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Chapters

turning the pages through grief



"IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN"

There is an old adage claiming the saddest words ever expressed point to what might have, may have, could have been. Grief, in any form, is just that—the shattering of a specific vision we had for our life. I'm not certain how much comfort comes with this realization, but it's true none-the-less. After my divorce, my adult son told me that it wasn't actually my marriage to his father that I was grieving, but the vision I had for my life that had, at that point, been permanently altered. I remember thinking that it was a true statement, even wise, but it didn't stop the grief.

If the person for whom you are currently grieving was a child, the shattering of everything they would have or could have done is likely the roughest part. I have a friend who lost his daughter at a very young age,

and it seems the grief he feels rears its head with each milestone she would likely have achieved. When she was supposed to have started school, he grieved. When she was supposed to have graduated high school, he grieved. By now, she may have been married, or a mother, a career woman, such as a lawyer, or a lonely truck-driver. I think the idea that he'll never know is where the grief hides. The "it might have been" encompasses almost everything about her short life, often leaving him overwhelmed by grief.



"Really? 'Tomorrow's another day? That's the best you've got?'"

Conversely, you may be grieving someone who lived to a ripe old age, after having had a seemingly full life. Life is strange that way. We know from the time we are young, that it won't last forever, and yet, we still grieve someone elderly, who was once an every day part of

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*"To live in hearts we leave behind is not to die."
— Thomas Campbell*



* footnotes

Winds of Change



by Bill Hoy

Life Changes in Your Grief—not only was life irrevocably altered by this loss, but your life continues to change now with the blowing winds of bereavement. J. William Worden, a friend of mine known the world over for his work with people in grief says that asking how long grief lasts is like asking, “How high is up?”

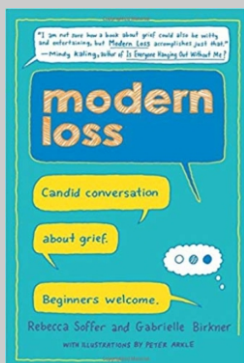
While most people certainly don’t sense the same intensity of pain later that one does in the early weeks, grief doesn’t go away and we don’t ever seem to achieve that elusive “closure.”

Rather, grief is filled with changes and transitions as we learn to live life in new ways. We can’t achieve the goal of having our loved one back, but like the weather we are reminded that life continues to change and some of those changes are good. You learn new skills you never knew you would need. You make new friendships you would have never discovered apart from grief. And you discover new abilities within yourself that you never imagined you could possess. Though these winds of change might be fierce, hold on. The winds of change will gradually become much more like a fluttering breeze.

* Dr. Bill Hoy teaches at Baylor University in Waco, Texas. He is widely regarded as an authority on the sociocultural history of funeral rites, the topic of his most recent book: *Do Funerals Matter: The Purposes and Practices of Death Rituals in Global Perspective* (Routledge, 2013).

Modern Loss: Candid Conversation About Grief. Beginners Welcome

By Rebecca Soffer and Gabrielle Birkner



This book is a fresh and irreverent examination into navigating grief and resilience in the age of social media, offering comfort and community for coping with the mess of loss through candid original essays from a variety of voices, accompanied by gorgeous two-color illustrations and wry infographics. Each having lost parents as young adults, Rebecca Soffer and Gabrielle Birkner co-

founded Modern Loss, responding to a need to change the dialogue around the messy experience of grief. Now, in this wise and often funny book, they offer the insights of the Modern Loss community to help us cry, laugh, grieve, identify, and—above all—empathize.

Soffer and Birkner, along with forty guest contributors including Lucy Kalanithi, singer Amanda Palmer, and CNN’s Brian Stelter, reveal their own stories on a wide range of topics including triggers, sex, secrets, and inheritance. Accompanied by beautiful hand-drawn illustrations and witty “how to” cartoons, each contribution provides a unique perspective on loss as well as a remarkable life-affirming message. (Amazon Review)

bookmark

...continued from front

our world. I was more attached to friend’s grandmother than either of my own grandmothers, and I find myself missing her laugh, her wisdom, and her stories. Even though, she had a life most would envy and consider very complete, she left a unique, her-shaped hole, where she used to be.

The idea of ‘might have been’ takes shape in different ways for all of us. The greatest combatant for this has to be, the new ‘is’, but don’t let others pressure you into getting there faster than you are ready. When a dear friend of mine lost her husband, I made the mistake of telling her she would likely meet someone new and re-marry one day. She wasn’t ready to hear that, by the longest shot, and it ended up coming between us for many years. Though I meant her no harm, in fact, I was trying to compliment her by telling her she wouldn’t be alone for long, she instead felt as though I was giving little credence to what she was going through at the time. It’s okay to tell people you’re nowhere near being ‘over it’ and that right now you’re just trying to steady yourself in the new picture of what your life looks like.

The grieving seasons seem to come in waves. Sometimes they may seem easier to manage than others. The first wave may seem higher, thicker, and harder to maneuver than you were expecting. If, how, and when you take comfort in a group setting, or even a phone call to a friend, is entirely your decision. Keep in mind that grief is as different for us all, as our picture of ‘might have been’.

Above everything else, remember to be kind to yourself through this unsteady season, and when it comes, you will embrace the new ‘is’.

Paulette LeBlanc is an author, editor and freelance writer, who currently resides on the Gulf Coast of Florida. She has articles published with Union Gospel Press. In 2019, her book “Consuming Fire” (Wipf and Stock) was released.

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