

GRIEF IS THE WORD:

A Compendium of Grief Resources



compiled by

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POETRY, ELEGY, BLESSINGS

Beloved on the Earth: 150 Poems of Grief and Gratitude

edited by Jim Perlman, Deborah Cooper, Mara Hart and Pamela Mittlefehldt

This is my go-to, weathered and worn book for grief poems. While not curated by theme or type, it nonetheless contains an incredible collection of some of the best grief poems anywhere.

The Art of Losing: Poems of Grief & Healing

edited by Kevin Young

Sectioned, most-appropriately, into chapters in accordance with the grieving process - Reckoning, Regret, Remembrance, Ritual, Recovery and Redemption - this anthology is my other go-to grief poetry book. No celebrant engaged in should be without this book.

The Long Pale Corridor: Contemporary Poems of Bereavement

edited by Judi Benson & Agneta Falk

This book from the UK contains 304 poems and readings from sources both famous and obscure. It's a treasure trove I expect to be mining for years to come.

The Sorrow Psalms: a book of twentieth-century elegy

edited by Lynn Strongin

This is another very accessible volume of modern poems, many by well-known poets. I have cited from it a handful of times and will continue to do so.

Inventions of Farewell: A Book of Elegies

edited by Sandra M. Gilbert

This is an important and impressive compendium of poetry and as with the listings above, it is sorted by the type of loss.

Times of Grief: Mourning Poems

edited by Jeffrey Yang

Comprising 49 poems or stations of grief, this tiny volume is pithy yet eclectically and carefully culled from an array of poetic sources worldwide and through the ages. To quote from the preface, "its structure echoes the Buddhist calendar of mourning - the forty-nine bardo days of chants and ritual meditation that assist the dead on their journey to the next life."

The Cure for Sorrow: A Book of Blessings for Times of Grief

by Jan Richardson

Jan is a gifted crafter of blessings - her previous book of blessings, *Circle of Grace*, is testament to that. This powerful book of blessings was born in the months and years after Jan's husband died suddenly. These words of blessing are ideal as readings for any communal grief ritual.

A Broken Heart Still Beats: After Your Child Dies

edited by Anne McCracken and Mary Semel

Covering 12 chapters, which range from shock to despair to anger to complicated grief to notions of time and legacy, this book is truly one of the best compilations of grief stories and poems from a wide array of writers, celebrities, et al, that while specific to a particular type of mourning – that for a child – offers fabulous and heart-wrenching perspectives on sudden loss and grief in general.

GRIEF & RITUAL STUDIES RESOURCES

Medical and Therapeutic Healing (MATH) Model

Bearing the Unbearable: Love, Loss, and the Heartbreaking Path of Grief

by Joanne Cacciatore, PhD

The author has crafted what I consider to be the most exquisite and singularly important book on grief written to date. As one who knows what it means to be with and experience grief, she leads the reader gently through the terrain, offering supportive practices and timeless wisdom for the way forward through and with grief.

It's OK That You're Not OK: Meeting Grief and Loss in a Culture That Doesn't Understand

by Megan Devine

This book belongs on every griever's grief literature bookshelf. Megan, a psychotherapist, grief advocate, and founder of the online community, Refuge in Grief, helps us reconceive of grief in real ways. It will shift the way you look at and experience grief.

Finding Meaning: The Sixth Stage of Grief

by David Kessler

Kessler picks up the thread from his groundbreaking work with Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and following the death of his son, in order to posit the finding and making of meaning as a sixth and necessary stage and/or state of grief.

Techniques of Grief Therapy: Creative Practices for Counseling the Bereaved

edited by Robert Neimeyer

While oriented to grief counselors, this workbook is nevertheless an invaluable resource for grief practitioners and/or celebrants who are engaged in community ritual. The tools and creative modalities can easily be adapted to suit ritual and circle work.

The Grief Recovery Handbook: The Action Program for Moving Beyond Death, Divorce and Other Losses *by John W. James and Russell Friedman*

This book is a seminal text for bereavement professionals. It is peppered with language about actions to take to complete the pain of loss, and “recovering” from the loss via a series of instructions and guidelines.

On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief Through the Five Stages of Loss *by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and David Kessler*

As a follow-up polemic to Kübler-Ross’ seminal work, *On Death and Dying*, this book, written in the months just prior and after Kübler-Ross’ death, revisits the five stages in light of more recent research and criticism, and walks grief tenders through practical methods for the various stages.

About Grief: Insights, Setbacks, Grace Notes, Taboos *by Ron Marasco and Brian Shuff*

This book offers a refreshing and interesting look at grief, as researched from the perspective of theatre and literary professionals.

Grief is a Journey: Finding Your Path Through Loss *by Dr. Kenneth J. Doka*

This is one of the most accessible and practical of grief therapy books. Dr. Doka offers salient ideas about moving through grief and addresses the importance of ritual in the grief process.

