

Grief JOURNEYS

◦ An Anthology from ◦
The Healing Center ◦



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ABOUT THE HEALING CENTER

The Healing Center is a non-profit organization based in Seattle, Washington, founded in 2000. It is a safe place that honors and normalizes grief, providing hope, learning, and support through community. Our founder, Kath McCormack, was widowed as a young woman with two preschool children. She envisioned a place where she and her children could go and be comforted and supported; a place they could return to again and again as they learned how to live their new life; a place where grief was welcomed and shared. With this dream as a guide, The Healing Center was born.

The Healing Center provides grief support for hundreds of people each year. We offer groups and other healing activities for children and adults at no cost to participants. We also strive to be a resource for grief education and support for the larger community.

Sonja Whitaker
Center Director

COVER ART BY ALEXANDRA FOREST

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DESIGN: Sandy Nelson



THE HEALING CENTER

CONTENTS

<i>Introduction</i>	Sonja Whitaker	1
<i>From the Editors</i>	Karen Fite, Mikey Jones, Diane Clausen	2
SECTION 1: How it Was		3
<i>Art on Section Cover Page</i>	Kailani	3
<i>Daddy</i>	Kailani	3
<i>The Pond</i>	Mikey Jones	4
<i>Skyward</i>	Anjali Fisher	5
<i>Stories from My Father</i>	Kayla Snider	6
<i>Dad's Eulogy</i>	Kate David	7
<i>Looking Back, 30 Years Later</i>	Debora Scott	9
<i>The loyalty of your love</i>	Sarah Broz Schieron	11
<i>Our First Song</i>	Mark Farrell	13
<i>River of Love and Grief</i>	Candace Clay	14
<i>Our hands that made us one</i>	Klaus Brandl	15
<i>Unseen Lunar Eclipse</i>	Sarah Broz Schieron	16
<i>Absence</i>	Ray Hoffman	17
SECTION 2: What Happened		19
<i>Art on Section Cover Page</i>	Amaru	19
<i>Love is Stronger than Pain</i>	Arlene Crews	20
<i>Every Time I Close My Eyes</i>	Mikey Jones	22
<i>Buckle</i>	Lisa Fusch Krause	25
<i>The Nights</i>	Patricia Raskin	26
<i>The silence</i>	Sara Stiehl	28
<i>Suspended</i>	Marcia Robbins	30
<i>When I was younger</i>	Karen Fite	31

SECTION 3: How It Is After: Early Grief		33
Art on Section Cover Page	Amaru	33
A Blessing for the Newly Grieving	Verhanika Willhelm	34
Ronan's Dad	Ronan	35
Grief is OK	Ronan	35
Bare Night 6.26.15	Nicole M. Harper	36
It Rained	Pam Intonti	37
Caloris	Graham Burri	38
Exhibit	Lily Redick	40
Sneaky Grief	Barb Ablehauser	41
Seeking Rock bottom	Sarah Broz Schieron	43
Widow	Sarah Broz Schieron	43
Reality	Jamee Fields	44
Walking	Jamee Fields	44
Life Before and Now	Jamee Fields	44
Impossible Math	Sarah Broz Schieron	45
How Death Feels	Karen Fite	46
Bad Dates	Ray Hoffman	48
DDBF	Margaret J. Stewart	49
Fabulous Party	Karen Fite	52
Grief Goes to a Party	Verhanika Willhelm	53
Visitation	Marcia Robbins	58
My Grief Observed	Alexandra Forest	60
Floorboards	Lisa Fusch Krause	67
Walking, Not Running	Lisa Fusch Krause	68
With cats	Karen Fite	70
Dust	Alex Leaf Maybruck	71
Grief Lands	Marcia Robbins	72
Conversation	Marcia Robbins	73
Lost Places 11.23.13	Nicole M. Harper	74
Loss	Mark Farrell	75

Reading a Poem to Loved Ones on a Lopez Beach at Sunset	Jared Curtis	76
SECTION 4: How It Is After: Later Grief		77
Art on Section Cover Page	Kachyna	77
Tethered: For Julie	Cora Goss-Grubbs	78
Waves	Jared Curtis	80
Document (22)	Lisa Fusch Krause	82
April 2, 2024 - To Jeff on the 5th Anniversary of His Death	Diane Clausen	84
last wish	Shelly Glennon	85
Later Grief	Candace Clay	86
Grief After Six Years	Theo McCulloch	87
Notes from my Grief Journal	Yaël Dvora Yanich	88
For My Mom (Fifty Years)	Lisa Fusch Krause	91
Invocation	Karen Fite	92
SECTION 5: What Helps		93
Art on Section Cover Page	Ronan	93
It's OK to Talk About Death	Barb Ablehauser	94
After Jeff Died	Diane Clausen	95
the fog of grief	Shelly Glennon	96
Ode to The Healing Center	Candace Clay	98
the lesbian photographs: a man with a don't say gay shirt as he mourns for his child	Caroline Catlin	99
Love Poem from an Empty Room	Caroline Catlin	99
Can I Borrow Your Father?	Elena Seaholm	100
Le Temps Perdu	Jared Curtis	101
About the Authors		103

INTRODUCTION

At The Healing Center, we don't tell people how to grieve. Instead, we make space for them to grieve in their own way, at their own pace. In the following pages, you will witness the myriad ways people process their grief: with sorrow, with anger, with humor; in ways that are sacred and ways that are profane; with gentle metaphor and with stark realism. They are all honest, beautiful, and true.

Sonja Whitaker

FROM THE EDITORS

This anthology has been for us a labor of love and expression of gratitude to The Healing Center. As we worked on putting it together our gratitude has expanded to include the nearly 40 writers and artists who have contributed their words and art. This is deeply personal work which we believe takes courage and love to share.

We wish also to express our gratitude to the members of The Healing Center community and to our friends and families who have supported us and this project.

We hope through this anthology to foster and expand the ability of The Healing Center to help others as it has helped us. We also hope to perpetuate and reinforce the sense of caring and understanding that is inherent in the community that is The Healing Center. And for the world beyond The Healing Center we hope that our anthology can be one small but enduring contribution to authentic and open dialogue about grief and to recognize, as Ronan, who is seven, almost eight, says, “grief is okay.”

*Karen Fite
Mikey Jones
Diane Clausen*

SECTION 1

HOW IT WAS



“Daddy”

by Kailani

I loved Daddy so
So much I loved him so
So much that my grief began to flow
Even more than my heart can show

Art by Kailani

The Pond

by Mikey Jones

Waiting for my father
for the last time
I watch him

hobble down wooden stairs
carrying in his weathered hand
an expired loaf
of Wonder bread.

Pinecones crunch
underneath our feet
sweet sulfur
lures us

to a splintering dock
that overlooks the pond,
dark green sludge
tangles up its sides.

My father gives me
a slice of bread
breaks off small pieces
tosses them into the water,

one by one

largemouth bass
dash to the surface
churn up tiny bits
cling to each other.

Skyward

by Anjali Fisher

Daddy:
In autumn, your favorite time,
You'd rake orange cedar droppings in the backyard
A Russian hat upon your shiny head
Craning your neck to watch the river of crows
On their timeless evening flight.

On the phone, I saw you gaze skyward, and heard you describe the weather in detail, not as a pleasantry but in earnest appreciation for the day.

You taught me early on that I could never be bored. Not as long as the sun ripened blackberries, airplanes defied gravity, and pieces of metal could come together to make a bicycle.

Through extreme discomfort, how did you still marvel at
Whether longhorns get migraines;
how highways stitch landscapes together;
the simple beauty of a seashell.
The ballerina in the driftwood;
steam's vapor in a cup of sun-lit tea;
the way our disparate body parts work together
to keep us whole.

Where are you now? You're the only one I want to talk to about death. How it's so bureaucratic and personal at the same time. So many decisions to be made, steps to take, while sifting through the painful earthly reminders of you.

I know you would show me a sense of acceptance, and curiosity about the cycles of life, the recirculations of matter, the way it all works til it doesn't.

Your own body betrayed you long ago, but in your mind you traveled far. You must be somewhere out there, wheelchair be damned, free as the buffalo in grandpa's cowboy songs. Or an eagle, gliding skyward, watching us bustle about in our strange frenzied lives.

Stories from My Father

by Kayla Snider

When I moved across the country, I took a story my father had written for me with me. It sits on a shelf and collects dust. When I asked him to create something for me for Christmas one year, he sanded down the cherry binding, worked the leather for the spine, and designed something one of a kind. It's not a gift anyone else on the planet ever received from him.

And some days, I don't feel worthy of it. The days that I make choices out of resentment, or fear. The slack in-between I don't always take to measure my words, the moments I let slip because I wasn't in the right mood, or my ego held me back. And every time I fall below myself, or perhaps the version of myself best suited for the life I am positioned to lead, it comes. That whooshing haunting. That little tugging reminder that my life could be different, if this one thing hadn't happened. If the face of my earth weren't irrevocably half caved.

And when I was on the plane today, on my way to make another hard choice, another fork in the road - do I stay or do I go? - he was there. With an old song off an album that doesn't make sense in the rest of my discography. In the little flecks of green in my eyes in the bathroom mirror. In the belly of my breath. These tangible pieces, the ways I've remained loyal and tethered since he was sanded down by the world, since he was turned to death - these are what show up for the spirit that once gave me irreplaceable comfort.

You reach a point in the journey where you're surrounded by people that don't know. It's the late payoff that comes with the price. You can find a lull, a little rocking soft boat, in this safe place. Particularly if you live 2000 miles away from family faces reckoning with their own remnants. And eventually you find yourself turning to them, maybe during a time you're supposed to smile, look at the colorful lights, and be grateful. The beam of history shines through their eyes, and you remember.

When I think about what I'm worth, I think about what I've lost. I think about how I've waged war against the qualities of myself I'd rather forget. And I think about how celebrated I feel when I give myself permission to recognize the perspective that eyes my life shaped by my father. I see him and the pebbled path to who I am. I make the choice he would encourage for me. I slough off the doubts and climb. I read his stories. I give and I receive. I create outside of me. And I live, without him.

Dad's Eulogy

by Kate David

When my mom was pregnant with Peter, Dad was terrified. He had always wanted to be a dad, but grew up without a father. He was first adopted and then his adoptive father passed away when he was really little. What I now realize is this sent him on a trajectory to be the man he would become.

Your parents are the first datapoints you have to work with. I think that missing this fatherly data point, allowed him to blow the options wide open. Here is what I mean by that. We all grow up in certain cultures that teach us the perceived right and wrong ways of doing things. But what if you remove those boundaries? Infinite possibilities open in front of you if you let them. Dad, whether he knew it or not, would teach me I could be "both and".

My dad could be both a gentleman and bit of a renegade. My dad could be both fiercely independent and still do the dishes every night. My Dad could be both fatherless and an incredible father.

My dad made his own rules. There was no fatherly playbook so he threw himself at it like he did with all things. He carved his own path and encouraged us to do the same.

He taught me to be both a dreamer and a doer.

He taught me to be both soft and tough as nails.

He taught me to be both unapologetic about who I am, and humble in my actions.

He taught me drive-in burgers and fine dining are necessary life experiences.

He taught me to both know who you are and be who you are. No apologies.

He taught me to both take my licks in business and keep going.

He taught me there's no shortage of free advice, but if you're looking for free advice, he has plenty.

He taught me it's important to follow the rules, but sometimes you have to break a few.

He taught me it's ok to be small, but to never let anyone make me feel small. As dad was in his final days, two quotes came to mind and I'd like to leave you with them.

The first is from 2 Timothy 4:7:

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

The second is from Theodore Roosevelt:

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.

Looking Back, 30 Years Later

by Debora Scott

September 18th, 1993 started out cool and foggy. The summer just ending had been one of the coolest and rainiest on record for Seattle. We had anxiously watched the weather forecast leading up to this day, trying to decide whether we should order the tent for outside. Money was tight back then and we really didn't want to pay for it if we didn't need it. We had a fallback—the inside of the inn where we were to be married, but we wanted to have the ceremony outside overlooking the sound. The forecast didn't say rain, so we rolled the dice. No tent. On the early morning ferry ride over to Bainbridge Island, you couldn't see the dock until we were almost docked. Fingers crossed.

The ceremony was planned for 1 pm. At some point, someone told us that the last ferry holding guests was running late. We decided to wait, opened the bar, and hoped for the best. I remember being upstairs, cloistered with my mom and maid of honor, waiting... We could hear the voices and laughter of our guests rising as wine was poured. It sounded like a great party down there! The last ferry guests eventually arrived and suddenly it was quiet. It was time.

Some of you reading this were there that day and may remember that about 1:30 that afternoon, the fog cleared, and the sun came out. It turned into a beautiful, late summer day with that golden light I look forward to every year. Sometimes, you just have to have a little faith...

When you get married, everything that day is focused on the future and what your life together will be. There really is no way to know what the future holds. When you think about it, it really is a giant leap of faith as you join hands, and vow to love and honor, through sickness and health until death do you part.

Thirty years later, some of those with us that day are no longer with us. My two grandfathers, my parents, Mike's mom, aunts and uncles, a first cousin and more than a few guests. And Mike.

It was about a year ago we found out that Mike had glioblastoma. We both knew it was possible he wouldn't make it to this day, to celebrate our 30th wedding anniversary. This wasn't supposed to happen. We had plans! Our daughter was launched and doing well. We both had worked hard, saved money. It was supposed to be our time.

As I sit here on what would have been our 30th wedding anniversary, Mike has been gone eight months. The memories of the last 30 years are everywhere. There were good years, great days, sad days, awful days, and of course, just plain days — the many unremarkable days that make up a long marriage.

When I look ahead, I don't know if I will be here in 30 years. My guess is probably not. Right now, the future doesn't look as bright and full of possibility as it did then. How could it? The days are hard and full of missing what was, and the future I thought would be. But like 30 years ago, I really have no idea what the future will be. So I have to hope it too will be filled with good years and great days (along with the inevitable hard ones). I just have to have a little faith...

But today, I'm not thinking about that. Instead, I'm remembering one magical day. September 18th, 1993.

The loyalty of your love

by Sarah Broz Schieron

You left the garage "buttoned up" so your Dad didn't have to check on it later.
you washed your dinner plate after a meal at my house
soaped, scrubbed, hand dried and put back in the cabinet where it belonged.
you picked up and drove your younger brother to and from playdates like a boss.

you called nerf gun wars "my jam"
you could casually backflip on any surface in any space
you blew up balloons for target BB gun practice
you played Easter bunny by hiding dollar bill-stuffed eggs

But you didn't make any of it feel like it was work or an obligation
my kids were solidly *not* your peers
when we shared a meal, you were not absent or on a device
you were not biding your time to be somewhere else
you were fully present, engaged, and connected.

