

When Someone You Loved Dies:  
An Expanded Funeral Service Talk in Osaka, Japan, 2022-04-29  
Reggie Pawle  
[www.reggiepawle.net](http://www.reggiepawle.net)

Master of Ceremony: As other people have said, exactly one year before Steve received his diagnosis, he lost his beloved wife (through a very unexpected tragedy). They were married for over twenty years and over the next couple years he worked, he saw people, he went places, and he did what he had to do, but the loss never faded and the pain was always there. A few months ago Steve invited Dr. Reggie Pawle to talk to us today about grief and loss and healing.

Reggie: Steve asked me to speak about grief and how to deal with grief. A lot of what I wanted to say has already been said, because people here seem to know about grief. I'll try to add some understanding to what has already been said.

I was Steve's counselor for about 11 years. I know him in a different way than most people here know him, because he only came when he had a deep challenge and I only saw him in my office. Still, even though we always talked about problems, the light, the brightness of Steve that has been talked about and shown here today, was really clear all the time in the midst of all his struggles.

When you lose somebody though death, the initial reaction is always shock, no matter how much you've been prepared, how much you know about it. The finality of death, right, you're never going to be able to meet the person again. It seems unreal, the surreality, the disorienting feelings that come up, the mystery, all of the unknowns, the intensity. You don't know what to do. In daily life we don't commonly have these kinds of deep and strong feelings. The pain, the hurt, the confusion.

Pain and joy are always interwoven in life. As Brand and Yancey (1997) describe so well, without pain there is no life. Very rarely people are born without the feeling of pain. They don't live long. How can someone who doesn't feel pain understand that they shouldn't walk on their leg that was just broken? Commonly these people die in their teenage years due to complications from uncared-for injuries.

The deeper you love, the deeper you grieve. Shannon Barry wrote in a poem on her Instagram account: "I turned to face grief, and I saw it was love in a heavy coat." That is so true. Your grief and your pain is part of your connection to your loved one. As time passes, grief and pain become one of your most tangible connections that you feel for your loved one. You might not want to let these painful feelings go. You might feel guilty if and when the pain lessens over time, as if the lessening of pain is because you are caring less for your loved one. You may hang onto things that you connect with your loved one, even though it pains you each time you see them. Regrets about "if only I had..." can plague you. Loneliness can be strongly felt. You cannot share together with your loved one anymore. You do not get the feedback and responses that were so much a part of your relationship together. All of your future plans cannot happen. You can't accept that your loved one has passed away. The feelings of loss, the feelings of emptiness. How can you go on?

I am going to read a couple poems by Earl Grollman (1995), who wrote a book (*Living When a Loved One Has Died*) about grief. This poem is entitled, "*And It Hurts*":

When you lose, you grieve.  
It is hard to have the links  
with your past severed completely.  
Never again will you hear  
your loved one's laughter.  
You must give up the plans  
you had made; abandon your  
hopes

Like all people who suffer  
the loss of someone they loved,  
You are going through a  
grieving process.

The time to grieve is NOW.  
Do not suppress or ignore your  
mourning reactions.  
If you do, your feelings will  
be like smoldering embers,  
which may later ignite and  
cause a more dangerous explosion.

Grief is unbearable heartache,  
sorrow, loneliness.  
Because you loved, grief walks  
by your side.

Grief is one of the most basic  
of human emotions.  
Grief is very, very normal.

Grief is a normal emotion. It's important to understand that each person grieves differently. You are your own expert in how to grieve. With grief another person can't say how to do it, because everybody does it in their own way. There's no timeline for grief. It comes in many forms, like, for example, for those of us who are *gaijins* (foreigners) in Japan, the experience of a long plane ride back to our home country when a family member has died. In my own case when my mother died, I booked a return ticket for two days later and canceled all my appointments, except for one. This woman begged me, so I said yes. Then she came the next day and told me her story of just returning to Japan from being in her home country to be at her mother's funeral. She cried. I didn't tell her my own story, but I cried, and we cried together. It was surreal. Then the next day I left for my own mother's funeral. There's no explaining death.

This is a diversity approach to life and death. Everybody has different experiences and everyone responds differently. It is important not to let social ideas of how to grieve tell you how you should grieve. Live your grief process.

This is a second poem by Earl Grollman (1995), called, "*But It Hurts... Differently*":

There is no way to predict  
how you will feel.

The reactions of grief are  
not like recipes,  
with given ingredients,  
and certain results.

Each person mourns in a  
different way.

You may cry hysterically,  
or  
you may remain outwardly controlled,  
showing little emotion.

You may lash out in anger against  
your family and friends,  
or  
you may express your gratitude  
for their concern and dedication.

You may be calm one moment –  
in turmoil the next.

Reactions are varied and  
contradictory.

Grief is universal.  
At the same time it  
is extremely personal.

Heal in your own way.