Anxiety: The Missing Stage of Grief: A Revolutionary Approach to Understanding and Healing the Impact of Loss *by Claire Bidwell Smith*

Bidwell Smith, author of *The Rules of Inheritance*, addresses anxiety relative to grief and explores pathways to acceptance and embracing the messiness and beauty of grief.

Shattered by Grief: Picking Up the Pieces to Become WHOLE Again *by Claudia Coenen*

Following her husband’s unexpected death, the author shares her experiences and practical tools, as a griever, expressive artist and professional counselor, for how to creatively navigate grief and reclaim a sense of wholeness.

Grief Dialogues: Stories on Love and Loss *by Elizabeth Coplan*

This curated collection of 60 stories, poems and plays by playwright Elizabeth Coplan looks at all the indelible, heartbreaking, and soul-piercing ways that grief walks alongside and within each of us.

Creative Acceptance through Resilience & Empowerment (CARE) Model

Send My Roots Rain: A Companion on the Grief Journey

by *Kim Langley*

Grief tenders looking to navigate their way with reflective and spiritual practices will find many mindful activities and much solace and sustenance for their grief in this four-part compendium that also includes 60 powerful grief poems.

Grief Day by Day: Simple Practices and Daily Guidance for Living with Loss

by *Jan Warner*

This 52-week guidebook by the founder of the online community, Grief Speaks Out, offers daily reflections, weekly themes, and healing exercises to help grief tenders orient their grief into practical ways through the calendar of their days.

The Alchemy of Grief: Embracing Mourning Through Grace

by *Annamarie Fidel-Rice*

Drawing from her research and work in depth psychology and mythological studies, Fidel-Rice explores grief alchemically. Given that alchemy is the art and science of transformation, she maps grief through seven healing processes, which align to the seven steps of alchemy: *mortificatio*, *olutio*, *calcinatio*, *sublimatio*, *coagulatio*, *separatio*, and *coniunctio*.

A New Theology: Turning to Poetry in a Time of Grief

by *Sheila Bender*

This memoir is a riveting and heart-wrenching account of how a grieving mother turned to poetry in the months and years after her adult son died in a snowboarding accident in 2000. She shares how crafting a township memorial plaque and fund in his honor also lent solace, legacy and meaning to her journey through grief.

Turning the Corner on Grief Street: Loss and Bereavement as a Journey of Awakening

by *Terri Daniel*

This book posits loss as an opening to a larger, metaphysical awareness about death, grief, and how loss might invite us to live more fully in the face of our grief. -+

Healing Improv: A Journey Through Grief to Laughter

by *Bart Sumner*

While not the best memoir ever, this book, nonetheless, has us consider grief through the lens of a grieving father and improvisation master. The author shares his approach to grieving the loss of his young son, using skills and techniques gleaned from his improv work as an actor. Transferring the rules of improv to grief work helps griever stay present, embrace what is real in the moment and open themselves up to joy through the cathartic release of laughter.

The Other Side of Sadness: What the New Science of Bereavement Tells Us About Life After Loss *by George A. Bonanno*

This book is a game-changing look at grief from one of our foremost clinical psychologists at Columbia University that redefines the human capacity to know and be shaped by sorrow. Bonanno cites several religious and cultural rites from around the world to illustrate how the creative, communal and curative realms can meld to help mourners lament their loss in powerful and sustainably healthy ways.

Die Wise: A Manifesto for Sanity and Soul *by Stephen Jenkinson*

Die Wise is what Stephen Jenkinson might call a manual for death trade types but given that end of life entails anticipatory grief, he unpacks the notion of grief as the natural order of things; a wisdom to be learned, embodied and embraced.

Creating Through Grief: 11 Creative Activities for Helping Your Clients Explore and Transform Grief *edited by The Creative Grief Studio*

Compiled by the good folks at The Creative Grief Studio, this free e-book is a fabulous resource of expressive arts activities, some of which could be incorporated in communal grief work.

Passed and Present: Keeping Memories of Loved Ones Alive *by Allison Gilbert*

Gilbert takes Worden's task-oriented model of grief with this illustrated field guide for how to create meaningful rituals of remembrance in the face of grief and loss.

Crossing the Bridge: Creating Ceremonies for Grieving and Healing from Life's Losses *by Sydney B. Metrick*

This book is full of thoughtful, healing ceremonies and ritual ideas designed to help navigate life's transition points and losses.

The Crafting of Grief: Crafting Aesthetic Responses to Loss *by John Winslade and Lorraine Hedtke*

As the latest of 18 scholarly texts in the Death, Dying and Bereavement series by Routledge, *The Crafting of Grief* is a refreshing departure from standard grief literature in that the authors advocate for empowering the bereaved and "conversational" responses to loss that acknowledge that one's relationship with those who have died endures perennially.