You charmed and dazzled.
i thanked you for the positive effect you had on my son
you remarked, "he's kind of my favorite"
what Momma heart doesn't skip a beat hearing that?
you gushed about my avocado corn salsa as "the shit"

you wholeheartedly loved your people.
i never heard you end a phone conversation without saying "I love you"
even when the conversation wasn't easy.

we weren't able to attend your graduation party
i called to see how I could get our gift to you
you cheerfully offered to come by.

your friend, someone we didn't know, waited in the truck.
i handed you the gift and some food my boys made at the door
you could have turned back and left right then
most people would — maybe even me.

i asked you what ferry you were trying to catch
i was giving you an out
you smiled and said "I got some time"

you asked about our family
you shared your impressive future plans
the boys eagerly showed you the trampoline tricks you taught them years ago
you encouraged their efforts, as always

The graduation gift was just a card with some cash
i had folded the currency into origami hearts
i hope those hearts communicated what I did not say
You were kind of our favorite, too.

Our First Song

by Mark Farrell

Hearing your voice was enough for me.

Earworm worthy, mellifluous as Monarchs
Leaping above their milkweed
Patch singing the praises of delicious dreams.

Making a life together was a lovely
Endeavour full of cheer and abiding grace.

How we danced, enveloped in love's embrace
Encouraging the tender roots, we cultivated for each other.

Learning the newness of each other's music

Playing the cello on Bluegrass Hill we became a
Metaphor for each other's
Experience.

For Diana Lee O'Neill, July 12, 1946 – July 2, 2022

River of Love and Grief

by Candace Clay

Our life together was like a trip on one of the many rivers we rafted.

Most of the trip was floating quietly through the water surrounded by sunlight, beauty and mother nature, often not sure where we were going or what would happen next.

Sometimes we would ride the wild rapids, hearts beating and adrenaline flowing.

Then the excitement would drop into the quiet depths of the river.

There were occasional rocks, requiring bravery and fortitude from us.

When we tired from the rigor of our journey, we were able to pull over to the bank to rest and prepare for the next adventure.

We knew the trip on our river would end, but we delayed it as long as we could and took joy in the adventure together.

Our hands that made us one

by Klaus Brandl

These are the hands that touched you first
These are the hands that tried to heal you
These are the hands that held you last
These are the hands that made us one

These are the eyes that saw your beauty
These are the eyes that saw you first
These are the eyes that saw the glory of
the place that we called home.

These are wounds that tell of sorrow
These are wounds that speak the pain
Yet you are the one who gave it all
These are the wounds of love.

We have crossed the oceans
We have followed the stars
We have learned to talk
We have exchanged our hearts
It was part of our plan
For we were one

These were the days we thought we'd live forever
These were the days of our time
These were the dreams that took us forward
These were the dreams that made us who we were
These were the dreams when we were one

And then it came the day, when you were gone

We were far from perfect
We were making mistakes
We changed directions
It was never too late
We crossed over bridges
We opened our hearts
Because we are one

Unseen Lunar Eclipse

by Sarah Broz Schieron

It's nearly midnight
We would be creeping out of bed about now
Shushing and giggling our way to the front door
Sloppily throwing on outdoor wear to protect us from the cold outside
And head out into the night
Hand in hand
To see what we could see

We may have oohed and aahed
Pointed and marveled
At the miracle of our solar system in full demonstration
At the lunar eclipse

Or perhaps we may have cursed the Seattle skies
The stray clouds impeding the view
The trees branches obscuring the sight from where we live

Yet even then we would have noted the quiet peacefulness of our usual busy
neighborhood
We would have embraced tighter
Shared gentle soulful kisses
Remarked how we really should do this more often
Felt sheer gratitude at this singular moment we made for ourselves, very much
together

Instead
I lie in bed
Alone
Poignantly aware of where I am not
and the enormity of what was lost with the loss of you

Absence

by Ray Hoffman

The things I miss most are the things I took for granted.
The things that were always there.

Such an integral part of you
They never screamed to be noticed
They never asked for attention
They were constants
Until not
Until gone
And not coming back.

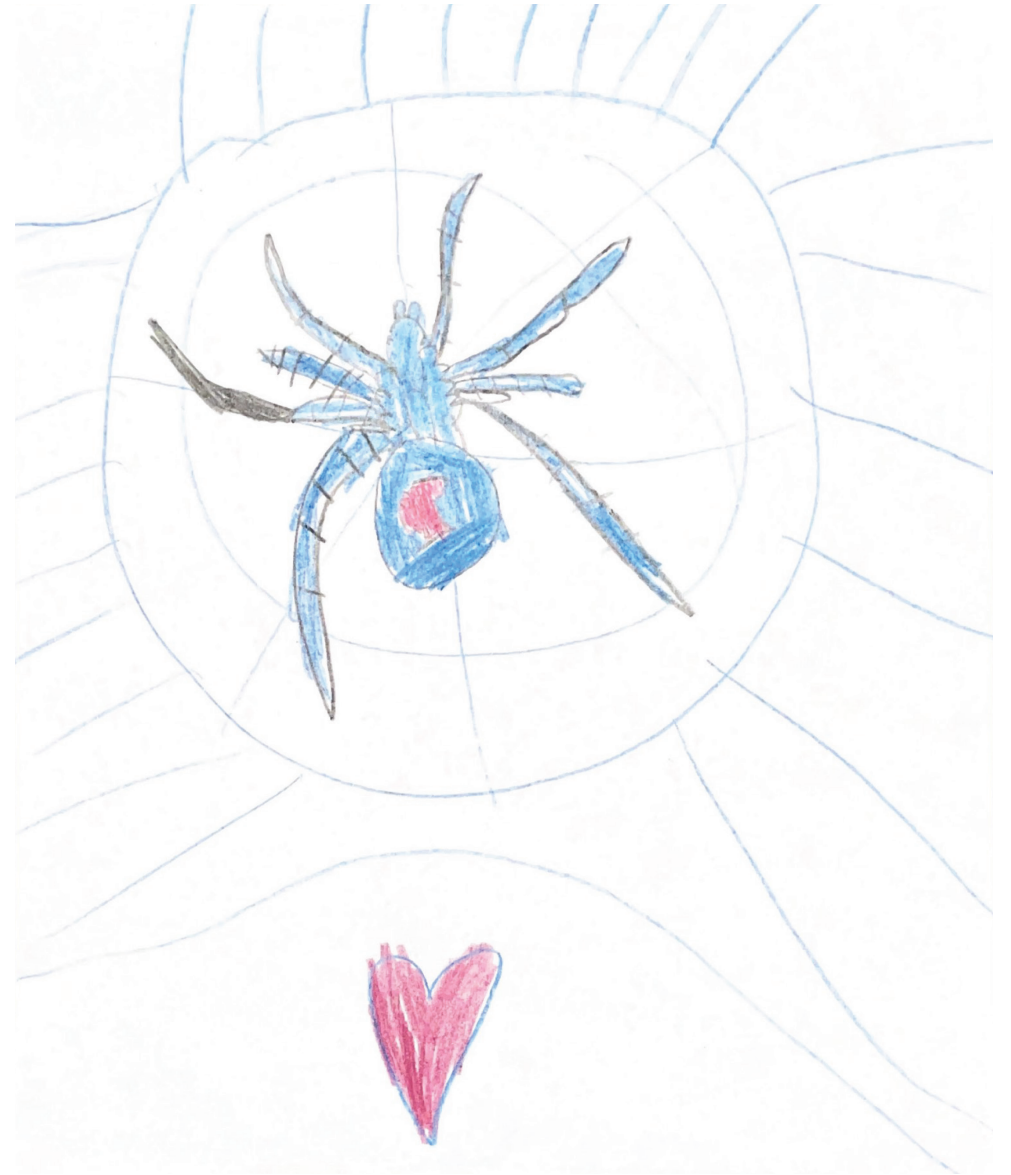
Your sleepy morning smile
Your hand on the small of my back
You wrinkling your nose
When I made a dinner suggestion
No words necessary.

The things I miss the most
Are our differences
That tried me at the time
And what I wouldn't give
To have them back.

The things I miss the most
Are those things
That made you
You.

SECTION 2

WHAT HAPPENED



Art by Amaru

Love is Stronger than Pain

by Arlene Crews

To Addison on your first birthday:

Jedidiah “Jed” Addison Crews died on July 1, 2019 when he was struck by a vehicle. Jed was 33 years old when he died. Arlene was 5 weeks pregnant. She and Jed were hit by the same car. Arlene is widow to Jed and mom to Abigail (8 years old) and Addison (3.5 years old). This is a letter she wrote to Addison on the eve of his first birthday.

Abby told me the other day she wasn’t sure if she wanted to be a mom because she heard me say how painful childbirth is. I told her, honestly, it is painful. But the love you receive from being a mom is stronger than any pain endured.

There’s

- The pain of carrying 55 extra lbs
- The pain of every cervix exam
- The pain of being out of my own body
- The pain of healing from a c section

The pain of coming home the first night and realizing it was no one else’s responsibility but my own to feed and care for you

And then there is the love:

- The love of earning your first smile
- The love of watching your cheeks and thighs fill out
- The love of inciting your first belly laugh
- The love of hearing “mama” over and over again
- The love of realizing I alone brought you into this world and I alone will care for you.

I don’t mean that in an ungrateful way to everyone who has supported me. I don’t mean that in a caustic way of never being open to the possibility of letting another person into our lives. I mean that in the way that I am your

only living parent who conceived you, grew you, carried you, delivered you, nursed you, rocked you in the middle of the night, taught you to smile, laugh, crawl, eat, stand — I did that. And I’m proud of myself. I’m proud of you.

I have zero doubt that your dad would be by my side, proudly co-parenting with me if he were alive. He would love you to pieces. He loves you and watches over you, wherever he is now. But I’m here. I’m on this earth with the sole responsibility of nurturing your life. And I’ve done it for one year, I’ll do it for a hundred more.

I spent all this time talking about how I raised you and kept you alive. I should tell you, you saved me too. You kept me alive. When the SUV split me and your dad, I went one way and he went another. I lived and he died. There is no reason and there is no justification. Somehow I lived anyway and so did you. In a world that made no sense, keeping you alive was the one thing I could do that didn’t require thought. I kept drinking water so you could have water. I ate so you could grow. I exercised so I could be healthy enough to deliver you. I didn’t drown myself in alcohol so I could keep you safe. I got out of bed every day so I could make it to the next appointment to confirm that you were still growing. I went to therapy to nurture a clean and loving body in which you would make your home for nine months. You gave me a reason to do all the things for myself that I might not have done if I were alone.

Pregnant widow. Newborn single mom. Single working mom to two kids. It all sounds so depressing. And sensational. And gruesome. So tragic, you can’t look away. Those words mean nothing to you now, but you’ll understand as you grow up what unique circumstances you were born into.

I’m here to tell you that it’s every bit as gruesome and tragic and gut wrenching as it sounds. It’s also beautiful. And hopeful. And inspiring. For every tragedy we overcome, it’s so much more beautiful when we come out on the other end. I may not ever make it to the other end but I made it to one year. One year of caring for you - a perfect human being who is so tiny and helpless - yet in your perfect pudgy fingers and toothy smile and jiggly belly, you hold my heart and my life. Thank you, baby boy, for giving me a reason to live through the pain and find love in it all. I love you. Happy birthday.

Every Time I Close My Eyes

by Mikey Jones

I don't want to see

my father lying
in his hospital bed
on Christmas Eve

seven iv's
pumping
limbs swollen
arms and legs
weeping
large bandages
soaked with blood
his skin tearing from
thousands of paper cuts

sweat and blood
on my hands
holding
his damp body
fighting poisons
his hand
squeezing mine
every few seconds
winning

as the nurse
checks the staples
around the hole
in his side
shows me
his large intestines
brown liquid
oozing
into a stained pouch
tells me
how nicely the wound is healing.

I don't want to see

leather restraints
around his wrists
preventing him
from ripping out
the breathing tube
shoved down his throat
like the man next door did
screaming

the smell of stale pee
from his catheter
black goo
draining
from his lungs
into a gallon container
on the floor
a bag of protein
like ground up oatmeal

fed through his stomach
the heart monitor
flashing
yellow warnings
sharp beeps in the air
green wobbly lines
all over the screen
like a child's drawing,
the doctor
slicing into the throat
once the breathing tube
stopped working.

I don't want to see

the tears stand still
on my father's
bewildered face
as he mouths
words to me

I think I'm dying.

Buckle

by Lisa Fusch Krause

The slack of your jaw,
the falling away—
my love for you, captured
momentarily
in the water bottle I carried

Whatever I saw there
was no longer you

I sped home, tore up
yellow Post-Its
scrawled with pithy sayings
you'd collect
in your crabbed writing

Where were the words
I needed?
The acknowledged slide
towards death,
your love?

I saw you next,
stone still,
your beard neatly trimmed

Did I bring your belt?
Was the buckle
swept up after you burned?

I sent you off,
I was the one who pushed
the button

The Nights

by Patricia Raskin

The days were bad. The nights were worse. They plague me still. A smell. A sudden noise in the dark. The rustle of sheets. And bam. I am back in it. Wide awake, heart pounding. Move. Do something. Make it better. Now.

M shaking, crying out. I hold him and whisper in his ear. Wanting, trying, to comfort him. God I was tired. What kind of love gets you through darkness, the darkness that comes and never leaves?

The struggles to get his trembling 6' body from the bed into the wheelchair. And then back to bed. So many times. So many nights. By then, his legs were thin and uncoordinated. They no longer supported him. He who had been so strong, so capable, so everything. Bracing him with all my weight, every muscle. Telling him to hold tight. Telling myself to be strong. Be strong. I realize now that strength is a tough one to pin down.

His cries, "No! No! I'm falling!"

I lie down to block his bedside with my body, holding the bars, just in case. "I am here, my sweetheart, my full body is next to you. I won't let you fall. Do you see me?"

But he couldn't see. It was too dark. Or he was too far gone. What's the difference?

When friends asked how I coped, I said things like, "Bombs are falling on our house."

That's how I felt. I ran around filling holes in the roof. Then quickly back to protect him from the horrible fires. As if I could. I had nightmares about war. In them, I was fighting. Or running scared. Always in the dark.

The terrible night drugs. "Oh god, oh god," he would say quietly, his hand shaking near his head. "They cause hallucinations," he told me when he was lucid.

"It's the only thing we have for this kind of pain," said the doctor. For god's sake. Really? I would focus on M's eyes, his ears, his fingers. Anything. And love them. Fiercely.

Perhaps the seizures topped it all. God. Uncontrollable pounding in my chest as he shook in the night. Stay focused. Do what needs to be done. Call 9-1-1. Cover him in blankets. I wedged pillows around him on the floor, turned on a light, held him, and waited.

M called me a warrior. Not "his warrior." A Warrior. I was a night warrior. Mostly.

I say mostly because when he fell. When he fell, goddamn it, I couldn't pick him up. So, the firemen again. The large trucks turning down our dark, quiet street. Their emergency lights flashing bright in the night. Five or six big men in all their gear and heavy boots climbing the stairs to our bedroom. To pick M up. My brave, fearless M. The one who took care of me. Of everyone.

Shouldn't one have the strength to lift their love from the floor? That word. Strength. I was being tested.

And then, the ambulances. In the black night, always the night. They lift him, strapped to a gurney. I climb in. Into the darkness we travel, my heart in my stomach. Holding his hand, fighting back tears, my lips on his forehead.