Accepting the death of your loved one is hardest part of grief. So much of you resists this, no, it cannot be... As one speaker said before me, "Fuck cancer." It can feel like losing a leg in an accident - you never get it back. Sarah Wildman (2023) describes this feeling after losing her 14 year old daughter to cancer, "Shockingly, I still wake each morning. In the first moments of each day a part of me still wonders if somehow reality will realign or if this new disorder is here to stay. The honor of Orli's physical presence

was only ours for 14 years. But her immediacy, her insouciance, her joy and her pain are ours forever, even if we live another 50 years without her.” People commonly think that grief gets smaller over time. However, Lois Tonkin (1996) drew these circles of grief to illustrate that actually what happens is that grief stays the same size, but life grows bigger around grief.



• <https://whatsyourgrief.com/growing-around-grief/>

Death is irrevocable and we don't like this situation one bit. Death has happened to Steve, and it will happen someday to each of us here today. Every person, and indeed everything that is born in this world, will die. In nature some creatures die peaceful deaths and others die horrific deaths. Some die young, others die old. From our limited perspective we humans cannot make sense of being part of this process. Accepting this condition is very hard, yet we can live from doing so. Rabbi Delphine Horvilleur said about this, “Resilience only comes from acknowledging that what is broken won't be repaired. It's always about knowing how you are going to bring together the shattered pieces of your life to create a stronger story for times of despair” (Lieblich, 2022).

Much of life is mysterious. Humans are within, not outside, this great process of living and dying. This means we have limited influence or control of this process according to what we like and don't like. Resolving this great matter of life and death is one of the greatest challenges for human beings in life. At the entrance to almost all Zen temple meditation halls in Japan, there is a sign that says, “Respectfully I appeal to you: Each of us must clarify the great matter of life and death. Time passes swiftly. Don't be negligent.” We each have our own path through the great process of life and death. Each of us needs to find peace in the midst of being a person who lives embodied in this world, who can explain some things while not being able to explain other things, who has both pain and joy, who will painfully lose loved ones, and who also will die.

An 18<sup>th</sup> century Japanese poet, Kobayashi Issa, expressed his struggle with the process of living and dying in this *haiku* (17 syllable poems). The world of dew refers to the Buddhist idea of the impermanence of this world:

So this world of dew  
Is a world of dew  
And yet . . . and yet . . .

The Japanese Zen teacher Shunryu Suzuki said, according to several internet websites, about this struggle with life and death that, “Renunciation is not giving up the things of the world, but accepting that they go away.”

Talking to other people during this time is sometimes awkward. They can be very irritating. Platitudes don't work. Sometimes people just don't know what to say. Sometimes you will hear dimwitted questions like, “How do you feel?”, when a better question would be, “How will you remember them?” Everyone it seems has an immortalized memory in their heart of their loved one.

You still have to deal with the business of living. If you park in a bus stop, like I did when I was upset after being informed that my grandfather had died, the local laws will still apply to you. It was the middle of the workday and I had to go to a building for a work function. I couldn't find a convenient parking space. I recall myself thinking, “I can't deal with this. I'm barely holding it together. I'll park in the bus stop.” So I went in for a few minutes, only a few minutes, came back out, and I had a parking ticket.

Just manage each moment, hour, that leads to another day without your light that shone so vibrantly before. Try to relinquish your sense of control and agenda and ride it out, while being attentive to what's going on, to what you are experiencing. Do what helps you. Some share with others who have had the same loss and find incredible support and strength. Listening to others' stories can help, as does telling your stories, like we're doing here today. Crying is natural when you are grieving. Some write poetry or prose, some read books like Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning*, some go for walks in the forest, some meditate, some listen to their choice of music.

As some have been doing here today, it is ok to give yourself license to express positive emotion and affirm other aspects of yourself that you value outside the tragedy. It can be psychologically healthy to focus on the parts of your identity that are not touched by the tragedy. It is ok for the grieving athlete to play in an important game. The same goes for the student who wants to take their final in the wake of a campus tragedy. Some have said that doing so will makes them feel more in control and helps them cope better down the line. There is not a right way or one way to grieve. Find your personal way.

You're dealing very directly with the existential realities of death and time. Everyone dies and nobody can stop time from continuing and passing. Grief can feel like collapsing on the ground. Yet it is through being on the ground that you can stand up again. Japanese people invoke this understanding when they say about Daruma (the person who brought Zen Buddhism to China from India), “Seven times falling, eight times standing”. The number is one more for standing than falling because the assumption is that it is natural for a person to stand up and be active in life. However, many times we get knocked over. The belief is that each time something in life knocks us over, we need to find our ground and stand up again.

Death happens to everyone. Therefore, it can't be bad. Your loved one is ok and you also will be ok when you die. It is written (Inoue, 2020) that the wife, Yoshie Inoue, of Zen master Gien Inoue said to her husband on June 2, 1946, “I'm indebted to you for all that you've done for me these many years. Now, I'm going to die.” Gien said, “Are you alright?” Yoshie laughed, saying, “I'm alright,” whereupon she died. You don't have to be afraid of death, you can find your way to deal with the passing of your loved one from this world, and you don't have to be alone. You can be at peace.

So, (as I turn to face the large photo of Steve on the altar) I want to say, thank you Steve, for what you've given to all of us, and for me personally, for the brightness that you always had in the midst of all your intense struggles that we shared together. You live on as a part of us.

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