

Letter to the Editor

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To the Editor: I read with interest the editorial by Dr. Brietbart, A COVID-19 Obituary, in the February 2021 issue of this journal. The commentary roused thoughts of my wife's death, and society's lamentable response to grief.

When my wife died, she was only 52 years of age. I retreated into widowed solitude. The pain was unbearable, the days filled with shock and disbelief. She was here, then gone, Rousseau (2019) present tense to past tense. The loss was insufferable. I didn't care if I lived or died.

I was told by concerned and well-meaning friends to call if I needed anything. Yet when I did call, they were occupied or offered lip service words meant to mend my grief: "She's in a better place." "God has a plan." "You have your memories." "You'll find someone else." "You have your daughters." "She's not suffering anymore." However, grief cannot be fixed, it must be carried, and it must be lived, for it is stitched into the fabric of life, always present, like a toothache softened with antibiotics. All I needed was silent presence, and a witness to my suffering. But there's a discomfort in silence; we always feel a need for words. And when we're unsure of the words, we shun the encounter. We hibernate from the discomfort (Rousseau, 2019).

Others tried to console by telling me they understood how I felt, for they too had suffered loss. But grief is individual; one loss does not, and cannot, translate into the experience of another's loss (Devine, 2017). Their self-disclosed stories, while assuredly well-meaning, negated the pain of my grief.

After a few weeks, when the concerned inquired as to how I was doing, I responded with words to comfort them: "I'm doing okay." "I'm hanging in there." "I'm well." I followed with a smile. Their brows eased, and their eyes brightened. Most never asked again (Rousseau, 2019). They had afforded a brief time for bereavement, after which normalcy was expected; I was merely obliging their needs.

So now I, like many grievers, refrain from public mourning. Instead, I weep and despair in the shelter of a car, in the hollow of stairwells, in the boundaries of home, and in the solitude of night. How sad this is, for we all lose loved ones, and we all grieve. It's just a matter of time.

References

- Devine M (2017) *It's Ok That You're Not Ok: Meeting Grief and Loss in A Culture That Doesn't Understand*. Boulder, Colorado, USA: Sounds True Press.
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