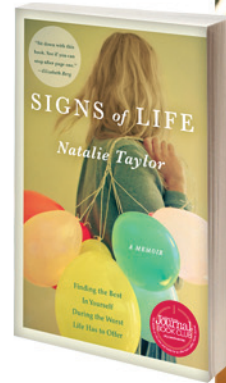


A letter from Natalie Taylor

Signs of Life a novel by Natalie Taylor

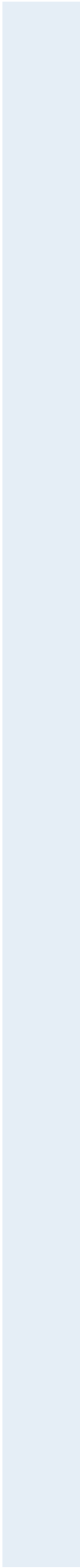


Dear Reader,

It's a few minutes past nine in my house as I write this. My son has been asleep for an hour. Since we finished our songs and I slowly crept out of his room, my night so far has consisted of putting Legos away, picking dried Play-Doh out of our living room rug, washing dishes, and wiping counters. So while you may reside somewhere else, in a place much unlike mine, I am certain you have lived this same evening. I'm sure you too have reveled in the joys of bedtime. I'm sure you also live for the questions whispered in the darkness ("Mom, do you know how to scuba dive?"), and because after that, and a little elbow grease, you get to look at a clean, quiet house for the first time since the sun came up. So no matter where you are, we're not that far apart.

There was a long period of time when I did not think that anyone had the same evenings I did, when I thought there was no one in the world who could relate to my house. Four and a half years ago, my husband Josh died suddenly in a fluke accident. We had been married for eighteen months and were expecting our first child. My son Kai was born four months after Josh's passing. In the two years following my husband's death, I felt much like a city leveled by an earthquake. I was filled with pure devastation and felt very alone. There was first the harrowing reality of who I had lost and a profound sense that I would be royally screwed up forever. I was a twenty-four year old widow, and I was convinced that every night of my life would now have to be spent sleeping in my parents' bed in between my mom and dad, much like a child does on the night of a bad dream.

Slowly, things began to appear in my desolate, destroyed landscape. I started to read books again. I went back to work teaching high school English. I moved out of my parents' bed and then eventually back into my house. My son was born, and I was born again as a parent. My family members and in-laws refused to leave us alone, driving me completely insane and simultaneously pulling me out of the rubble with their bare hands. And throughout all of these experiences, I wrote. I wrote what was in my head because I had to get it out of my brain somehow. Now I am preparing a letter to you about this story of loss, life, and love that I am sure won't seem too far from your own.



It is my sincerest hope that we can create a connection through this story. If there is one thing most of us on this planet have in common, it is that we've each faced the "Back-Up Plan" moment when life changes without our consent and we have to figure out, on our own, a way to move forward. I want to build this community of the spirit of survival with my little story from my one little house in the Midwest. Perhaps after you've read about Kai and Josh and my family and my students, you will conclude, as I have, that none of us has to live on that barren landscape; that despite our distance and differences, we have the same human desire to find happiness on this shared earth that seems to quake in the most unexpected ways.

All the best and happy reading,

Natalie