Geography of Loss: Embrace What Is, Honor What Was, Love What Will Be *by Patti Digh*

Part self-help guidebook and part owner's manual for the landscape called grief and loss, this wise and witty text is an accessible and metaphoric tool to help griefsters and grief gurus alike navigate through the past, present and future of grief.

Nothing Gold Can Stay: The Colors of Grief

by Mark Belletini

Offering a narrative that is compelling and myriad, this memoir by a retired Unitarian Universalist minister, speaks to two dozen aspects or “colors” of grief, ranging from sorrow to ritual to anger to gratitude to dance, to name a few. He speaks to his own personal losses, living in San Francisco during the 70’s AIDS epidemic, and how his pastoral work as a theologian and minister has informed his perceptions of grief.

Good Grief Rituals: Tools for Healing

by Elaine Childs-Gowell

This 89-page book, while slim and lacking substance/detail, offers dozens of creative grief ritual ideas. And considering the fact that her book was written 25 years ago, readers will find themselves inspired by the practical and transformative potential of many of these simple rituals.

Rituals for Life, Love and Loss

by Dorothy McRae-McMahon and Sydney B. Metrick

This little-known book is an ideal book for any celebrant or DIY ceremonialist. It features a plethora of sample ceremonies, many which are focused on grief and loss.

Transformative Rituals: Celebrations for Personal Growth

by Gay and David Williamson

Written by Unity practitioners 20+ years ago, *Transformative Rituals* encompasses 25 ritual ideas and sample ceremonies, many of which can be adapted for communal grief ritual purposes.

Grieving with Your Whole Heart: Spiritual Wisdom and Practice for Finding Comfort, Hope and Healing after Loss *edited by Skylight Paths*

Filled with more than 50 reflective and healing practices, ranging from yoga to meditation to designed to writing and art-making, this book, while an apt guidebook for spiritual directors, offers many inspiring poems, prayers, story prompts and guided exercises for anyone wanting to engage in communal grief work.

The Truth About Grief: The Myth of Its Five Stage and the New Science of Loss

by Ruth Davis Konigsberg

Written by an investigative journalist, this book delves into the modern bereavement industry, its prevailing theorists, offerings and what the new science of grief has to teach us about this weighty topic.

The Creative Toolkit for Working with Grief and Bereavement: A Practitioner’s Guide with Activities and Worksheets *by Claudia Coenen*

This new release offers a glimpse at seven grief models (such as the dual process model, mindfulness, companioning, creative and somatic awareness modalities, and meaning-making) in order to help bereavement practitioners and grievers alike explore innovative grief pathways and processes.

Shamanic and Indigenous Grief Healing (SIGH) Model

Entering the Healing Ground: Grief, Ritual and the Soul of the World

by Francis Weller

I urge anyone interested in “entering the healing ground,” to do so through the open and accessible gate of this book. Francis Weller draws upon his psychotherapeutic and rites of passage teachings to posit an approach to grief work that will serve our communities well. He speaks of five gates to grief: *Everything We Love, We Will Lose; The Places That Have Not Known Love; The Sorrows of the World; What We Expected and Did Not Receive; and Ancestral Grief.*

Falling Out of Grace: Meditations on Loss, Healing and Wisdom

by Sobonfu Somé

Sobonfu offers the feminine healer’s voice to Dagara ritual and is leading grief ritual guru in North America. Her accounts and teachings are rich with wisdom and compassion.

The Dancing Healers: A Doctor’s Journey of Healing with Native Americans

by Carl A. Hammerschlag, M.D.

This book, largely autobiographical, is a good addition to indigenous teachings about healing and griefwork.

Ritual: Power, Healing and Community

by Malidoma Patrice Somé

This book is accessible, fascinating and necessary, and for anyone seeking to enact grief rituals, it is a mandatory read.

The Smell of Rain on Dust: Grief and Praise

by Martín Prechtel

Modern mythologist and Indigenous Soul leader Prechtel weaves grief so co-creatively into the human condition that to read this deliciously wrought work is to marvel at how and why it is that we’ve lost our societal way with grief.

Coming Back to Life: The Updated Guide to the Work That Reconnects

by Joanna Macy and Molly Brown

Ecotheologian Joanna Macy is a modern spiritual master and this book is essential reading for anyone who wants to understand grief from an ecological perspective.

LITERARY FICTION & MEMOIRS

The works below represent the slimmest fraction of memoirs on grief and loss, but these happen to be some of my favorites, relative to their respective narratives and interpretations and subjective experiences of grief and loss.

