. The drive to survive is innate within us, and we can bolster it with learnable skills and acquirable resources—such as realistic optimism, honest communication, hope, love, curiosity, bravery, and emotional and psychological flexibility.

Our capacity to navigate tough times comes from the choices we make in the micro moments of our days—in the ways we choose to think, act, and be. Your ability to somehow pick your way through what's happened lies in doing all the ordinary things Imogen did: not letting yourself fall apart, keeping connections with friends alive and communications open, focusing your attention on the things you can change and somehow accepting the stuff you can't, asking for help, telling your people you love them, and finding ways to be kind to yourself along the way.

The University of Minnesota's Professor Ann Masten, renowned for her pioneering research on resilience in human development, refers to these kinds of behaviors as "ordinary magic." It's a phrase I've always loved. It fits well with our stew metaphor: our strength to steer through tough times comes from pretty ordinary, everyday actions, available to us all, and there's a cumulative potency to those ingredients. But we have to cre-

ate the magic. Ultimately, how we survive each loss and change comes down to us. Ordinary magic can be as simple as texting a friend to say "I'm struggling today," or as deliberate as setting a reminder to get outside each morning. These small acts may not feel like magic in the moment, but they add up and make all the difference over time.

Many of the "ordinary magic" strategies I share in my training are encapsulated in Imogen's personal resilience recipe:

- having strong, supportive relationships you can count on, but not beating yourself (or your loved ones) up when shortcomings are revealed
- having a sense of survivor's mission; refusing to stay stuck or overwhelmed
- focusing on what you *can* change, *have* got, or *can* do
- keeping up your self-care, even when it feels pointless and insufficient
- having copious amounts of patience, courage, and perseverance

Bravery, perseverance, and vulnerability

In the days after our daughter was killed, I came across a passage in Veronica Roth's *Allegiant* (the book Abi had been reading at the time of her death) that sums up how I feel about bravery. It says there are lots of ways to be brave, that sometimes bravery involves laying down your life or giving up everything and