He didn't leave me at night. After that long, final battle we waged together. That one, the godforsaken worst. No. He left me in the light of day. But as he drew his last breaths, the darkness came anyway. That's how it goes with the nights.

The silence

by Sara Stiehl

Death and grief have sounds. Ask a griever what death sounds like to them, and I'm sure it illustrates a full range to the soundtrack of death. For me, it's the silence. The silence began to play that night, it came about twice, and it hasn't stopped since.

There's the silence when you stopped breathing. Just prior you were choking, suffocating, shaking, tense, convulsing. I yelled, screamed, shook you, rolled you, held your tongue, checked your breath and felt nothing... the first silence had hit. You weren't shaking. You weren't gasping. You were still. You were quiet. You were lifeless.

The sound crescendoed from there, the volume increasing- the 911 operator's instructions, the sound of your chest cracking when I started cpr, the sound of the sirens in the distance that took forever to get there, the yelling at the emts to save you, the throwing up, the yelling they did to each other, the lights were loud too- every light was on and the room pulsed in red from the trucks. Then they pronounced you. Officially. And the noise continued. I yelled more, cried, wept, held you for what felt like only a minute but I'm told were hours. I held you till you were stiff, white, and discolored. Kissing your hair, smelling it one last time, volume changed again.

They left. They packed their gear. Rolled you away. They took you, the red lights went away, the tiny apartment that just held 13 adults, was now just holding me. They left. They left the wrapping from the paddles used to shock you back. They left the caps to the syringes on the floor. They left the bed torn up and covered in your urine. They left the carpet stained and covered in your fluids. They left the lights on. They left a brochure for the morgue with a business card. They just left. The house was quiet. From cacophony to stillness. In my head everything was buzzing. The yelling, the shaking, the begging,

pleading, crying...it was all so fresh, you were just there, and the new silence around me left your absence even more amplified. The quiet slipped into my mind and swirled with the confusion and shock of what just happened. A vacuum of sound leaving me sitting there, alone, silent.

It's that second silence that consumes me still. The silence of your absence, of people giving up and saying it's done. It's the silence I hear still as I make the bed today, the same way I made the bed the next morning. Picking off your soaked sheets, doing a load of laundry, and making it again. This time you'll never sleep in it. You'll never be back. It's just the silence that remains after everyone left, you included. The silence of driving in the car, reaching for speed dial to call you, only to remember your number isn't yours anymore. So I sit there and drive – in silence. I remind myself that I can still talk to you, so I talk, out loud, recapping, waiting for a response- silence. It's the silence when someone asks if you are single or married...and there's a space where words can't fill the void fast enough as you're yet again faced with your reality. Silence. It's the silence when you stare at a screen, asking me to name my emergency contact and my mind remembers what is not possible. My throat swells up, my head throbs and I let out a breath. Silence. It's the tears in the middle of the night, my mind and body aching for your voice, your tone, your raspy mumbles to pull me close and tell me it's all going to be ok. And instead, I continue to be greeted with silence.

You're not here. And it's silent. And it's a silence that's deafening.

Suspended

by Marcia Robbins

She was not scared to talk of dying
Discuss regrets and remains
To get her nights and days confused
And not ignore a single sound

To navigate the rooms behind his walker
Shadowing not hovering.
Not scared of full commodes
Of wipes and gloves,

Death rattles, vacant stares,
Not scared of slowing breath,
Cold hands, hot face
Sunken sinking leaving.

She was not scared to wake unmoored,
To choose new appliances when old ones broke
To mow the lawn and shovel snow
And sit alone on Christmas.

She kept her eyes focused on what's next.
She blurred her eyes to loneliness and pain.
She squinted past the sharp points of loss
And quickly wiped the tears.

And yet today, her eye doctor's
Face close behind plastic and glass
Pinned her down to say which looked better:
Two or one, one or two?
And she saw that she was scared.

When I was younger –

by Karen Fite

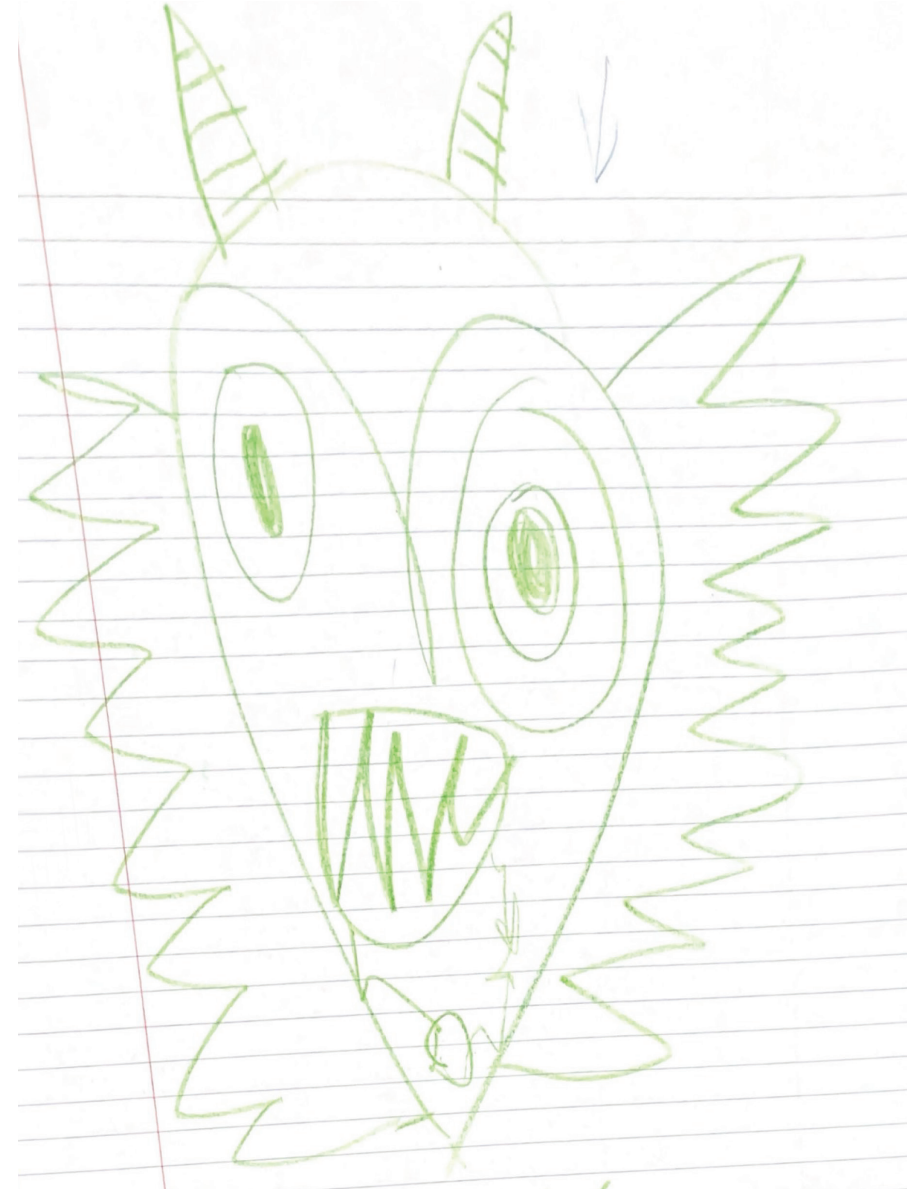
Not in the young stage where I was going to live forever
But in the stage where grandparents had died
And parents had been threatened
By CAT scans and PET scans and diagnoses
and some of them were lost—I used to think -
When I or a beloved was threatened,
the thing to do was
find out all the facts.
Confront reality.
Endure and not cough
while in a long tube.
Allow without complaint arms to be poked with needles.
Sit patiently in waiting rooms in the company of
pale women in turbans
and men leaning on their walkers and staring

and when the facts were clear
If there was something to be done
Let them do it.
The poison chemicals in those distressed veins.
The burning radiation.
The removal of various parts.
Be cheerful and brave.
And if there was nothing to be done,
then too be cheerful and brave.
Face the facts.

I didn't understand then as I do now
the beauty of the golden hours
of denial and hope spent
Lying together holding hands
watching the leafing and blooming of the chestnut tree
outside the bedroom window.
I didn't know how much goodness we could find
In the soft silvery haze of those waiting rooms,
sitting side by side. Together.

SECTION 3

HOW IT IS AFTER: EARLY GRIEF



A Blessing for the Newly Grieving

by Verhanika Willhelm

If you have to be here--and you do because there is no taking this back--may you live and love as if this hadn't happened to you.

May your heart be full of care for others and for yourself.

May your heart be filled with the care from others and from yourself.

May you live a life that your loved one would be proud of--but also, that they would miss. Live a life so full and glorious that your loved one makes every effort from the Other World to come join you. They will be Eurydice and you will be Orpheus. Your music will be your beautiful life and they will try and trick the Gods to come home to you. They will fail, because this is not a state that can be reversed. And you will continue with your tempting music.

You will live, laugh, love. You will do things they will be embarrassed about and things they will roll their eyes over. You will make terrible choices and good choices and you will miss them the whole time. And they will continue to pound at the underside of the Earth in an attempt to get back to you.

They will not. They are spectral, you are corporeal.

Live a life that will prompt them to remember that because they are spectral, they can be with you always. That though they cannot hold you, and kiss you, and drive a car with you, they can be next to you, over you, under you, maybe even through you if they can figure that one out.

Live a life that will make them want to explore their Old Magic and create New Magic so they may continue to be close to you.

So on a spring day, as the sun is bright and blinding overhead, you feel a gentle breeze, smell the green of the new blossoms, and hear the wind in the wind chimes and know they are with you.

May you live a life worthy of your loved one. So their death may not be in vain. Live a life as if death has touched you, so you know the true meaning of life.

Ronan's Dad

by Ronan

My name is Ronan, I have lots of fun. It was more fun when my dad was here, but now it is perfectly clear, that my dad is dead.

Because he died from cancer, that's why he isn't here. I wish he could come back but it is impossible to come back from the dead.

I wish I could tell him but you actually can't. You can talk to him with your heart and it is perfectly clear that you can talk to him that way, if you just love him enough, you can actually talk to him here and there, you can talk to him anywhere.

I still wish he could come back from the dead. He would be more proud than ever of me. I really wish that would come true.

THE END

Grief is OK

by Ronan

My name is Ronan and I am a poet.

I am 7 years old, almost 8.

I am kind.

I believe in God.

I wonder, can life get better when you feel grief?

I miss my dad.

I remember special moments with me, my mom, and my dad.

I wish that no one would die.

I feel brave when I feel my dad with me.

I am proud of knowing my dad enough to remember he is with me.

Feelings are sometimes nice.

If someone in your life died, I want you to know -
your person who died will always be with you.

Bare Night 6.26.15

by Nicole M. Harper

I stumble upon the hollow night
Raw, naked, bare
Stripped to the marrow
I am less than a shell
Empty to the world;
This soggy green city

Tonight I am the only one who
 knows me
Because my heart is wide open
And I'm taking in every detail
With a mouth wide shut
And a sealed cognizance
Allowing nothing to escape

I wander through the vacant streets
Absent from places of comfort
Blurry and alone
Wishing to stumble upon you somehow
And in this moment
I have no home
For you really are my home
And you are not here with me

All that I have
Are the sky and eternal stars
The concrete beneath my feet
The smell of salty waters and gasoline
The beach beyond
And the lonely sea outside

It Rained

by Pam Intonti

I'd never seen it rain like that.
Not before or since.
The sky pushed light and life down, into sodden darkness
And the rain...the rain fell heavy, on umbrellas of black.

Young, strong bodies, fragile that day,
Trembled beneath those skies of blackened grey; they
Bore the unbearable, eyes ahead, wading through
Sorrow's pools that seeped in and saturated their shining shoes.

I'd never seen it rain like that.
Not before or since.
A morning of lifeless twilight, grey and heavy
Foreshadowing the flood of eternal night.

A red rose, a favorite rose-red shoe,
Marred and bespattered by heaven's torrent.
A lush black coat over a trembling body gone numb.
As a soul hovered in the roar of rain, gathering what light there was.

I'd never seen it rain like that.
Not before or since.
The rain drenched our prayers and spattered the deacon's alb
As it poured from above and leapt from below.

Boys in air-force blue, white gloves glowing, stood straight aside
Our country's colors; fold after fold, then a solemn salute.
A bugle seemed so far away, familiar notes hushed, and the rain,
The rain fell heavy on umbrellas of black.

I'd never seen it rain...not like that.

Caloris

by Graham Burri

3.9 billion years ago an object the size of Vermont impacted the planet Mercury. The object, now known as the Caloris Impactor, was traveling at about 43 kilometers per second, roughly equivalent to 96,200 miles per hour or 127 times the speed of sound.

Direct observation of Mercury has always been challenging due to its proximity to the Sun. The planet was little more than a hazy blur in telescopes until the Mariner 10 probe imaged it for the first time in 1974. Mariner revealed the planet: a barren world where a day lasts twice as long as a year, its surface scorched bare by solar radiation, dotted with the remains of millions of impacts, preserved completely in time. With no wind and water to scab over the wounds of the planet's past, its violent history is impossible to hide. Its trauma.

The Caloris Impact was the most violent event in the history of the Solar System. The scar it left behind dominates the surface of an entire world. The crater, now known as Caloris Planitia, is 1,000 miles across and has a surface area similar to India. On the opposite side of the planet from the impact site, at the spot where the shockwave met itself, the ground itself was compressed, forced upwards into dark, twisted columns of rock that even now stretch miles above the airless surface.

Mercury is a survivor. The Caloris Impact occurred during the Late Heavy Bombardment, when the hundreds of small rocky planets that initially coalesced around the Sun collided for 100 million years until they had finally consolidated into only four remaining planets. We only know that these hundreds of worlds existed at all from the trauma of their passing, the scars left behind by their destruction. Caloris Planitia is as much a tombstone as it is a crater.

The end of the Late Heavy Bombardment marked the beginning of life on Earth. The consolidation of the mass of hundreds of worlds into a few rocky bodies gave Earth enough gravity to hold a thick atmosphere. The immense thermal energy of millions of years of constant impacts heated the mantle creating the magnetosphere necessary to shield life from solar radiation. The deposition of phosphorus and carbon through impacts enabled organic chemical processes to take place. On Earth, the craters filled with water and soil and life and weathered away to nothing.

I have a Caloris Planitia. I have sun-scorched neurons and shock-warped thoughts. I have a crater the size of India and days that last longer than years. I have a hundred worlds to grieve.

Exhibit

by Lily Redick

I gave up the moment I walked in and saw that everything was the same.
I had told myself it was all for the living, the plane ride and the suitcases
and the hassle.
It was.
But it was also for you.
The whole house is a museum now, and not just the old parts.
It's a book with the pages all out of order and the letters in different fonts.
I couldn't piece together every part if I stayed forever.
I would try, though,
Because every time I lie down I feel the heaviness of the pain I inherited from
you,
Pain I never knew existed, because you never explained it.
I wouldn't give it away even if I could.
It reminds me that you aren't any numbered distance from us anymore,
That a phone call can't bring back your voice.
I'd rather know that all the time.