The Bright Hour: A Memoir of Living and Dying

by Nina Riggs

Caravan of No Despair: A Memoir of Loss and Transformation

by *Mirabai Starr*

Grief is the Thing with Feathers

by *Max Porter*

The Rules of Inheritance: A Memoir

by *Claire Bidwell Smith*

A Grief Observed

by *C.S. Lewis*

The Year of Magical Thinking

by *Joan Didion*

The Secret Life of Grief: A Memoir

by *Tanja Pajavic*

H is for Hawk

by *Helen Macdonald*

Let's Take the Long Way Home: A Memoir of Friendship

by *Gail Caldwell*

Rare Bird

by *Anna Whiston-Donaldson*

What Remains

by *Carole Radziwill*

When Breath Becomes Air

by *Paul Kalanithi*

A Three Dog Life

by Abigail Thomas

The Long Goodbye: A Memoir

by Meghan O'Rourke

The Light of the World: A Memoir

by Elizabeth Alexander

Surrendering to Joy: A Year of Love, Letting Go and Forgiveness

by Suzanne Falter

Wave

by Sonali Deraniyagala

The following additional links offer a wealth of other great books on grief:

<http://www.whatsyourgrief.com/32-books-about-death-and-grief/>

<http://www.whatsyourgrief.com/32-more-books-about-death-and-grief/>

<https://healgrief.org/recommended-reading/>

GRIEF ARTICLES

A Dirty Secret Called Grief - The Guardian

David Bowie and the Rise of the Grief Police - The Atlantic

Death/Grief/Bereavement - The Guardian

Different Kinds of Grief - Huffington Post

Embracing Grief - Sobonfu Some

Five Myths About Grief

Grief is the Human Angel in the World - Stephen Jenkinson - Beyond Meds

Grief Rituals: Finding Peace Through Communal Grieving - Francis Weller

Grieving My Sister's Death - The Guardian

[Hearing the Cries of the World - Mark Nepo - Parabola Magazine](#)

[I'll Never Be At a 100 Percent - Patton Oswalt](#)

[New Ways to Think About Grief - Time Magazine](#)

[Shades of Grief - Scientific American](#)

[The Journey Through Grief: Six Mourner's Needs - Alan Wolfelt](#)

[To Release Your Grief of a Lifetime - Mary O'Malley](#)

[To See One Another Broken - On Being](#)

ONLINE GRIEF RESOURCES

Online grief resources abound. Here are a handful of social media and web-based grief resources/aggregates that host grief communities, podcasts and grief content.

[Grief](#)

[Grief Beyond Belief](#)

[GriefLink](#)

[Grief, Loss & Recovery](#)

[Grief Resources](#)

[Grief Rites Foundation](#)

[Heal Grief](#)

[Modern Loss](#)

[Refuge in Grief](#)

[The Grief Dialogues](#)

[The Grief Toolbox](#)

[What's Your Grief](#)

DOCUMENTARIES, FILMS, TALKS

Re:Member: Where Grief & Beauty Co-exist

Speaking Grief

<http://www.whatsyourgrief.com/64-movies-about-grief-and-loss/>

Griefwalker

Transforming Loss

Voices of Grief

Departures

Captain Fantastic

One Last Hug: Three Days at Grief Camp

Newtown

TED TALKS:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/TEDxTalks/search?query=grief>

Good Grief! What I Learned from Loss

Finding Hope in Hopelessness - Peta Murchinson

The Beautiful Awful - Alyssa Monks

The Cure for Grief - Norah Casey

Why We Should Share Our Stories of Loss and Disappointment - Rebecca Peyton

OTHER:

Robert Bly

Patton Oswalt - Why Grieving in Public is Therapeutic

Grieving and Recovery - Sobonfu Some

Grief and Praise: Part 1 Martín Prechtel

Grief and Praise: Part 2 – Martín Prechtel

Grief and Praise: Part 3 – Martín Prechtel

Grief, Ritual and Sacrifice – Malidoma Some

Of Grief and Reverence – Francis Weller

Walking with Grief – Stephen Jenkinson

Way of Grief – Stephen Jenkinson

Grief Rituals: Finding Peace Through Communal Grieving – Francis Weller

CASE STUDIES

Cracked Open in the Wild – School of Lost Borders

ONLINE SCHOLARLY RESEARCH

Grief:

Grief and Mourning in Cross-Cultural Perspective

Grief and Acceptance as Opposite Sides of the Same Coin: Setting a Research Agenda to Study Peaceful Acceptance of Loss

Cultural Coping Strategies and Grief Therapy (quote p. 19)

https://thanatosjournal.files.wordpress.com/2012/12/thanatos312014_deathandinternet4.pdf

https://thanatosjournal.files.wordpress.com/2014/11/pentaris_bridegroom.pdf

https://thanatosjournal.files.wordpress.com/2012/12/gray_memoryremains1.pdf

https://issuu.com/annae.haverinen/docs/thanatos312014_deathandinternet

Ritual Efficacy:

Rituals for Grieving – The Afterlife Conference

Why Rituals Are Good for Your Health – YES! Magazine

Rituals Alleviate Grieving for Loved Ones – Harvard Business Journal

In the Aftermath of Orlando Shooting, Prayer and Mourning – Religious Literacy Project – Harvard Divinity School.

