



THE OPRAH  
MAGAZINE



# HOW TO BE A HAPPIER CAMPER

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forward  
in your life

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your underwear again



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GLENNON DOYLE MELTON

# Hurts So Good

Next time you're tempted to shut out negative emotions, try gritting your teeth and welcoming that unlikely teacher, heartbreak.



ILLUSTRATION BY Keith Negley

DOYLE MELTON: AMY PAULSON

**YOU KNOW THOSE** Staples commercials in which, during times of crisis, a coworker can simply press the red "easy" button and any problem will magically be solved?

For most of my life, I was an easy-button junkie, doing whatever I could to avoid pain. There was no organic reason for this—I come from a loving family and by all outward measures was a lucky girl. And yet I never really felt comfortable in my skin. As I entered adolescence, my discomfort

got worse. Overeating was the only thing that made me feel better. Food became my retreat, a way to numb myself. I became bulimic and years later an alcoholic. My addictions were my hiding place, a way to make myself untouchable. If you couldn't reach me, you couldn't hurt me. I hid within my addictions for years.

At age 26, I became pregnant. I wasn't married, and I knew I was completely unprepared for motherhood. But as I stared at that positive pregnancy test, for the first time in years I felt a sense of clarity. The brokenness I had been wallowing in gave way to a startling realization: I wanted the baby I was carrying. I wanted it more than overeating or drinking and the anesthetizing fog they promised. In that moment, I decided I would have the baby, and I would do it sober. No more easy buttons.

With my sister's help, I made my way to my first recovery meeting, and as hard as sobriety was for me—as hard as it's been every day since then—I felt a profound sense of relief there. Fourteen years and three kids later, I've learned to live with my own discomfort, to allow myself to be touched by pain—even to embrace it as the great healer, a kind of traveling professor. Pain knocks on everyone's door. If we are wise, we will greet it and say, *Come in, sit down, and don't leave until you've taught me what I need to know.* Allow heartbreak to guide you at every turn.

Ask yourself: What breaks your heart?

At least once a day, I hear some version of this: "Oh, I can't bear to look at that rescue dog. It breaks my heart." "I can't read about those poor Syrian refugees." "I can't visit my friend in the oncology ward. It's too hard seeing her that way." As if our hearts were meant to be returned to

our maker in pristine condition! No, the heart is like any other muscle: It has to be worked, even ripped apart in order to grow stronger. We must get familiar with heartbreak, become curious about it, because there we will find essential clues for solving the mystery of who we are intended to be.

I recently met a group of women in Iowa who'd each lost a baby to stillbirth or early infant death. In 2003, they formed a sisterhood and then an advocacy group: **Healthy Birth Day.** Together, through education and other kinds of support, they've contributed to lowering the stillbirth rate in their state so significantly that doctors are scratching their heads. My theory? Instead of withdrawing after their losses or finding ways to disconnect from the magnitude of their suffering, they ran straight toward it. Their pain became their fuel. Their courage saved others from the misery they'd experienced. And not coincidentally, they also found family in one another.

What breaks your heart? Hunger? Misogyny? Racial injustice? Mental illness? Domestic violence? The warrior knows that her heartbreak is her map. It will lead her toward her purpose, her tribe.

These days, on my office wall I keep a list of my easy buttons: alcohol, overeating, overexercising, shopping, excessive Facebooking. I avoid them all and try always to face hurt squarely. Because I've learned that when I run from pain, I bypass transformation—like a caterpillar constantly jumping out of its cocoon, right before it was about to become a butterfly.

**GLENNON DOYLE MELTON** is the author of the number one New York Times best-selling memoir *Love Warrior*, a 2016 Oprah's Book Club pick; the founder of *Momastery*, an online community; and the creator and president of the nonprofit *Together Rising*.



**THE UPSHIFT**  
If it breaks your heart, don't turn away. Use it as a teachable moment.

Five Des Moines moms—strangers until each lost an infant daughter—chose to honor their children's memories by helping others, as well as one another. Kate Safris, Tiffan Yamen, Janet Petersen, Jan Caruthers, and Kerry Biondi-Morlan, acknowledging that their lives would never be the same after tragedy, took action. They launched their "Count the Kicks" campaign to educate couples on how to reduce the risk of stillbirth. They also created a story-sharing site for other grieving parents and helped secure more than \$2 million for research into preventing stillbirth and infant death in Iowa. "The loss of our girls brought us together," Safris tells O. "Every day we now walk together in our pain in the hope that others won't have to endure what we faced. When we hear that our organization helped save another baby, we know we're making a real difference." Go to [countthekicks.org](http://countthekicks.org) to learn more.