Sneaky Grief

by Barb Ablehauser

I really thought I was doing fine. I had stopped the daily crying thing. I'd go longer and longer periods without thinking about him. I'd even look heavenward and do some joking quips now and then, and smile.

The outside observer would assume I was coping well. I was doing all the things I needed to do. Nothing looked different. Move along. Nothing to see here.

I did occasionally watch my friends and family, who were interacting with me as normal, and think, "Wow. They can't see it. I'm profoundly changed, will never ever be the same, and they can't see it."

It's as if your entire house is the same except for the basement, which has been completely and utterly gutted and is showing evidence of fissures which, granted, have been patched, but are still there. Visitors to the upper floors would never know, but the structure is not what it was.

Chuck's death, without a doubt, is the worst thing that has ever happened to me. So it was silly of me to think that I'd gotten over the worst of it in a few months. I was just distracted by the stress of house hunting and packing and moving, so I had shoved my emotions into a little corner, and I guess the pressure had been building up.

I'd gotten past the worst of the move, and I was finally transporting my dogs from the old apartment to the new when the dam broke. I suddenly realized, for the first time, that I was moving to a place that Chuck had never been and wouldn't know. There'd be no memories of him there. And... I know this is silly, but it hit me like a ton of bricks: How would he be able to find me now? How could he come to me when I needed him? I was officially and completely

and utterly and profoundly alone for the first time in decades. I wailed, “I can’t do this alone! I’m frightened!”

I never use the word frightened. I hate the word frightened. It’s such a spineless, wimpy word.

Needless to say, I did not react well. Hysterical panic attack would be putting it mildly. I called one of my best friends, crying and probably incoherent, and bless him, he listened. Unfortunately, he’s not the type to say “There, there, everything is going to be all right,” or, “I’ll be right over.” I really could have used that, but he’s not a coddler. But he listened. And that gave me just enough strength to pull my silly self together and complete the drive to my new home, where I hugged my dogs fiercely and fell into a profound and much-needed sleep.

Grief can be sneaky. You might think you have conquered it. You might believe you’ve wrestled it to the ground and you are now standing triumphantly with your foot on its chest, but when you least expect it, it can still rise up and punch you right in the gut.

So I guess the trick is to learn how to take a punch. If I do that, maybe someday grief will get bored and quietly slink away, probably without me even realizing it for a long time. Oh, I’m sure it will still make brief visits every now and then to give me a nice forceful backhanded slap, but hey, that’s sure better than a daily beat down.

Seeking Rock bottom

by Sarah Broz Schieron

Put me at the bottom, the very bottom
I’ll puke, bleed, suffocate, die a hundred deaths
Subject me to the worst, the deepest, the cruelest
I will gladly suffer in exchange for the knowledge that this is the deepest depth

Give me a timeline
a road map
a crystal ball
a vision
a promise of what is to come
The unknown will ruin me

I always hope
that if I grieve this hard enough
it can go away once and for all

so, let’s cut a deal

Widow

by Sarah Broz Schieron

Black
As in a deadly spider
Or a badass super hero

Walk
A landing above a house for anxious pacing

Peak
A menacing point in your hairline

Maker
A deadly heart attack no one saw coming

Also:
What I am, in the absence of you

Three Poems

by Jamee Fields

Reality

Erased
Appointments
On pages
Breaking
Heart
Wondering around
With a sense of
Unreal.

Walking

Permanence
Heavy burden
Bent Back
Avoid eye contact
Surrounded by
Sorrow.

Life Before and Now

Life Before
Sparkles Smiles Sunrises Sunsets Sunlight glistening on water
Joyful colors
STOP. SLASH.
Now.
Support groups.
Lying in bed.
Listening to I'm Sorry and I can't imagine.
Coining new phrases "Horribly Good"
Feeling loss of person. Of self. Of lifestyle.
Of Future. Of Past. Of Present.

Impossible Math

by Sarah Broz Schieron

$1+1= 2$
 $1+0 = 1$
1 cannot equal 2

If a 1 gets up early
works intently all day long
reads all the parenting books
does everything "right"
It still will not equal a 2

This is my grief in the purest terms

How Death Feels

by Karen Fite

1. What Death Feels Like to Me

I'm just going along
Walking along
Or reading along
Or just staring out
Maybe listening to music
Maybe in conversation

And I reach out for you
With my thoughts
With my longings
In my memories
In my fantasies

And you aren't here.
I can't reach you.
You are behind a wall
higher than the sky, thicker than the earth
You are with death.

Where are you?

2. How Death Feels to My Friend

My friend says she lives in the ocean
Floating in his absence
Always he is gone
He is never not gone

Have I not yet had the courage
To jump into that ocean
Of you always being gone
Never not gone?

It is true that I am – sometimes -
Caught up short, breathless
when I come again upon that wall
- your forever disappearance.

Aren't you just in another room?

3. How Death Feels to Us Both

My friend says it wasn't courage,
It was like the tide coming in.
My tide comes in but my tide goes out
You are forever gone
You are just upstairs

We both remember
The timeless time
Of being caught in the undertow
Dragged under,
Dragged out to sea.

We both had no choice
But to let the rip tide drag us
Farther out to sea
than we had ever been.
And then it let go.

She made her way back
To the ocean of absence
And I made my way back
To the flickering presence
And the affronting wall.

Bad Dates

by Ray Hoffman

No.
That's not the kind
I'm talking about.
Not the
coffee
lunch
drinks
dinner
with an
other
that didn't meet
your expectations.
Perhaps
failed miserably.
That you shook your head
and laughed about
later.
The other kind.
With months
and days
indelibly stamped.
Your personal
9/11
12/7
8/6.
Your day
of devastation.
You shake your head
but there is
no laughter
when apocalypse
hits.
Just
an ephemeral hope
for a Phoenix
in the ashes.

DDBF (Dumb Dead Blue Face)

*by Margaret J. Stewart,
art by daughter Amaru*

I'd rather be angry and hate you
Than miss you. It's easier.
It hurts less.

Anger gives me energy and power
When I have no strength left
Inside or out of me to survive
The immeasurable pain of each day without you.

We were close to divorce in life
And I guess in the afterlife too.

I'm mad at you, but I want you near.
Give me space, but stay close.

Leave me alone and love me,
Unconditionally.

I feel you near but you're not alive
In this timeline anymore.

How?
What is time?
You're forever 31.
And apparently, according to Jen's dream
You're "good."

Must. Be. Nice. Damn, still mad.

I avoid sleep also, knowing I'll wake up
And the imprint of your D.D.B.F. catalyzes
The re-playing of the the the the the the the the



Jump.

From another timeline. And into “this” one.
Whatever “this” is. Back here.

Growing up in my childhood home. With our child.
What would it look like if I could give her
The childhood I wanted or dare dream of
Let alone manifest?

And re-write. A whole new
Timeline.

One where I’m the favorite version
Of myself. For her. For us.
She’s in pain.
For her, I need to have more pictures
Of your beautiful face and sunshine smile.

I’m not ready.

I guess I’m holding on more
to the image of your D.D.B.F.
Than your gorgeous and angelic smile.

It hurts too much.
I can’t breathe.
Then it all starts again.

Your death day was
Just one of the many days of your life.

Just ONE.
But it hurts so hard.

It took one of the biggest pieces of myself
(and baby, doesn’t feel like there were many left to begin with)
With it.

So I hold it close because it doesn’t make sense.
Even though I always knew and felt in my heart
That we would one day end.

And it would be catastrophic.

And it was.

And it still is.

Finding you the way I did wasn’t ever
How I WANTED it.

Who would?
Want that.
Now What?
I’m here.
But I want to be home. You’re my home.

You always were.
The moment I met you.

Did your soul or spirit make the choice to leave this life
So you could orchestrate things on the other side

In order to protect/guide/help our child?
Still mad. But with a smile.



Fabulous Party

by Karen Fite

She was the twin sister
of your uncle's ex-wife, I believe,
who over lunch today
told us about her mynah bird,
\$35 on sale for bad language,
cage included.

The twin sister,
whose husband had died of cancer
a year before your husband died of ALS
and my wife died of cancer,
has been cooking gourmet Sunday lunches for us
during your dying year.

This one day she told us that the mynah bird
whose name was Culture Vulture,
knew all their many cats by name. Once
when a stray cat, who was a calico
just like her friend Grubstake,
got in and attacked her cage she said:
"What the fuck, Grubstake?!"

A time came that the vet said
"Culture Vulture has cancer, nothing to be done."
They said their goodbyes and
as the bird was carried away
In her finest British accent she exclaimed –
"Fabulous Party!"

Grief Goes to a Party

by Verhanika Willhelm

Grief is a wild woman and she'll take you when she wants to.

Grief stands in the corner of the room, martini in hand. She wears a fuchsia pink skirt suit, 80s-style with huge shoulder pads and a double breast. Her hair is teased high, her pumps match her suit. She smokes in the corner despite the fact that it's 2020 and no one smokes indoors anymore. She doesn't give a FUCK. Come tell her to stop, she will fuck you up.

She has one arm crossed over her chest, the fist supporting the bent elbow of her other arm. She leers at the party-goers. All of them casual, at ease, having fun.

Grief hates fun.

It's time to shake this shit up.

"What a bunch of tools," she says to no one, but to everyone. "Sitting here like everything is fucking fine. Like the world is fucking perfect."

People are starting to look at her.

Good. That's what she wants.

"That's right, you heard me. You all are fucking lemmings with your perfect craft cocktails and your fucking kombucha chasers and your chinos that don't fucking wrinkle because you paid extra for the fucking wrinkle-resistant fabric. Fuck your chinos. And fuck your ironic T-shirts. No one fucking cares about your sense of humor. You don't have one if it needs to be on display!"

Everyone has stopped. Open-mouthed, staring at Grief, who is just getting started.

“You all think you know,” she lurches forward. She’s not drunk. No, Grief can’t be blunted by anything. She’s unapologetic and now that she has all eyes on her, she starts gesturing wildly with her martini, letting the liquid slosh out onto the high-end contemporary couch the host paid to have custom made.

Grief will not be paying for that cleaning bill.

“You know what? Your problems are small, minute, Lilliputian. No one fucking cares about your stock dividends or your diet or your marathon training, Allison,” Grief shoots a look at Allison, who had, in fact, been just speaking about her marathon training. Even now she’s in a running dress, which Grief thinks is just fucking ridiculous. A running dress?

“We get it, Allison. You’re a runner now!” People are glancing amongst themselves. Some looks are nervous, some full of pity, some are quietly applauding Grief for taking down Allison about her marathon training.

“And Greg,” Grief spits. Greg snaps his head up. He had been trying to stay hidden behind the man sitting next to him. He knew he was going to be a source for Grief’s ire.

“Can you stop it with the fucking travel blog? No one gives a shit that you go to Sweden or that bed and breakfast in fucking Butte. Stop trying to make yourself interesting. You’re just not.”

Greg is looking around wondering if this is true. No one steps up to defend him. But that could also be because Grief doesn’t stop when she gets started. Grief seems to always attack Greg. His blog is a particular source of fodder, as if Grief doesn’t like pretty pictures and sources for local honey. Greg once invited Grief to come with him on one of these trips, but she bailed at the last minute, citing “work” as an excuse. Grief works a lot so it wasn’t an implausible excuse.

The hostess comes over to Grief.

“Grief, honey, would you like something to eat? I have some great cheese in the kitchen.”

“I don’t want your goddamn cheese, Melanie. Your cheese is a fucking disaster and food won’t fix all these fucking lemmings,” Grief takes a swig of her drink, finishing it. She fishes the olive out of the glass and throws it in Melanie’s face, bouncing off her forehead. “What are you going to do, Melanie? I’m ruining a ‘lovely’ party. Again.”

She’s right, of course. Grief is ruining the party again. People are whispering, “Why does Melanie invite her if she always gets like this?”

Melanie looks at her guests. Then she looks at Grief. Grief is holding her empty glass, arms crossed, literally tapping her foot. Waiting for a reaction from Melanie, from anyone. Anyone who will engage with her so she can explode, again. She likes explosions.

Melanie notices the purple splotches under Grief’s eyes, the full coverage foundation that isn’t quite covering the attempt Grief has made to cover up her hideous parts. But Grief doesn’t know...she’s not hideous. Grief doesn’t see herself as beautiful and Melanie remembers this. So instead of pushing back, of exploding back at Grief...

“G,” Melanie whispers, “Come with me, please.”

Grief rolls her eyes. Melanie takes her by the elbow and walks her to a bedroom. She doesn’t acknowledge her guests. No apologizing, not daring to give in to the shame that could overwhelm her because of her friend. Her somehow newest and best friend.

They walk into Melanie’s guest room. It’s rich and comfortable and soft and cozy. Grief kicks off her pumps and Melanie notices Grief is wearing pantyhose again. Why does Grief love to wear those uncomfortable things? A question for another day.

“What do you want?” Grief says, flopping into the easy chair in the corner, curling her feet under her. This gesture betrays everything.

“Do you need a hug?” Melanie asks.

“The fuck?” Grief exclaims.

“Do you need a hug?” Melanie asks again, lifting her arms.

And then Grief is there, in Melanie’s arms, sobbing, shaking, keening. Grief can’t breathe, she is taking huge gasping breaths, her face buried in her hands. Grief is mortified. Grief is sad. Grief just wanted to be acknowledged.

“I’m sorry, Mel. I know I don’t fit in, I know I don’t wear the right clothes or drink the right thing. I know I’m weird. But I just wanted someone to talk to me. Someone who would ask about me and not ignore me. I’m so tired of being ignored.” Grief picks her head up and her face is covered in tracks from her mascara, thick, black lines going through that foundation.

“I’ll try, Mel, I really will.” Melanie has heard this before. Grief will try. She’ll try to fit in, try to play nice, try to not be such a buzzkill and a burden.

“G,” Mel says gently. “I don’t need you to be different. You are not the problem. If people can’t get past your fashion or your presence, that’s their problem. You are here to stay with me. And people who can’t welcome you are free to leave.”

Grief takes a deep breath, steadies herself.

“Can I have some water?”

“Of course,” Melanie fills a glass from the adjoining bathroom. She keeps glasses near every sink now because water always seems to help Grief when she’s in a state like this.

Grief drinks as if she’s been in a desert for 40 days and 40 nights. She turns to Melanie.

“Hey, do you remember that time we went to that concert in the park and ate a picnic in the grass?”

Of course Melanie remembers. “Oh, that was so much fun.”

“Could we go on another picnic? Regardless of whether there’s a concert?”

“Hell yeah we can,” Melanie replies. “Can I bring cheese?”

“Yeah. You have good cheese. It’s not a disaster.”

“Oh, I know,” Melanie replies, smiling.

Grief takes her position in the chair, Melanie lies on her side on the bed, facing Grief. Giving Grief her full attention. Grief tells her the best stories and Melanie remembers every detail Grief tells her as if she’s experiencing it again.

“I’m sorry, G,” Melanie says. “I should have spent time with you tonight.”

“Yeah, you should have,” Grief replies. “But it’s ok now.”

Guests leave slowly. Grief and Melanie rejoin the party, Grief right next to Melanie as she cleans the kitchen, changes into her PJs, and gets in bed.