Why Rituals Work – Scientific American

THOUGHTS ON GRIEF

WHAT IS GRIEF?

“Grief is the human angel in the world. Grief is not in the order of despair, depression, you know, “I give up.” Grief is the deep getting of it, and the deep being gotten by it. Grief is the willingness to be claimed by a story bigger than the one you wish for. So in that sense grief is a willingness to know. That’s what it is. Grief is the human angel in the world.”

“A culture addicted to security, comfort and ‘be all you want to be’ makes no time in its public or private life for sorrow or uncertainty or the end of things. To a culture like our own, grief is mostly medicated or resolved, and our hearts elbow our lives out of the way in their headlong search for safe landings and getting their needs met. But what would our culture look like and how would our children think of us fifty years from now, if we began to honour and teach grief as a skill, as vital to our personal and cultural and spiritual life as the skill of loving?”

Stephen Jenkinson, *Die Wise*

GRIEF AS LOVE’S TOLL

“I often compare our grief to putting salt in cake batter – it highlights the sweet. Love and loss are intertwined – we can't know one without the other.”

Jade Bock, *Children's Grief Center of New Mexico*

“So it’s true, when all is said and done, grief is the price we pay for love.”

E.A. Bucchianeri, *Brushstrokes of a Gadfly*

GRIEF AS AN ASSAULT

“Grief is an attack on life. It’s not a seducer. It’s an ambush or worse. It stands right out there and says: “The minute you try something, I’m waiting for you.”

Patton Oswalt

“Grief, as we all have heard, comes in waves. That’s a lie. These aren’t waves; these are gargantuan freight trains that ram into your very soul, from nowhere. They come as you stand in the fruit aisle of the supermarket, looking around you, wondering how the hell anyone can manage to get on with life when this terrible thing has happened and suddenly, from out of nowhere that train comes hurtling at you. It feels as if someone has sucked out everything you have – your guts, your heart, your oxygen, your whole being.”

Jenni Russell

“I believe that imagination is stronger than knowledge. That myth is more potent than history. That dreams are more powerful than facts. That hope always triumphs over experience. That laughter is the only cure for grief. And I believe that love is stronger than death.”

Robert Fulghum, *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*

GRIEF AS MELANCHOLY

Grief “is the blue mood that greets us upon waking. It is the melancholy that shades the day in muted tones. It is the recognition of time’s passing, the slow emptying of our days. It is the searing pain that erupts when someone close to us dies – a parent, a partner, a child, a beloved pet. It is the confounding grief when our life circumstances are shattered by the unexpected: the phone rings with frightening news of a biopsy; we find ourselves suddenly without work, uncertain as to how we will support our family; our partner decides one day that the marriage is over. We tumble and fall as the ground beneath us opens, shaken by violent rumblings. Grief enfolds our lives, drops us close to the earth, reminding us of our inevitable return to the dark soil.”

Francis Weller, *The Wild Edge of Sorrow*

“Grief turns out to be a place none of us know until we reach it. We anticipate (we know) that someone close to us could die, but we do not look beyond the few days or weeks that immediately follow such an imagined death. We misconstrue the nature of even those few days or weeks. We might expect if the death is sudden to feel shock. We do not expect the shock to be obliterative, dislocating to both body and mind. We might expect that we will be prostrate, inconsolable, crazy with loss. We do not expect to be literally crazy, cool customers who believe that their husband is about to return and need his shoes. In the version of grief we imagine, the model will be “healing.” A certain forward movement will prevail.

The worst days will be the earliest days. We imagine that the moment to most severely test us will be the funeral, after which this hypothetical healing will take place. When we anticipate the funeral, we wonder about failing to “get through it,” rise to the occasion, exhibit the “strength” that invariably gets mentioned as the correct response to death.

We anticipate needing to steel ourselves for the moment: will I be able to greet people, will I be able to leave the scene, will I be able even to get dressed that day? We have no way of knowing that this will not be the issue. We have no way of knowing that the funeral itself will be anodyne, a kind of narcotic regression in which we are wrapped in the care of others and the gravity and meaning of the occasion. Nor can we know ahead of the fact (and here lies the heart of the difference between grief as we imagine it and grief as it is) the unending absence that follows, the void, the very opposite of meaning, the relentless succession of moments during which we will confront the experience of meaninglessness itself.”

Joan Didion, *A Year of Magical Thinking*

“In grief, your carefully constructed life crashes and falls away, leaving you exposed, flayed, raw, helpless as a newborn. Daily life becomes a matrix of impossibilities, starting with getting out of bed in the morning. You develop sleep alternatives or new ways of grooming. That they might not be successful is beside the point.

