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Chapters

turning the pages through grief



Courtesy whatsyourgrief.com

Grief is human, but this doesn't mean you have to like it.

In case you're worried, I will not be giving a sanctimonious lecture about how you should embrace death and grief because they are a part of the human condition. Yes, death is a part of life, but it's the part that ends it, and that doesn't sit well with me.

No, you don't have to like grief, but there may be a benefit in acknowledging that it is a part of us. It is a normal human experience; therefore, allowing it to exist within us is okay. We do not need to rush to cure it, like a virus, or to exorcise it, like a demon. Instead, we must find ways to live alongside it, just as humans have been doing since the beginning.

Our loss and grief represent just one spot on a very long and complex timeline full of human loss and suffering of all kinds. I don't say this to minimize anyone's grief in the here

and now. On the contrary, I have always believed that people should fully recognize the depth and importance of their losses. Knowing the universality of pain and loss can bring comfort and perspective, but it doesn't make it hurt any less. Likewise, the fact that tragedy has always existed doesn't make it any less tragic when it happens.

Grief is human, though it may feel like something totally new.



"Alexa, tell Siri I'm not speaking to her."

For many people, grief is the single most challenging thing they've ever experienced. So it makes sense that some people might feel like they've woken up in a new body in a new (way worse) world. Grief is one of those experiences that feels difficult to wrap your head around. It feels different each time it happens to you. And though you may recognize thoughts and emotions, everything is intertwined and more intense. Grief is unmistakable, yet a master of disguise, which is a confusing but appropriate sentence because grief is often two things at once.

But it is only because grief is so elusive that I feel the need to adamantly say—grief is human. Because the experience is unpredictable and scary enough without adding to its mystique. It begins with human love and (or) attachment and reflects how individual people learn to make sense of a life that's missing significant and irreplaceable pieces. In reality, it's far more complex than this, but it is undeniably "us".

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**SEPTEMBER
2022**



"Anything that's human is mentionable."
—Fred Rogers

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If grief is an everyday human experience for those who experience loss, can we please start talking about it like everyday ordinary people?

We should, of course, pay appropriate reverence and respect to the people who've died, and we should be sensitive to the impact and importance of people's losses. But this does not mean that we need to tiptoe around the subject of grief itself.

Grieving people already feel like they're wearing the scarlet letter 'G'. Whether or not others know about their loss, they know they're walking around with a hidden dimension that can only be mentioned in specific ways with certain people. And the sad thing is, many people feel this way, but because we don't openly talk about loss, everyone thinks they're the only one.

I can't help but think that if our society could stop being so weird about grief, people might be able to draw their boundaries a little wider.

People treat grief like a sometimes-subject. As in, only sometimes should one feel free to talk about anything beyond surface-level. Yes, there is a time and place for everything. But why is it that grief has so few times and places? True, grieving people rightfully draw boundaries around when and where they want to discuss their loss experiences. But, I can't help but think that if our society could stop being so

weird about grief, people might be able to draw their boundaries a little wider.

And I've noticed after working in the field for a long time, people with a relationship to grief often feel immense relief when they finally find themselves in a group or setting where they can just have open and regular conversations about their experiences.

How can we make this more of the norm?

I'm not sure, but I guess one thing we can do is work to remove the expectation that people have to talk about their grief-experiences in any prescribed way, and let them express themselves without fear of defying a social norm, being policed, shut down, or judged. Easier said than done? Yes. But you have to start somewhere.

* Footnotes

Sometimes when we are hurting inward, looking outward can help not only others, but ourselves in the process.

HEALTH. Many studies have found that people who regularly volunteer tend to lead healthier lives and have a reduced risk of heart disease. The jury is still out as to why exactly this is, but giving back to others seems to reduce stress, build confidence and increase a person's sense of satisfaction. These psychological factors play an enormous role in our physical health. While they help create connections and build community, volunteers also get a huge amount of personal benefits from their work. Better health, a sense of satisfaction and joy that comes with helping others are only a few of the reasons why more people are deciding to give their time to others.

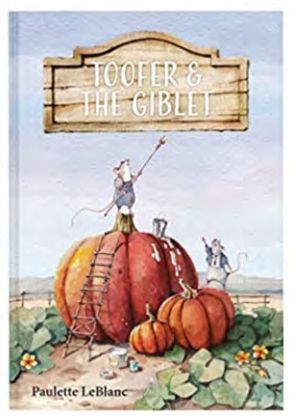
COMMUNITY. In our digital age when everyone is engrossed in their smart phones and seem to be locked in their own world, connecting with others - whether it's those in need or other volunteers - is more important than ever.

FAMILY. When someone takes a day or two off to volunteer, many will bring family members along. The reason is simple: coming together to do something for others is an incredible bonding experience and can really strengthen relationships.

bookmarks

When you are grieving, sometimes the last thing you need is another book about grief.

Toofer & The Giblet series of books about adventurous mice, by *Chapters* newsletter writer Paulette LeBlanc, offers meaningful and magical escapism. These clever tales are great for kids and adults alike.



Toofer is reserved, thoughtful, and observant, while The Giblet is outgoing and sociable. At the heart of *Toofer & The Giblet* is a deep kinship of two opposites, revealed through the innocence and wisdom of the characters.

In addition to the ability to amuse, LeBlanc's award-winning books teach the value of friendship, to prize honesty, and to act with integrity.

Whimsical and wonderful illustrations by Ukrainian artist Dmitry Morozov are as beautiful as they are soothing.

Available on amazon.com and tooferandthegiblet.com

SEPTEMBER

Flower:
Aster

Birthstone:
Sapphire

Color:
Rust

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