“Good night, G,” Melanie calls out.

“Good night, Mel. See you in the morning.” Grief closes the door and sits on that custom couch in the living room. Drinking tea. Knowing it’s just a matter of time until she and Melanie have to work this out again. But for now, she lets Melanie sleep and sits vigil to keep the ghosts away.

Visitation

by Marcia Robbins

I thought he would come in shrouds or clouds - filmy; or perhaps as wise and distant. So strange to not find him after never having him out of my sight for two months. Then there he was, an elf. Round and solid but surely him. My dream found me surprised, my waking found me curious. Meaning? Weighty thoughts filled the morning.

Writing about it later, I found another surprise: Chippy the Christmas Elf. This little flaccid hotselling elf comes for parents to hide each night so kids can find him (or her now that gender equality sells) each morning in a new place where Elf stays until at night Elf flies back to the North Pole only to return in a new hiding place by morning.

Five years I hid our Chippy (male identified Elf) for Jim who moved from skepticism about the point of all this to delight in the newness of each morning. He would come down the stairs with increasing difficulty as the years progressed, search with decreasing vision and capacity, but never shun Chippy's antics, never once complimenting me on the hiding place.

In those years of diminishment of body and mind, this was our place of magic. Medications, treatments, sweet potatoes were not magic for his health. Support, awareness, meditation were not magic for my worry. But Chippy was magic.

Hiding and finding, hiding and finding for 25 times each year. This last year, because I knew this was the last, Chippy stayed until New Years before being hidden in the bag of wrapping paper lest either one of us find him when he did not want to be found.

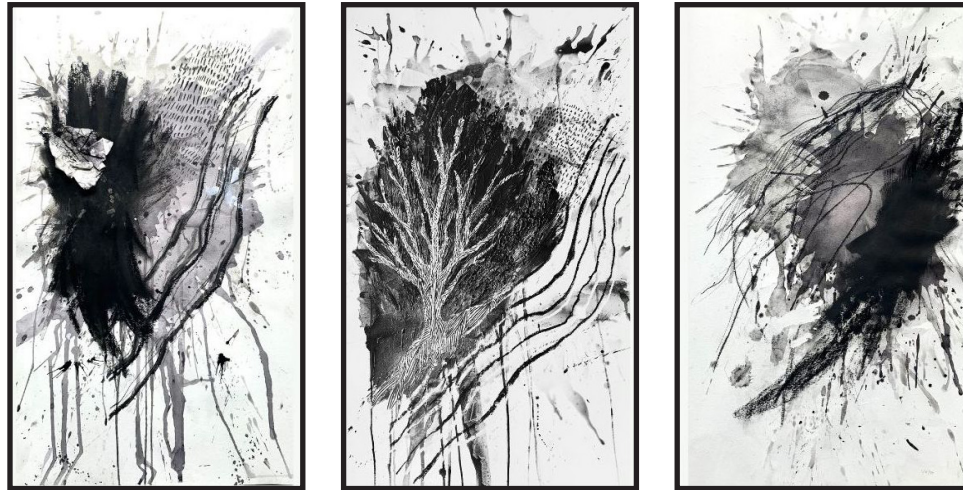
Now Jim has flown away, I cannot touch him just as we were admonished against touching Chippy during the day. His hiding place I cannot find, not in the poinsettia now wrinkled and dry, not in the teapot, not hanging from the shower curtain. I open cabinets and do not find him, only the crackers Jim never got to finish.

Last night, this little elf of Jim appeared in my dream and I am now in the magic again. Sometimes magic is so hard to tolerate - tell me how this works! I cry. But magic sits quietly there offering delight, frustration, wonder. "I'm here today and if you are careful not to mess with me, I'll be back tomorrow," magic promises. "Please, oh please," I cry with glee and tears.

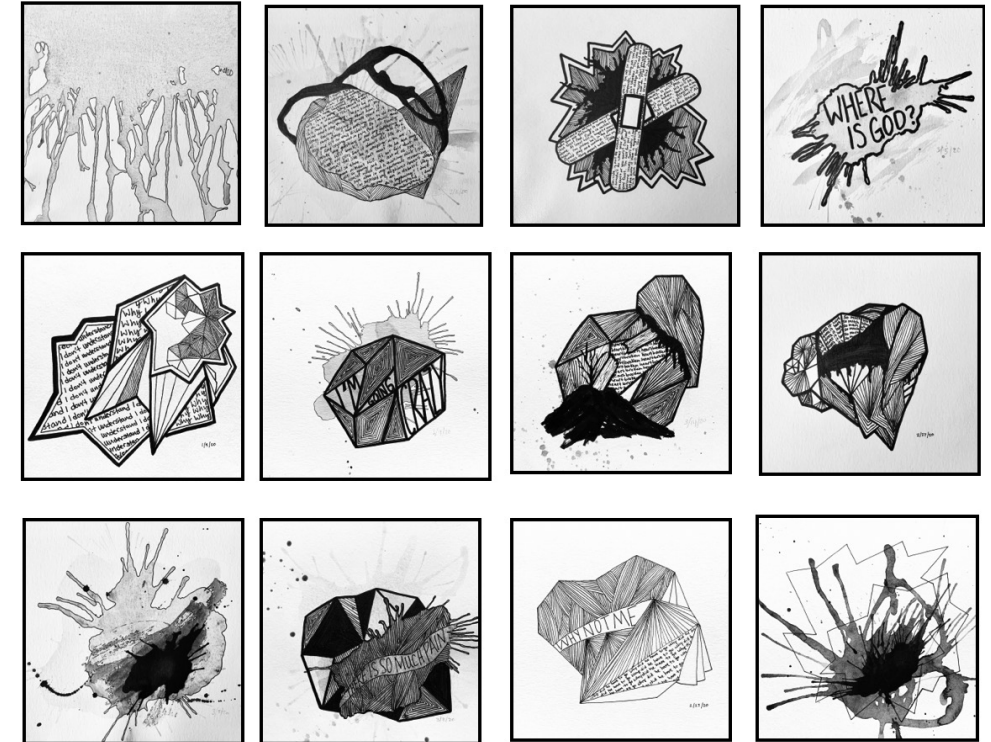
I had to remind Jim to look for Chippy as the years progressed. Now he reminds me to look for the elves that find their hiding place in grief.

My Grief Observed

by Alexandra Forest

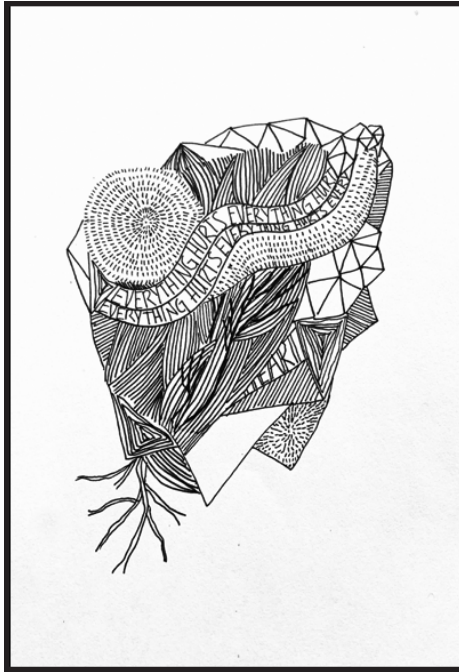


The Beginning #1 #2 #3
10 x 18
Mixed Media
Alexandra Forest 2019

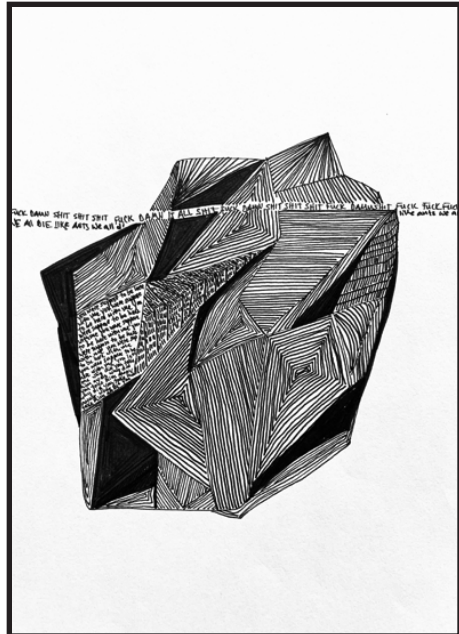


Dark Night #1-#12
5x5
Watercolor & Pen
Alexandra Forest 2020

These pieces were made during some of the darkest nights of my grief. I wanted to die. I remember being alone in the empty apartment where Will and I used to live; stepping out onto the ledge outside my room staring at the ground. I remember looking down wishing that it was high enough for me to jump off of. It was only two stories. At best I would be paralyzed for life leaving me to live out the rest of my cursed life unable to move. I collapsed to the floor of that balcony feeling defeated because I knew the jump wouldn't be enough to kill me. I remember that it started to rain that night. How poetic. It rained, the moon was full, and I was alive. I couldn't kill myself without some horrible pain ensuing first. I guess it was the pain I feared more than death interestingly enough. Instead I screamed. Screamed on my bed, screamed on the floor, screamed in my pillow. It was probably 3 or 4 am that I finally pulled out my watercolors and started drawing these pieces. I didn't know what else to do. No one else was around or awake. I was ALONE. It was dark. It was night. Nothing could hold my pain except the pages of the paper. It was a dark night. A horrible horrible night. A night I will never be able to forget it...and yet, the sun rose in the end.



Everything Hurts
5 x 8
Pen



We Die Like Ants
5 x 8
Pen
Alexandra Forest 2020



Paralyzed
5 x 8
Pen



"...And all that is left is my somatic existence."
9 x 12
Mixed Media
Alexandra Forest 2021

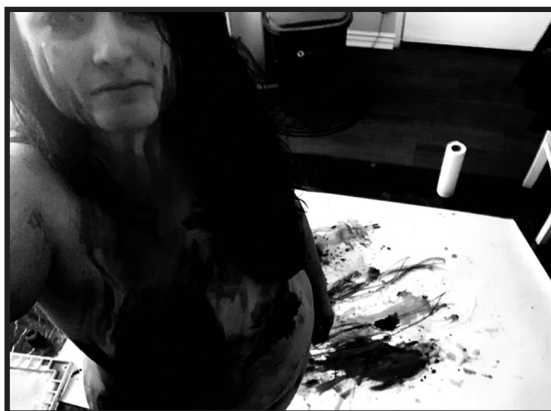
Since Will died nothing has been the same. I've been uprooted from my old life. I don't feel connected to anything anymore. I feel isolated in my trauma and loss. Ultimately the only thing I am rooted in is my mere existence. My physical being, my body.

Despite the heartache and pain and even at times the will to no longer live, my body has continued to keep breathing. I am separated from my physical body. My body is its own being with instincts rooted in living. Even in my fiancé's last moments, his heart did everything it could to survive. We have no control of how or when we die, but our bodies in their last moments will continue to live as long as they can. I hate that I'm still here and that Will isn't. At times it feels as if my physical being has betrayed me and what I truly desire. Grief has swallowed me whole and all that is left is my somatic existence.



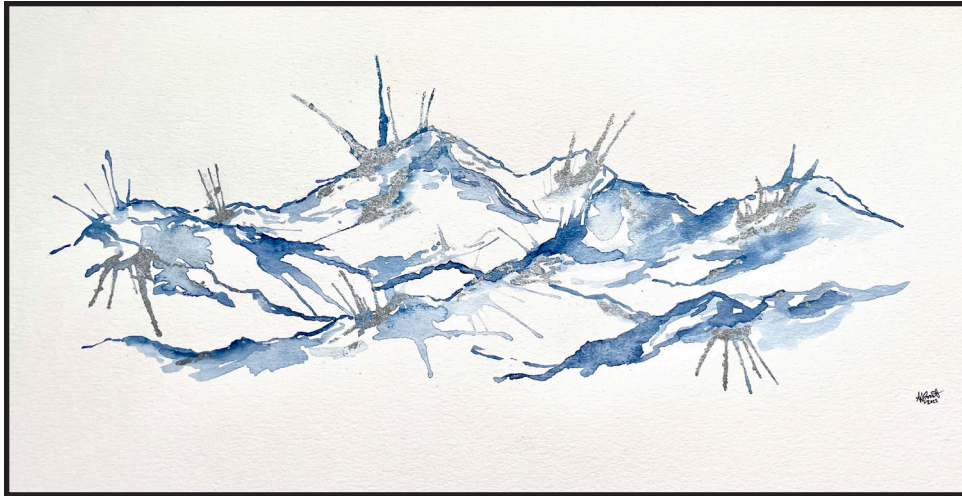
Blood, Death, and Tears
48x72
Mixed Media Performance Piece
Alexandra Forest 2019

In the beginning the grief was overwhelming. I felt as if I was going to burst from the inside out. So I laid out a 48x72 piece of paper, stripped nude, and painted myself with black ink, acrylic, watercolor, and charcoal. I drenched my hair and hands in paint to use as them a brush. I spent hours just sitting and crying. It allowed me to see what my grief looked like. It was depressing, heartbreaking, therapeutic all at the same time.



Scars: The Entanglement of Grief and Living #1 & #2
10 x 18
Watercolor, Charcoal, and Gold Leaf
Alexandra Forest 2022

My grief is like cement that is entangled within my everyday life. I never understood the depth and duality of emotions that a person can experience through grief until now. How is it possible to be happy, cheerful, heartbroken, desolate, angry, and content all at the same time? Happiness isn't carefree and pure anymore. It's entangled with bittersweet memories of what could have been, leaving a permanent sting reaching my core. I often feel insane because it seems impossible to reconcile these dualities. Realities that may seem insignificant to outsiders are tied to painful traumatic memories which make it difficult to explain and connect with others. How was I suppose to explain to the stranger at the gas station that I wasn't actually sobbing in the rain because I couldn't figure out how to fix my windshield wiper? Or to the people at that one random party that I wasn't really crying because my car got stuck in the snow while trying to drive home? It was never about the windshield wiper or the car stuck in the snow. It was about feeling alone in my grief and memories being triggered. They say grief comes in waves. For me, it is more like a journey of multiple emotions married together through the scars of grief. Sometimes all you see and feel is color and other times, only darkness.



Bittersweet
10x18
Watercolor and silver leaf
Alexandra Forest 2022

Before Will died, we took a roadtrip together through Denali National Park. My painting, “Bittersweet,” is inspired from one particular memory of Will and me sitting on a bench overlooking the mountains. It was 10 p.m. and the sun was still shining bright on the valley with no one around except the two of us. We spent the evening talking about our future and wanting to have a “summer home” in Alaska where we could visit during the shining months. For me, the word bittersweet refers to the pain of a life you can no longer live. How is it possible for such memories to bring happiness and also leave you with such a painful sting?