At other times, grief feels like a bone lodged in the throat, a calcification of the heart. The bits of you that ought to be open are obstructed. The pain of loss dulls your senses, creates a force field around your body, encases you in ice, makes you impervious to the world around you, and especially impervious to its pleasure you shut down.

Grief is a necessary pain. That means there's no way around it - try to bury it now, and it'll come back and tsunami you later. But when you're grieving, the world grants you a little slack. You have license to be weird. In fact, you need to be. It's the only way you're going to get through it. Think of it as a healthy madness.”

Ellen Kanner, *Feeding the Hungry Ghost: Life, Faith and What to Eat for Dinner*

GRIEVE IN WAVES

“Grief has no distance. Grief comes in waves, paroxysms, sudden apprehensions that weaken the knees and blind the eyes and obliterate the dailiness of life.”

Francis Weller

“As for grief, you'll find it comes in waves. When the ship is first wrecked, you're drowning, with wreckage all around you. Everything floating around you reminds you of the beauty and the magnificence of the ship that was, and is no more. And all you can do is float. You find some piece of the wreckage and you hang on for a while. Maybe it's some physical thing.

Maybe it's a happy memory or a photograph. Maybe it's a person who is also floating. For a while, all you can do is float. Stay alive.

In the beginning, the waves are 100 feet tall and crash over you without mercy. They come 10 seconds apart and don't even give you time to catch your breath. All you can do is hang on and float. After a while, maybe weeks, maybe months, you'll find the waves are still 100 feet tall, but they come further apart. When they come, they still crash all over you and wipe you out. But in between, you can breathe, you can function. You never know what's going to trigger the grief. It might be a song, a picture, a street intersection, the smell of a cup of coffee. It can be just about anything...and the wave comes crashing. But in between waves, there is life.

Somewhere down the line, and it's different for everybody, you find that the waves are only 80 feet tall. Or 50 feet tall. And while they still come, they come further apart. You can see them coming. An anniversary, a birthday, or Christmas, or landing at O'Hare. You can see it coming, for the most part, and prepare yourself. And when it washes over you, you know that somehow you will, again, come out the other side. Soaking wet, sputtering, still hanging on to some tiny piece of the wreckage, but you'll come out. Take it from an old guy. The waves never stop coming, and somehow you don't really want them to. But you learn that you'll survive them. And other waves will come. And you'll survive them too.

If you're lucky, you'll have lots of scars from lots of loves. And lots of shipwrecks.”

as posted on Reddit, circa 2011

THE PARTICULARITY OF GRIEF

“Grief is piercingly particular. There is hardly any limit to the ways loss will find us, entering into our lives not only through the death of someone we love but also through the myriad other ways life can wrest from us what we have held dear. When grief does find us – however it finds us – it shapes itself precisely to the details of our lives. It fits itself to our habits and routines, our relationships, our priorities, what we have organized our lives around – all that makes us who we are in this world. Because of this, no one will know our grief as we do. No one will inhabit it in the same way we do. No one will entirely understand what it is like to live with our specific shattering.

There is something beautiful about this. Our particular grief reflects the particular wonder of what we had – a grace that visited our life in a way designed especially for us. Yet this very quality can compound our grief because it leaves us feeling so alone. One of grief’s most insidious aspects lies in how isolating it can become. This aspect of grief calls for intentionality from us: that we resist grief’s capacity to cut us off from those around at the time we need them most.”

Jan Richardson

THE WEIGHT OF GRIEF

“At times grief invites us into a terrain that reduces us to our most naked self. We find it hard to meet the day, to accomplish the smallest of tasks, to tolerate the greeting of others. We feel estranged from the world and only marginally able to navigate the necessities of eating, sleeping, and self-care. Some other presence takes over in times of intense grief and we are humbled, brought to our knees where we live close to the ground, the gravity of sorrow felt deep in our bones.”

Francis Weller

“You walk into the vet with a Saint Bernard and you leave with an empty collar that somehow weighs more than she ever did, 120 pounds of sadness pressing down against your chest. This is your second dog lost in seven days, following the evaporation of your 16-year marriage, and the grief feels too massive, something you can’t possibly bear. But you aren’t alone—you must also shepherd your children through this journey—and so you bundle their grief up too, folding it neatly into hatboxes and fastening it atop your own steamer trunk of sorrow with a strong sisal rope. And when your handle breaks, you gather the weight into your arms, cradling it like an overgrown child too old to be carried, yet still needing comfort. Burdened so, you sit by the river and, as the waves of fear and sorrow flood your body, you try not to flee but to be present to the pain.

Wisdom must be earned—you know this—but the opposite bank seems too distant, a shore you can never hope to reach. You dip your toes in the water, thinking perhaps your load will become buoyant, that maybe you can grab hold of it like an overtipped canoe and float, carried along by the current. For even if you can never ford this river, somewhere downstream there must be a way out of this place, if only you follow its meandering curves far enough along. The weight of the grief drags you under and you think: I could just let go and I’d be free. Then you remember: Carrying grief is sacred work. So you kick your feet and surface, knowing that of course you can hold on to this burden a little longer. You’ve been carrying it all this time.”

Cindy Reed

“I did not know the work of mourning / Is like carrying a bag of cement / Up a mountain at night / The mountaintop is not in sight / Because there is no mountaintop.”

Edward Hirsch, *Gabriel: A Poem*

THE FOREVERNESS OF GRIEF

“You will lose someone you can’t live without, and your heart will be badly broken, and the bad news is that you never completely get over the loss of your beloved. But this is also the good news. They live forever in your broken heart that doesn’t seal back up. And you come through. It’s like having a broken leg that never heals perfectly—that still hurts when the weather gets cold, but you learn to dance with the limp.”

Anne Lamott

“As far as I can see, grief will never truly end. It may become softer over time, more gentle, but some days will feel sharp, but grief will last as long as love does— forever. It’s simply the way the absence of your loved on manifests in your heart. A deep longing, accompanied by the deepest love. Some days, the heavy fog may return, and the next day, it may recede, once again. It’s all an ebb and flow, a constant dance of sorrow and joy, pain and sweet love.”

Lexi Behrndt

“Grief changes shape but it never ends.”

Keanu Reeves

“There is no map for the landscape of loss, no established itinerary, no cosmic checklist, where each item ticked off gets you closer to success. You cannot *succeed* in mourning your loved ones. You cannot fail. Nor is grief a malady, like the flu. You will not get over it. You will only come to integrate your loss, like the girl who learned to surf again after her arm was bitten off by a shark. The death of a beloved is an amputation. You find a new center of gravity, but the limb does not grow back. When someone you love very much dies, the sky falls. And so you walk around under a fallen sky.”

Mirabai Starr, *Caravan of No Despair: A Memoir of Loss and Transformation*

“Grief doesn’t have a plot. It isn’t smooth. There is no beginning and middle and end.”

Ann Hood, *Comfort: A Journey Through Grief*

GRIEF AS THE WHY OF LIFE

“Grief can destroy you -- or focus you. You can decide a relationship was all for nothing if it had to end in death, and you alone. OR you can realize that every moment of it had more meaning than you dared to recognize at the time, so much meaning it scared you, so you just lived, just took for granted the love and laughter of each day, and didn't allow yourself to consider the sacredness of it. But when it's over and you're alone, you begin to see that it wasn't just a movie and a dinner together, not just watching sunsets together, not just scrubbing a floor or washing dishes together or worrying over a high electric bill. It was everything, it was the why of life, every event and precious moment of it. The answer to the mystery of existence is the love you shared sometimes so imperfectly, and when the loss wakes you to the deeper beauty of it, to the sanctity of it, you can't get off your knees for a long time, you're driven to your knees not by the weight of the loss but by gratitude for what preceded the loss. And the ache is always there, but one day not the emptiness, because to nurture the emptiness, to take solace in it, is to disrespect the gift of life.”

Dean Koontz, *Odd Hours*

GRIEF AS THE PERSISTENT, INCONVENIENT STRANGER

“Think of grief as a person knocking on your door who really wants to see you. They knock incessantly and you duck behind closed curtains praying they’ll take the hint and leave. But they don’t. Instead, they just keep on knocking until you finally swing open the door exclaiming, “WHAT DO YOU WANT NOW?” When the knocking starts, instead of hiding, you can take a deep breath and welcome this person into your home. You set a few reasonable boundaries as to how much time you have to give and then you put the kettle on. You settle in for some hot tea and conversation. As the visit progresses, you notice that it isn’t as bad as you thought it would be. You are discovering that this person you had always hidden from is wise and has much to offer. Then the time is up, and although you found the visit surprisingly helpful, you are exhausted and have a list of things to do before the day ends. You say your goodbyes knowing that this person, whom you now consider a friend, will be back. They may return when it isn’t convenient, and you may not want to stop what you’re doing to sit quietly and share tea. You have learned the value of this pause in your day with this friend who has only your best interests at heart.”

Julie Keon, *What I Would Tell You: One Mother’s Adventure with Medical Fragility*

GRIEF AS AN ELEMENT OF SELF

“I had my own notion of grief. I thought it was the sad time that followed the death of someone you love. And you had to push through it to get to the other side. But I’m learning there is no other side. There is no pushing through. But rather, there is absorption. Adjustment. Acceptance. And grief is not something you complete, but rather, you endure. Grief is not a task to finish and move on, but an element of yourself - an alteration of your being. A new way of seeing. A new definition of self.”