Floorboards

by Lisa Fusch Krause

Why do I still speak to you
in love and anger?
You have disappeared
from the floorboards of this house,
your spirit somewhere far beyond
the burned-out lightbulbs
I can't reach in the kitchen

Walking, Not Running

by Lisa Fusch Krause

Today, I finally emptied out
the cabinet where you'd put
your running clothes—
I'd been afraid
to even look at them

I was surprised to find them
neatly laundered;
it must have been a long time
since you'd felt good enough
to use them

I had hoped for some scent of you;
instead, only particle board,
perhaps a wisp
of laundry soap

Our Siamese hopped in,
rested on them
for a moment—
maybe he sensed you,
maybe he'd known
you were dying

These days, two cats greet me
every morning,
tumble down the stairs
for breakfast

I make my own coffee

Next week,
the painters come

I pack up photos of you,
photos of the two of us,
then dig them out again

I'm not trying to edit you
out of my life—
it's just sorrow is too big
of a load to carry

With cats

by Karen Fite

Does anyone understand?
When I think of your hair
and wish that I had kept
the long tail that you cut off
when we were young?
So that today I wouldn't be
clutching my own old woman's head
with both hands.
And all I have
Is the fur of these two cats you've left me with.

Does anyone else
turn her hands into fists
digging the nails into the palms
with the empty of reaching
for strong brown hands
that are no longer there?
While all I have
are the sharp claws of these two cats you've left me with.

Does anyone at all
clench her jaw in pain
And strain her ears
listening so hard
for a voice that can't be heard,
stopping the scream of pain
that won't be heard,
alone with these cats
who don't come when I call?

Dust

by Alex Leaf Maybruck

The living, breathing person
Whom I loved, talked to, and held close at night
My miracle
My reason
Just dust.

My only one
My best friend
My treasure
My forever love
And now
Just dust.

They have no more consciousness
No more emotion
No knowledge they existed as a beautifully alive being
No knowledge they exist no longer.

All their memories of life
All the layers of their character
All their love
Everything they ever learned
Everything they ever knew
Is now nothingness.

Their body is nothingness
Their soul is nothingness
They are not there
They are not anywhere, anymore
They are not they
There is no they
There is just dust
My forever precious love
My destruction
Just dust.

Grief Lands

by Marcia Robbins

At first grief lands like a great
Eagle on her chest -
Talons out, piercing.
The weight immense,
Breathtaking.
The wing span darkening any light
Or hope for ease.
This bird of prey, coming for the living left
behind by the dead.

Days become nights and so forth.
Cards received. Cards put away.
Closets cleaned, tears staining silk ties,
Old Kleenex precious in pockets.

Each morning, she wakes in bed,
Stretches her warm arm to feel
The night chilled space beside
And relinquishes herself to
the bird's sharp visit.

This morning, heavy cat's paws
Land on her chest
Claws retracted in kindness.
She holds her breath, waiting for the sharpness.

Soft, familiar, heavy still, this grief
curls into her,
Finding its place to rest.

Conversation

by Marcia Robbins

There's so much to tell you:
That the stove broke again
That the berries on the bamboo are bright
That little Charlie laughs now
And Cathy lost her baby
Oh, and sweet potatoes with miso and lime are so good.
I want to tell you that Walter remembers your mother's smile
And I sometimes forget yours
And Larry has a new love
And the Christmas elf is back and fun.
You'd be surprised how much I want to tell you.
Mostly I want to tell you this,
I wish you weren't dead.

Lost Places 11.23.13

by Nicole M. Harper

I'll never be here again
The presence of this place
Will soon only exist
Locked in memory
A vision of what once was
And never again will be

I don't want to leave
Accept that this is it
-The End-
Such a frozen sentiment
So empty

Anticipating the occupation
Of someone strange
How can this be?

I don't want to ever forget
What happened over there
By that wall
Or in the kitchen
Down the hall

Its fate is out of my hands
Not up to me
If I had my way
I would collect places
The way people collect things

Losing this place
Feels like losing a part of myself

Loss

by Mark Farrell

In the year since Diana died,
I have heard the consoling words, "I am sorry for your loss," many, many times.
I cannot doubt the sincerity of any speaker.
I am very heartened by the words and accept, with gratitude, their intended sentiment.
I feel it to my bones.
Increasingly I have been wondering about the word LOSS. When I hear the phrase, I experience a moment of our past in the present.
I can hear her voice and see her.
The person who Diana was is no longer here.
I am not sure that I have lost her.

Reading a Poem to Loved Ones on a Lopez Beach at Sunset

by Jared Curtis

A scarlet disk sat on the spine
of San Juan Island
just across the channel,
grinning brightly yellow
while it sank below the ridge.

And as it dropped, a voice rose up
in praise of her we mourn—beloved
wife, grandmother, and dear friend.
Ashes on lapping waters at our feet.

Tears well up to shake the voice
as parting words come haltingly.
Those in the circle stand
to enfold him in their arms,
tears in their eyes, too.

Remaining ashes on their boards,
her son and granddaughter
launch and paddle out,
stop, and scatter dust
on the receding tide,
saying words to one another,
too far off for those on shore to hear.

The grey dust carries south
to join the waters flowing west
through Juan de Fuca Strait
and open ocean.

SECTION 4

HOW IT IS AFTER: LATER GRIEF



Art by Kachyna

Tethered For Julie

by Cora Goss-Grubbs

“It’s twenty years today,” you sigh.

I settle into the phone for a
long talk. All over again we’re

thirteen when you murmured
“My dad shot himself” and I counted

backwards to the night my brother
was killed. Twenty-one days exactly.

Today the phone line spans a
thousand miles further and here we
are, still

tethered. Just like every year since,
the date slaps your face. And for the

twentieth time I count backwards
from yours to calculate mine.

Tucked into an overstuffed duvet,
you scan the sparse walls of your

flat and speak of the burden that
lingers, the joy you seek.

Between your words the silence
hisses. I’ve alighted upon the

couch, an island in a teeming sea.
As you talk I search for my grief,

but find only walls of family photos,
stacks of kids CDs, scattered toys and

books, a bulletin board of To Do
lists and inked-up calendars,

shrieks of raucous laughter: Daddy
and Ry playing hide-and-go-seek on

another floor of our three-story home.
Have I buried it? No. It’s stacked in a

closet: twenty-eight journals, two
novels,
bottled memories poured onto paper
year

after year so that now when I
stare into my son’s amber eyes,

Uncle Mike’s, I remember with love
not ache. Will this poem hurt you?

I’ve never been good at hearing your
pain.
I’d rather tug on this phone line
until you’re

beside me on this oasis, dividing
my excess, sharing your quiet.

Ry toddles up the stairs, fills my lap,
steals the phone. “It’s Auntie Julie,”
I say.

“Gooney!” Those eyes light up. For
an instant, your voice lifts so high,

I can feel it from here.

Waves

by Jared Curtis

“...resilience is...the most common response to loss.”
– Neuroscientist Mary-Francis O’Connor

Gray days
 have their own
 resilience—a grim
canopy overhead
 a moment later opens
 into patches of blue,
promising sun,
 then sol appears
 in glorious person,
shifting shadows
 as clouds slip by,
 drying sidewalks,
lifting spirits again.

Clouds regather,
 reappear, and
 then pass on.

Yet grief from loss
 returns, wave
 upon wave,
to drag us down—
 traveling waves
 that roll through oceans,
dynamic perturbations
 moving at pace
 inexorably
from shore to shore...
 or meet opposing waves
 head on—to form

a standing wave
 that rises up and holds
 its place—no place to be.

The hollow of a wave,
 its nadir,
 its rock bottom,
must also have its crest,
 its apogee and can be ridden up
 as well as down—
So we in grief may answer
 not always with sadness,
 silence, sighs, or sobs,
but often with surprise
 at joy, resilience,
 a saving grace
that lets light shine
 on what’s before us,
 gives permission
to greet the world
 not as it was,
 as it had been,
but as it is now
 in all its jumble,
 confusion and grit,
its variety
 and beauty,
 its blessing.

Document (22)

by Lisa Fusch Krause

1.
Now I'm sure
love can't be found
at the bottom of a wine glass,
and no matter where I look,
I won't find you

I close the curtains,
turn down the covers
on the bed we once shared

Three years have passed—
I've yet to accept
two cats are now my lot

2.
Why do I still see you
at the foot of the couch,
a pot pipe in your hand—

haunted eyes,
exhaustion leaking
from every pore?

3.
My world's grown small—
it comes down to a wound
on my left arm that won't heal,
a flash of hunger in my stomach,

two cats,
a photo of you I remember...
but can't find

4.
I wish I had something pretty
to show you

All I have
is my rumpled face,

not quite crying

April 2, 2024 - To Jeff on the 5th Anniversary of His Death

by Diane Clausen

Five years ago today, you died.

I had no warning. No time to forgive, no time to be forgiven.

This caused a hole, which I filled with self-recrimination; with dreams where you are alive but don't love me anymore.

Even so, I move forward. I try new things, I offer and accept help, I pay attention when the universe sends me a gift. I am often happy and sometimes sad.

I like who I am becoming -- stronger and kinder, having survived the pain of your death.

I love my life. I love you.

last wish

by Shelly Glennon

I want you to dance again
once the grief's wrung out
feel sun warm your shoulder
where my hands once rested
raise your face up
the world needs your beauty
live fully with joy
my gratitude complete

Later Grief

by Candace Clay

After six years,

My grief feels like a burden
I will always carry with me.

While it began as an almost unbearable burden,
I now feel lighter.

The grief is still there but does not seem as heavy as it once did.

What I have lost

Is the person I was

With my life companion.

That me disappeared

I have had to create a new me –

The hardest thing I have had to do in my life.

Grief After Six Years

by Theo McCulloch

What have I lost?

Keun Hii is gone.

I know better than to judge how people handle their grief.

I have lost nothing

I never have to let go of my Keun Hii.

What is grief like now?

Softer. Bearable.

I am learning how to carry

Something that cannot be fixed

I have new friends, a tribe to walk with me.

What have I gained?

I have gained peace

Love for my fellows

Perhaps I am a better man

For learning to live with grief.

Notes from my Grief Journal

by Yaël Dvora Yanich

In June of 2017, my life partner, Doug, died seven weeks after he was diagnosed with lung cancer.

Doug was handsome and charming: bright, caring, and well-read, with a deep appreciation for art and music, and a wicked sense of humor. We found each other later in life, and cherished our time together.

A Vietnam vet, Doug's exposure to the toxic defoliant Agent Orange most likely contributed to his lightning speed demise.

Shortly after Doug's death, a friend who'd lost her husband several years previously told me that it would take at least a year before things got better. I was shocked. "That's unacceptable," I replied. "I can't feel this way for a whole year!"

Times of deep sadness and grief are life-changing. The world cracks open, exposing its thumping organs, inner-workings, blood and guts. We can see backstage and into the wings, and it's all there: illness, debilitation, death-- things we usually try not to think about.

Lovely.

This was part of life now, and I had no choice but to bear witness. My heart felt raw, like bits of it had been shaved off. I welcomed laughter like water in the desert, a salvation from sadness.

Grief is complicated. When we lose someone, we don't just grieve for that person. We also grieve for our loss of innocence and our sense of safety. We grieve for a world that has suddenly vanished, leaving us in a new world that we didn't choose.

In the months following Doug's passing, I was frequently asked how I was doing. My reply was usually, "I'm okay when I'm okay, and I'm not when I'm not." What I really felt like saying was, "Can't you see this burden I'm carrying? How exhausted I am and why I have so little energy? Can't you see this giant hole in my shattered heart?"

This is a metaphor for grief that came to me: I watch as a truck pulls up to my house and delivers a giant box. In the process of unloading the box, the forklift destroys both the entry and the front part of my house. I am helpless. There's nothing I can do to stop the destruction.

I didn't order this box and don't want it, but I have no choice in the matter. My house is partially destroyed and I am now obliged to carry this cumbersome box around. I feel exposed and a little apologetic that this is my new reality. The box is very heavy. I'm tired and confused.

In life, we're used to things breaking and getting fixed. There was no fixing this. Doug was gone. I wasn't prepared for it. I felt like I'd lost a part of myself.

The only way forward that made any sense was to acknowledge that any form of progress was good. Even the smallest steps counted. I called them 'tiny ant steps.' When that was all I could do, it would have to be enough.

On my first evening at The Healing Center, I was unsure if I could participate. I couldn't stop weeping, and wondered how any good could come from attending.

During my intake interview, after I had answered some questions, the counselor asked if I had any questions. I asked him, "How can you spend your time listening to grieving people? It's all so sad." I was surprised by the counselor's answer: "It's an honor," he replied.

It took a year of attending weekly meetings before I began to understand what he meant. I had also come to realize that it was an honor to bear witness to others' inner struggles, helplessness, sadness and love.

At The Healing Center, I didn't feel compelled to 'pass' as okay the way I did with concerned family and friends. This was a place where it was okay to feel

broken; others felt that way, too. Crying was normal and accepted. We all took our turns and someone was always there to pass the tissues.

A year after Doug's death, I still couldn't wrap my head around it. How can it be? He's still gone? And, it's been a year?

But, I had survived that year. And, if I could do that, I reminded myself, who knows what other seemingly impossible things I could do. Be creative? Clean my bedroom?

I started to understand that part of my journey was accepting that I was no longer the same person I had been. Grief and loss had changed me. I wanted to feel whole again, instead of like a hollow receptacle for a shattered version of my former self.

Two years after Doug's death, I knew I'd changed but continued to feel like I was in the process of changing. I hoped my mind could once again be sharp, and I hoped I'd regain the ability to find joy in everyday activities.

More recently, rather than focusing on what's challenging for me (and what I'm messing up) I substitute, "This is what it looks like to become the person I'm becoming." It's a developmental phase.

There's another metaphor that resonates with me: life is a dance. Like all dances, it eventually ends.

Our dances are as unique as we are. We miss someone's particular way of dancing through life in a way that was theirs alone. We remember how they made us feel, how fortunate we were to have been there to witness and share their unique expression of life.

The moments we shared became memories to treasure

They're mine for the keeping, for all of my days

And all of the ways that you showed me you loved me

Are all of the ways

I will think of you

All of my days

For My Mom (Fifty Years)

by Lisa Fusch Krause

November leaves crumple,
parchment-like, outdoors;
my dark eyes skitter away from hers
in my bathroom mirror

I'm lost-girl sad and don't know why

Then, "Fifty years," my sister writes—
fifty years, to the day....
the day she didn't come home,
the day we huddled in our stairwell,
foundering

Why have I been granted
a half-century more?
I never had her sharp elegance,
only her fierce love of words
I used merely to hide behind

Artful words escape me now;
autumn geese take flight
for warmer weather

Here, on my dead-end street,
where orange and red maple leaves
perform countless little suicides,
I whisper, "Fifty years? That long?
I loved you so much"

Even now, I dare not shout

Invocation

by Karen Fite

Afterwards
 After losses
 After the life
 After the loves
 After the intact incarnation

In the times
Of solitude and alone
Of inertia and stillness
Of emptiness and space
Of scars and strength

I invoke grief and the power of pain
I invoke age and the wisdom of crones
I invoke sorrowful play and playful sorrow
Motherfather power in the lightdarkness.

Bent and limping crone of curious laughing mind,
Tears. Lakes my eyes
I am a body filled with salt water more than I can hold,
I leak and leak, leave puddles along my path
All I can't
hold on to I love
And love and love.