Gwen Flowers

ACTIVE GRIEVING AS A RADICAL ACT

“I believe active grieving is a radical and revolutionary act. That reclaiming and engaging a relationship with our less-palatable emotions and experiences is a radical act. That coming together as communities to rage and grieve in times of outrage and sorrow is a radical act. That facing the painful legacies we are born from and then working to heal them is a radical act.”

Alex Eisenberg

GRIEF AS GRADUAL

“When someone you love dies, and you’re not expecting it, you don’t lose her all at once; you lose her in pieces over a long time—the way the mail stops coming, and her scent fades from the pillows and even from the clothes in her closet and drawers. Gradually, you accumulate the parts of her that are gone.

Just when the day comes—when there's a particular missing part that overwhelms you with the feeling that she's gone, forever—there comes another day, and another specifically missing part.”

John Irving, *A Prayer for Owen Meany*

GRIEF AS THE POEM INSIDE

"I am not interested in what Bourdieu, or Kristeva, has to say about grief. I don't want a grid, I want arms. I don't want a theory; I want the poem inside me. I want the poem to unfurl like a thousand monks chanting inside me. I want the poem to skewer me, to catapult me into the clouds. I want to sink into the rhythm of your weeping, I want to say, my grief is turning and I have no way to remain still.

I am not interested in feeling by proxy; I go to the hollow when I want to empty, I go to theory when I want to sit with someone else's thinking, I go to myself when I want to see you."

Sina Queyras, "Water, Water Everywhere"

GRIEF AS A WILD CREATURE

"...grief is a wild creature. Grief will resist every attempt to tame it, to control it, or to keep it tidy and well-behaved. Rather than managing it, grief asks instead that we tend it, listen to it, question it. One of the surest ways to calm it is to give it some space in which to speak—or to holler, or weep.

I have learned also that grief loves stories. Resistant as grief is to pat answers, logic, and linear thinking, it finds a natural home within the landscape of a story, where meaning appears not so much in facts or formulas as in metaphors, symbols, and the unpredictable pathways of narrative."

Jan Richardson

GRIEF AS A CULTURAL PATHOLOGY

"If, as a culture, we don't bear witness to grief, the burden of loss is placed entirely upon the bereaved, while the rest of us avert our eyes and wait for those in mourning to stop being sad, to let go, to move on, to cheer up. And if they don't — if they have loved too deeply, if they do wake each morning thinking, I cannot continue to live — well, then we pathologize their pain; we call their suffering a disease. We do not help them: we tell them that they need to get help."

Cheryl Strayed

THE GEOGRAPHY OF GRIEF

"Deep grief sometimes is almost like a specific location, a coordinate on a map of time. When you are standing in that forest of sorrow, you cannot imagine that you could ever find your way to a better place. But if someone can assure you that they themselves have stood in that same place, and now have moved on, sometimes this will bring hope."

Elizabeth Gilbert, *Eat, Pray, Love*

GRIEF AS A KIND OF MONASTIC VOW

“..what happened is I entered grief as if a monk to a monastery, vowing to allow it to inhabit me until I might arrive at what I hoped could be a natural conclusion—oh, I hoped for that. Grief brought me to mercy, replacing justice. Grief brought me to self (through breath meditation) and to service (through Thai massage), both now equally important as water, food and air. Grief was glue to those hundred thousand million broken pieces scattered across vastness on no map, nowhere, no “you are here.”

Janet Levin

GRIEF AS A THING

“Sometimes grief comes like a runaway truck. You can see it careening down the highway toward you, but you don’t have enough time to get out of the way before it flattens you. Sometimes it’s a slow-moving train, and you’re stuck at the crossing, impatiently waiting for it to pass so that you can get on with your life. Sometimes grief is a stealth bomber, dropping missiles from the sky and leaving you with an unfamiliar and sinister landscape that you don’t know how to navigate. This Christmas, grief came to me like a sailboat – not disruptive or forceful, but with a strong enough wake to rearrange the pebbles on the shore.”

Heather Plett

GRIEF AS A SPIRAL

For in grief nothing "stays put." One keeps on emerging from a phase, but it always recurs. Round and round. Everything repeats. Am I going in circles, or dare I hope I am on a spiral? But if a spiral, am I going up or down it? How often – will it be for always? -- how often will the vast emptiness astonish me like a complete novelty and make me say, "I never realized my loss till this moment"? The same leg is cut off time after time.”

C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*

THE DUALITY OF GRIEF

“Why does tragedy exist? Because you are full of rage. Why are you full of rage? Because you are full of grief.”

Anne Carson, *Grief Lessons: Four Plays by Euripides*

“Grief is in two parts. The first is loss. The second is the remaking of life.”

Anne Roiphe, *Epilogue: A Memoir*