SECTION 5

WHAT HELPS



It is 600 D + 0

FEEL FEEL'INGS

It's Okay to Talk About Death

by Barb Ablehauser

During the most profound parts of my grief over the loss of my boyfriend, I remember thinking, “I wonder how long it will be before I can talk about Chuck without making people uncomfortable.”

I wanted to talk about him. I really did. Both good stuff and bad stuff. I wanted to process what I was feeling and why. But I found it really hard to discuss it with people because I felt as if I were making them squirm and they didn't know what to say.

How could I explain to them that it was okay to talk about Chuck? How could I tactfully make the point that death, as a general rule, is not contagious after the fact? How could I reassure them that they couldn't possibly cause me any more pain than I was already in, and that by talking about him they were actually helping me? My energy was at an all-time low so I wasn't in the mood to school people.

Barbara Kingsolver knows:

“People who are grieving walk with death, every waking moment. When the rest of us dread that we'll somehow remind them of death's existence, we are missing their reality.”

This couldn't be more true! It's not like we're taking a vacation from grief and by bringing the subject up you're thrusting us back into that awful place. You're not reminding us of something we've forgotten. We're already there, people. And it's okay. We're going to survive. It's just that it would be so comforting to talk about it, so nice to feel less isolated. So make the effort, even if it's just to ask if we'd like to talk. It would mean more than you know.

I'm happy to say I've gotten past the worst of my grief (although it will never go away completely), but if anything could have made the experience easier, it would have been the general sense that I didn't have to censor myself to avoid making everyone feel awkward.

Please try to give that gift to the people you love who are grieving.

After Jeff Died

by Diane Clausen

After my husband Jeff died, I gratefully accepted so many gifts: gifts of food, gifts of visits and phone calls, gifts of practical support navigating the world with my grief brain (help pumping gas and grocery shopping come to mind).

Gifts of just sitting and listening to whatever came out of my mouth deserve a special call out. This is not an easy task! You have to be willing to see and feel another's deep pain, and not run away. Not try to fix it. Not try to minimize it with a simple “you are so strong” or “this too will pass.”

Just sitting and listening. Listening to someone who is only beginning to realize what death means. No more walks together in the Arboretum. No more birthday cards or anniversary cards. No more eating out at nice restaurants together. No more travels together. No more sharing daily chores and daily news.

Just sitting and listening. For as long as it takes. I am so grateful for this gift. And for all the other gifts generously given.

the fog of grief

by Shelly Glennon

the force of his struggle was strong
his attempt to hold on denied
his heart rate changed
his last breath a sigh
his once strong hand grew cold in
mine

I sat numb, listless
and the fog rose around me
guided through the hall
through the parking lot
to our empty home
I carried the clothes I thought he'd
come home in

cloudy outlines of life
the hands of my family to steady me
their embrace as together we wept
shattered
broken hearts are real

dense grief
fog as thick as the love we lost
empty hands limp
staring at nothing
listless, exhausted
time invisible

a subtle shift
a shimmer seeps through
with a grandchild's smile
the embrace of an old friend
sweet family ever attentive
beside me all along

revealed by the lifting fog
the sea of tears
was really a sea of possibilities
day's glow touches my hand
I remember warmth
bringing focus back to my eyes
joy back to my heart
the flowers we planted now blooming

the fog is lifting
in gratitude, my soul heals

Ode to The Healing Center

by Candace Clay

“Grief isolates us from those that don’t know what it is like to go through.
Yet, at the same time it binds us to those that do know.” *Benjamin Allen*

Thanks to each and every one of you who sat with me and listened during the
worst time of my life and helped me not to feel totally isolated.

Thanks for understanding my broken heart and tears in my eyes and
understanding it is not crazy to sob out loud while driving alone in my car.

Thanks for being my tribe.

Because of you, I feel strong enough to start to recenter my life and begin to
laugh again.

the lesbian photographs a man with a *don't say* gay shirt as he mourns for his child

by Caroline Catlin

grief levels us. this is a thing I learn time
and time again. every time I walk
into these rooms of mourning.

whatever we believe, whoever
we are, whatever we stand for. grief
brings us to this place.

which is to say, we all love
the same way. there is so little
that unites us. but loss,

we understand. we all know
what it is to love with our whole
selves and lose anyway.

we are together in this wide aching
room. all our messy hearts on
the same steady beat.

Love Poem from an Empty Room

by Caroline Catlin

I want to write an ode to the days
where we hold it alone. where we
sleep and wait and whimper in
our beds or on quiet stiff couches
with soup or crackers or water or
tea or heat packs. with a silent
phone in our hand and pain
meds that have stopped working
forgotten on the table. I want to
write an ode to enduring. a poem
for the days we say we are fine
or healthy or well because the
truth feels weary in our mouths,
the truth is never changing, the
truth is hard and real and painful
and now and now and now and
only a few of us will ever fully
get what that means. I want to
write a poem in praise of what
it is to survive when it feels as if
everyone else has looked away,
away from your illness, your
tragedy, your loss, your grief, your
prognosis, your heart, your body,
your hope. a poem for you, me,
us, here, listening as the entire
world tells us no over and over
again and yet still, somehow, here
we are, finding strength to hope
for a yes.

Can I Borrow Your Father?

by Elena Seaholm

Can I borrow your father?
May I listen in on the pun-filled lines he casts your way?
the ones sent with a nudge
received with the rolling of your eyes.

Could I try to catch the quote he slips
into the conversation?
The one followed by a pause
and an expectant pout.

Can I watch him hug you?

I don't mean to intrude
or interrupt. Please
don't even look my way.

Consider me an observer
no longer privy to intimate moments
of comfort and support,
just
an audience to public expressions
if I am granted.

No need to meet my plea with pity,
I just want a reminder
just to see from a distance
what I chase in dreamscapes,
to feel for a moment
that love lives on.

So could I borrow your father?

Le Temps Perdu

by Jared Curtis

“ . . . grief has no clock or calendar. It has no expiration date—we only learn how to live with it. Like memory, it is not locked in the past, rather an ongoing fluid phenomenon.” - Carol Muske-Dukes

Nostalgia is a form of grief
displaced from what is truly lost
to what might be recoverable
if “they” would only bring it back.
It's easy just to find a thief
who's stolen from us what we feel
is ours by right and loudly mourn.

The deepest grief does not recede—
it shifts its shape and calls itself
by other names. Nostalgia's one,
malaise, indifference, and rage—
those swirling dreams that haunt me still
and drop on me a hail of guilt,
a flood of tears, a surge of grief.
And yet the gentian on my deck
shows signs of life, of baby leaves
now sprouting underneath the brown,
promising a trumpet blue and bright.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Barb Ablehauser

A year and a half after my partner's body was found in his truck, clutching his asthma inhaler, I decided my life needed a do-over. I moved from Florida to Seattle, never having been there and not knowing a soul. It was the best decision I ever made. It took another year and a half for the dust to settle. Then, for several months, I attended The Healing Center's Transitions Group, where I met Cris. We are now married, and will be forever grateful to The Healing Center for bringing us together. I am a bridgetender, getting paid to make half the city late to work by opening one of Seattle's many drawbridges. I also write a blog entitled The View from a Drawbridge. We live with our two destructive yet lovable dogs in Kent, Washington.

Klaus Brandl

On Feb. 7, 2021, my beloved Anne passed away in my arms. She was my lover, best friend, and wife for nearly 20 years. A few days later, my daughter Carmina connected me with The Healing Center. Overwhelmed by grief at this time, I followed her guidance blindly joining a group of early griever. During my ensuing journey, the group brought me together with strangers looking for comfort where there was no comfort to be found, trying to face, and accept what cannot be understood. And yet, I started to bond with people whose pain resonated with me as deeply as I could feel my own. Seeing many people join and leave, I was able to experience the healing power of sharing pain and grief. After more than two years, I finally stepped away from my group, but I could not ignore the calling to give back to others what I received when I was in need the most. Currently, I assist Mary Jackson as a co-facilitator with one of the Memory Keepers Groups.

In memory of Anne, with much love and gratitude.

Graham Burri

I started working with the Healing Center after my friend passed away in an accident in July of 2022. I have found an amazing and supportive community who have made this challenging journey easier for me. It is a rare and special group of people.

Caroline Catlin

I am a writer, photographer, and care worker who believes in the power of shared and authentic truths. My photography and writing have been published in *The New York Times*, *Glamour*, *Boston Globe*, *Healthline*, and elsewhere. Following a diagnosis of brain cancer at age 27, I shifted my career plan to working, writing, and creating within the world of grief care and illness. I volunteer as a critical care and end of life photographer for children and families and am the Youth Program Lead at The Healing Center. I am fueled most by connection, creativity, and sour candy.

The poems I included in this *Anthology* were written in response to my volunteer work as an end of life photographer for children and families.

Diane Clausen

My husband Jeff died suddenly on April 2, 2019, of a hemorrhagic stroke. In an instant, I lost my partner of 40 years, my best friend, my primary advisor, and the focus of my life. In the days and years that followed, I found compassionate support from family and friends, and from The Healing Center, for which I am deeply grateful. I hope my writings bring some comfort to others on their grief journeys.

Candace Clay

I was a client of The Healing Center for almost 4 years. I lost my beloved husband, Jerry, to cancer after 30 plus years together. My connection with The Healing Center has been a lifealtering experience for me. When there was an opening for volunteers I was selected to help facilitate one of the groups. My professional life included mediating and facilitating but I never dreamed I would use these life skills by being involved in the grief community.

Note: Candace died on May 16 2024. She is greatly missed by her Healing Center friends. We love you, Candy.

Arlene Crews

I came to the Healing Center after my husband, Jed Crews, died in a car accident on July 1, 2019. The Healing Center was the catalyst for many beautiful friendships in my life that continue to this day. I'd be a different person (undoubtedly less healed!) without the support from my fellow Early Group members.

Jared Curtis

Between January 2020 and February 2023 our family suffered repeated blows when four beloved family members died of painful, debilitating illnesses. The poems I selected address the sadness and grief I felt at these losses of such vital, joyful, and loving souls. The poems are a sampling of my means to healing through the process of finding words to express and understand my sorrow, my loss. Sharing these poems and the small victories they describe—with my family and with others who are in the midst of grief—is a small gift I can give and a tribute to the beloved wife, son, and two brothers we have lost. My daughter-in-law Amy Hamblin attended The Healing Center.

Patricia Jo David/Kate David

Paul, my husband, died May 13, 2022 of cancer. We were married 50 years during which time he was an optician and the father of our three children, Peter, Kate and Denny. Our daughter Kate is the author of *Dad's Eulogy*, included in this anthology.

I learned of The Healing Center through a friend and when I called the Center I was connected to Mary Jackson and the Memory Keepers group. At The Healing Center I met very wise and compassionate women who walked ahead of me in this grief walk. I felt validated, they knew my grief. I wanted to know what they knew. I felt crazy, they nodded, "it is called widow brain." I experienced an inability to read, could not concentrate, lost interest in doing things, had trouble sleeping. Mary let me know it is not crazy...it is grief. What a relief to hear those words!

My husband was a man of simple pleasures, yet also relished the finer experiences of life. He loved discovering new musicians, trying the most outlandish item on a menu, and Anahola Beach on Kauai. Our five grandchildren, Brody, Logan, Miranda, Micah, and Winona, brought him unending joy. Our love grows exponentially!

Mark Farrell

I came to The Healing Center about five seasons ago after my wife's passing. Diana L. O'Neill was her name. She was a Renaissance Woman who had many accomplishments: she travelled the world, was in Community Theatre, attended New College in London and sang in their productions, and was learning the Cello when we met in the mid-80s. We travelled together, sang together, bought a small casita in Morelia, Mexico, had good fights together, shared our love of cats together, and cultivated together a wonderful perennial garden.

I am a former farmer who found his niche working with adjudicated youth for over 30 years. I have not attempted to write any poetry for the past 50 years.

I am with Cohort 1 at The Healing Center. Several of us are meeting outside the ZOOM at the Urban Bakery. Six of our group are now Balloon Veterans. I am most grateful to be a part of Cohort 1.

Jamee Fields

I have been a member of the Early Loss support group at The Healing Center since July 2023 after my dear husband of 20 years Marty Davidson died suddenly and unexpectedly of heart failure. Marty loved being a Dad, fishing, football, playing Settlers of Catan, ping pong, trivia, was a wine lover, loved everything politics and was an amazing partner, friend, family member, and neighbor.

Poetry is something that has come to me since the loss of my husband as a way to express the deep grief and feelings around grief. It allows expression of something that I do not want to express. The Healing Center is somewhere that I know there is comfort and support available, a true community of healing.

Anjali Fisher

I have been a client at The Healing Center for two years in the Young Adult group. I joined The Healing Center after my dad, Tad Fisher, died in October 2021. He lived with an eye for the sublime in our daily lives, on the border between absurd humor and philosophy, and he died from cognitive decline. He

loved going for walks through the woods and ravines in our area, and nerding out about the stormwater detention infrastructure when it rained. He would have loved to know his daughter is now an environmental planner, working on those things for King County.

I grew up in Seattle and found my way home after moving away in my 20s. I truly have no words to describe how grateful I am to my Healing Center cohort. It's a sacred space where we help each other feel seen as we go through a very lonely experience.

Karen Fite

I came to the Healing Center in 2018 after my life partner of almost 40 years (and wife of 3 years) died of cancer. Niki was a therapist. We had talked about death and loss, we were old and her dying had taken place over about a year, so I thought I was prepared and doing fine even though I couldn't sleep and couldn't remember how to get places I had been hundreds of times. But I thought "Well Niki would like me to find some help even though I'm doing fine" and The Healing Center in those pre-Covid days was in a sweet little house up too many rickety steps for my old knees but it was close to my house.

And there I found a whole group of people who could help me understand and articulate what I was going through. For me in those early days Mary Jackson was the rock who helped so many of us to believe that an "after" life was possible. And I found the close friendships that shared vulnerability can foster.

After a few years in the Memory Keepers group I found that I could be helpful to other people experiencing grief. I had written poetry my whole life but suddenly the loss of Niki released a flow of poetic energy and I noticed that other people in grief also found writing a good outlet so I had the idea for this anthology. And I started volunteering at The Healing Center with Saara and the Young Adult group where I met Mikey and he and I bonded over our love for poetry and commitment to writing it and so I asked him if he would collaborate with me on this project. Though I miss Niki every moment and want her back, this grief journey, thanks to The Healing Center and all the friends I have made here, has been a rewarding journey of growth and love.

Alexandra Forest

The phrase “you’ll never understand it until it happens to you” never felt so true as it has since the day my fiancé suddenly died. I am a part of The Healing Center’s Early Group for my fiancé William Strong who passed November 21, 2019 of cardiac arrest. He was 23 years old. I watched his face as his life left his body. I gave him CPR and he still died. The medical professionals did everything they could and he still died...I prayed and he still died. While at times it feels like it was yesterday I also feel like it has been an eternity. I feel like I’ve already lived a lifetime of loss. Yet apparently I still have a lifetime ahead of me. That’s what I thought Will and I had together. My life has continued...but it has never been the same.

This shouldn’t have happened. In my early days of grief I was so angry. I’m still so angry. Even years later there are still days I feel like I can’t function. There isn’t a moment that I don’t think about him and the impact he has made on my life. Throughout this time there have been so many things I want to say but I couldn’t seem to find the words. There are no words that can describe this pain; this sorrow; this trauma. The closest thing I have felt to relief from this never-ending torment has been when I create art. At least with art there is some possibility of bringing my inward feelings out into physical representations. I spent the first few months after Will’s death pouring my heart and soul into art pieces like the ones included here, and at some point along the way I realized I wanted to share my work in order to show the world what this experience has been like for me and to honor Will with it.

I dedicate all of this to my darling William Strong. The greatest supporter of my art. It breaks my heart that he can’t be here to see it but I know he would have been so proud. I love you my darling dear.

Shelly Glennon

I’ve been a member of Memory Keepers for about a year after the passing of my beloved husband, Joe Glennon. He was a respected chiropractor on the Monterey Peninsula for many years and I was a teacher. Together we moved to Seattle in retirement eight years ago to be closer to our incredible granddaughters and families.

Cora Goss-Grubbs

My 16-year-old brother Michael died in a fight when I was 13, and my best friend’s father died by suicide just three weeks later. Our bond in grief has had much impact on my life as well as on all the poems, essays, and young adult fiction I have written since then. It’s been 40 years and what feels like several lifetimes; the poem included here captures a moment 20 years into it. It’s a testament not only to the dynamic nature of grief - we are both in very different places now - but to each person’s unique grief journey and to the power of walking along that grief path together. Our talks through the years and my writing helped me integrate the loss into who I am today and the impact I want to make on our world. I connected with The Healing Center as a Teen Grief Group facilitator in 2015-2016, which led me to the UW Social Work graduate program and to my work today as a High School Behavioral Health Counselor.

Nicole M. Harper

I have been a client of The Healing Center in the Survivors of Suicide group since summer 2023. The reason for my seeking out The Healing Center group was the sudden, unexpected death of the person who was my partner, best friend and love of my life.

I’ve been writing poetry from the age of eight and am also an independent songwriter, guitarist and singer who turns poetry into songs.

Ray Hoffman

I lost my wife to pancreatic cancer and was fortunate enough to be gently directed to The Healing Center. Lost, confused and in a state of numbness with a skeptic’s eye towards the benefits of group meetings. Ten months on from my loss, I look forward to getting together with my comrades in loss and have found that the more I put into it, the more I get out of it. I’m glad they are there.

Pam Intonti

I've been a client of The Healing Center since early fall of 2022. Mary Jackson not only welcomed me into the Memory Keepers group, she guided me with a gentle heart, and shared freely her much needed widow's wisdom mixed with a healthy dose of humor.

My husband, Joe, died in December of 2019. We were married for 53 short years. Joe was a kind, passionate man. He loved with every fiber of his body. He lived for family, faith and good food. He stood in line every year on the Feast of St. Francis, singing and holding one or two of our little dogs, so they could be blessed. Although my Joe was happy when coffee was hot, when tomatoes were ripe, and when he was on his way home...he was happiest when I was smiling.

The Healing Center has helped me to embrace the fact that there is life after loss for those of us left to pick up all the pieces. Today, I still love my Joe; I always will. Today, I'm more than a survivor. Today, I have a renewed passion for good food and a table crowded with friends and family. I have a 6-pound Yorkie named Freddy who has stolen my heart and half of my bed. I exercise not at all or all too hard. When the day draws to an end, you can find me sipping an over-sized cup of hot, strong, black tea, winding down while I knit with Freddy on my lap under a pile of soft wool.

Mikey Jones

I became acquainted with the Healing Center in April of 2022, two months after the death of my father, Michael Jones. Since then, I have been involved in the Young Adult Group Cohort 3 for those who have lost a parent and/or a sibling. I am forever grateful to The Healing Center for it has given me a sacred space to heal and learn how to navigate through my grief journey. I am honored to be a co-editor on this writing anthology with my friend, Karen Fite, and I hope to continue finding ways to support The Healing Center and its community.

Kailani

Kailani is a participant in The Healing Center's Healing Club 123.

Kachyna

Kachyna is a participant in The Healing Center's Middle School Group.

Lisa Fusch Krause

I became acquainted with grief young, losing my mother at age 13 and both my father's parents when I was even younger. After my husband of 28 years, John Davis Krause, died in September 2020, I felt as if I was foundering and sought out help from The Healing Center. I was first in their Memory Keepers group and am currently in their Transitions group. I am truly grateful for the kindness and support they've offered. I find connection through my poetrywriting, as well, and am pleased to have been published in *Right Hand Pointing*, *Cascadia Review*, *Englyn*, *The Ghazal Page*, *Scissors and Spackle*, *Three Drops From a Cauldron*, and am glad to be a part of The Healing Center *Grief Anthology*.

Alex Leaf Maybruck

I currently participate in Early Group, hosted by Saara, and Katie as the volunteer. I've been attending meetings for around 1.5 years now. I joined The Healing Center after being recommended from my mom. This was a year after my wife of 4 months, Alycia, suddenly passed away from a kidney infection, possibly brought on by an alcohol addiction she had been keeping secret. She was 30 years old. I had felt I had gone long enough grieving her on my own, and that I needed some help. She was my one and only. To think about her is always with pain. There'll never be enough to say about her. Through all the pain she dealt with in life, which was so much more than most people, she always stood up for who she loved, and stood for the greater good.

I grew up in Seattle with my parents, and my little sister we adopted from China. I currently work as an automotive technician at a small shop. I'm not a writer, I've just found writing is the best way to capture my thoughts and feeling most completely. I'm very glad to be a part of The Healing Center. Because for all the dark thoughts and ugliness I feel inside on a daily basis, no matter what I express, it's always met with such kindness and acceptance, which feels very needed when I have so little kindness to give myself.

Theo McCulloch

My wife Keun Hii of 52 years died in July 2018 after a three and a half year battle with cancer. Very fortunately for me my son suggested The Healing Center shortly after her death.

I am taking this opportunity to express my deep gratitude to the many players that make The Healing Center so powerful and welcoming – leaders, funding sources, session leaders. And to the people in grief that bravely share their stories and join the rest of us managing our ways ahead. An especially happy and strong benefit for me is making precious friends at Memory Keepers. I am proud to know you all and share this journey with you. Thank you!

Patricia Raskin

I grew up in the Seattle area when the region was still filled with forests and open space. I and my late husband Mark considered ourselves the lucky types who fell in love the day they met. We remained in love and best friends to his last breath. I was Mark's primary caregiver through the long, horrible decline caused by his brain cancer and cancer treatment.

Although I have enjoyed writing since I was young, it was not until Mark passed away that I realized more deeply its healing power. I believe that when we share our deepest experiences – love, joy, loss, trauma, grief – it can be healing for everyone, for the universe.

The piece included here is shared in the hope that others may know they are not alone. Not alone in the tragedy of clinging to a love who is dying and in the subsequent desperate search for meaning.

I was a member of a Healing Center grief group for about a year after Mark's passing.

Lily Redick

I participated in the Teen 2 group at The Healing Center for about seven months, from December to June 2022-2023 after I lost my grandfather, Daniel Thomas Redick. He lived a life full of stories; the ones he heard, the ones he connected to, the ones he made for himself. He cared deeply about people.

All people, not just the ones who were important to him. To this day, I'm convinced there has never existed a person who was easier to talk to. My experience with The Healing Center has been of a place where I never feel as though I am alone, and I am deeply grateful for the time that I spent there and the people I met.

Marcia Robbins

I found my way to a group at The Healing Center when my husband Jim died in early 2021. The support and welcome helped me through the first 15 months after his death. I am an end-of-life doula, run groups around facing our mortality, and work with Hospice. In the midst of that, I find writing both a challenge and a resource, and hope to spend more time with my pen as time goes on.

Sarah Broz Schieron

I lost my extraordinary husband and best friend to glioblastoma in 2016. I attended a widows' group with The Healing Center for one year.

Debora Scott

I have been attending a Memory Keepers grief group since March 2023. I found out about The Healing Center from a friend (and previous Healing Center client) after my husband Mike Scott died in January 2023. He was diagnosed with glioblastoma (terminal brain cancer) in late August 2022 and lived just four and a half months. We were married for almost 30 years and have one daughter, Katherine Scott. Mike was an architect who designed numerous buildings in Seattle and around the world, an ardent history buff, and lover of all animals—especially his two Cavalier King Charles Spaniels.

Mike's diagnosis came as a total surprise, and it took him so quickly. I was in shock and devastated. My grief group, facilitated by Mary, has been a lifesaver. The time I spend every two weeks connecting with others who have recently lost their partners is slowly helping me to process and navigate my loss. I am so grateful to everyone who makes The Healing Center possible!

I have been keeping a journal off and on since Mike's diagnosis. The piece I submitted was taken from a reflection I wrote on what would have been our 30th wedding anniversary, September 18, 2023.

Elena Seaholm

My dad, Lane Seaholm, was diagnosed with esophageal cancer in March of 2021, started hospice in December of 2022, and died in March of 2023. I was 22. It felt to me as if his sickness lasted an eternity, but as soon as it was over it felt like no time at all had passed. My poem was inspired by watching families and dads in national parks and feeling overcome by the memories of being on the receiving ends of those affections. I miss my dad all the time and am so grateful to The Healing Center for providing me with an incredible group of insightful and kind young adults with whom I can share those feelings.

Kayla Snider

I am a Columbus, Ohio native and have resided in Seattle since 2021. I first fell in love with the Pacific Northwest on a spring break trip to the city in 2018. Immediately upon my return home, my father Thomas Snider was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. My beloved mentor and friend, he died July 1, 2018, just three and a half months later.

I joined The Healing Center as a client in Spring 2022. I participated in the Young Adult group for approximately a year and a half.

My father was a lover of animals, gardening, woodworking, and writing; I honor his memory by bonding with my two cats, exploring the outdoors, reading old books, accidentally killing my house plants, and writing when I find time. I wrote this piece while hiding in the bathroom at a work holiday party. I feel it is important to contextualize it with its time and place of origin. More than any other time of year, the holidays can often feel like a fresh death for those grieving a family member. This was written just before my fifth Christmas without him.

Amaru Luli Stewart

Amaru Luli Stewart is a real cool artist/scientist who lives in Florida with her Mom and Grandma. She does brave stuff even when scared like trekking the Amazon in Ecuador.

Margaret J. Stewart

My daughter Amaru and I got connected to The Healing Center within the first month after the death of my husband and her father in September of 2022. Clint M. Stewart was my love, friend, and husband. He was co-parent, safe space, and fellow fun-haver with our child. He believed the purpose of life was to connect and he did just that with those fortunate enough to meet him. Despite his pain and struggle with drug addiction (or perhaps as a result of it), he constantly showed his love to those he connected to. Whether it was cooking delicious meals people still talk about to this day, or playing with our daughter for hours, or making up traditions like UN-birthdays for our daughter immediately following one of our own actual birthdays so she knew every day was special and so was she, he always left you wanting more of his time, love, and attention. He lost his struggle with addiction the horrible day he died from fentanyl poisoning.

At first I was reluctant to join The Healing Center group. I didn't want to acknowledge my very real need to be in a space with others experiencing loss. At one point, I remember thinking "these sad people are bringing me down". But the heaviness and pain of watching our daughter experience the sudden and unexpected death of her father on top of my own grief made me accept I needed help. Then like magic, The Healing Center appeared in our lives and I found community around death and its impact on those left behind. I realized this space and courageously vulnerable folks were exactly what I needed. I'm forever grateful to The Healing Center and its staff like Saara, Kim, and so many others who create, cultivate, and protect people like me and our daughter.

Clint's legacy doesn't end with his death because we choose to honor him by living up each day we have together and trying to turn all the love we can't give to him directly by turning it inward and being gentle, patient, and understanding with ourselves.

Thanks to The Healing Center our child is thriving as a person, student, and artist. And I'm relearning who I am after this trauma. I truly believe The Healing Center is the reason I am alive today. There were many times I thought I wasn't capable of making it as a newly widowed and single-mom but they have taught me that it's okay to feel all the feelings. For that, I am eternally grateful to The Healing Center and its incredible staff.

Sara Stiehl

I lost Mike when I was 29 and we were planning our wedding. Our love always felt timeless and everlasting, in many ways it still is. Mike was 35 and bursting with life. Always prepared to laugh, listen, and live, he was the most lovable and hilarious person I'd ever met. He died after we finished a beautiful hike to Lena Lake in the Olympics. We were home, tucked into bed, kissed goodnight, and that was the last thing I would ever hear from him.

The Healing Center saved my life in more ways than I can count. I joined three weeks after Mike passed. My early loss group was the biggest gift I could've been offered. We clicked immediately, and still four years later keep in touch with emails, zoom calls of our own, and in-person gatherings. Our lives have evolved, carrying our people with us, and our group now stretches across the U.S. but their stories, their perspectives, their voices, are huge sources of comfort for my grief still today.

Ronan Willhelm

Ronan is a glasses-wearing student who likes school. His favorite things at school are art and science. When he's not at school he tries to have the best fun he can during the day by making new Lego creations and going on adventures. He's a big fan of playing with his friends. You can usually see him with his stuffy Pete, who is a green chicken with no arms, no legs, a crooked nose, and looks like a big marshmallow Peep.

Verhanika Willhelm

I lost my husband on October 3, 2019 to colon cancer. Our son, Ronan, was just 3 years old at the time. I was terrified that Andy's death would be the catalyst for a truly awful future for Ronan like becoming a drug dealer or preferring the Star Wars prequels to the original trilogy. We wanted to preserve Andy's memory and legacy more than his death. Andy was a charismatic, truly hilarious, wildly intelligent, deeply feeling, affectionate, and hard-working man. He was the Master Electrician at the Seattle Repertory Theatre for 20 years and as his legacy the theatre's control booth is named after him.

The Healing Center was where we turned for support as we tried to navigate this new reality without Ronan's Papa. I was in the Early Group, which later transitioned to an online group during the pandemic. Ronan was in the Littles Group and is currently in Club 123. We've been clients of The Healing Center since Andy's death and all that I have learned has permeated our deeper community. Writing has been a central part of my journey with grief and I'm grateful that The Healing Center helped me find language to put to an experience for which there are usually no words.

Yaël Dvora Yanich

I came to The Healing Center in January, 2018, seven months after the death of my partner, Doug Morrison. I was in the Early Group for a little over a year.

Doug had a deep appreciation of art, music, poetry, and literature. He was a Union Stagehand for many years and had wonderful stories to tell of the many performers he'd met. He loved kids and animals. He had a beautiful smile, a wonderful sense of humor, and was a lifelong learner.

I live in the U-District, near Ravenna Park, in a house that I share with several other adults. I don't have children, but I have a 40-year-old cockatoo named Charlie, who I've had since he was two. He's the inspiration for one of my several storybooks that I hope to get published: *The Adventures of Cookie-Foo-Foo* (written in verse). I'm also a visual artist and musician/songwriter. I teach a workshop at Fairhaven College called "We Can Change the World: Writing Protest Songs for our Time."



