

LIFT

Grief is a process, not a state. –Anne Grant

February 2022

Bereavement Newsletter

Living Is For Today

West Texas Rehab's Hospice of San Angelo

Grief Education Support Group

Tuesday, February 1, 5:30 pm

WTRC/HOSA Bates Bereavement Center

1933 University Avenue

Monthly Luncheon

Tuesday, February 15, 11 am

WTRC/HOSA IDT Room

1933 University Avenue

For more information about any of HOSA's bereavement offerings, please call the Bereavement Department at 325-658-6524 or email Karen at kschmeltekopf@wtrc.com.

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When someone dies, it's normal to wonder: "What am I going to do with their 'stuff'?" Should I keep it? Give it away? Do something meaningful with their things? What's the right amount of time to keep – or to dispose of things?" This collection of articles, assembled by the LIFT editor Louise Jones, reminds us that "The Artifacts of Love" usually includes much more than our loved one's actual "belongings".

## THE ARTIFACTS OF LOVE

*A wife, a therapist, and a friend share their thoughts about the death of someone they love and the finality of disposing of the artifacts they leave behind – a bag of grapes, a file, a Facebook page – and other truths about love.*

For Jeanne Heifetz, the home in Park Slope, Brooklyn, that she shared with her husband, the writer Juris Jurjevics, is the place where he is most present and most absent. Mr. Jurjevics died unexpectedly last November at age 75. Since then, Ms. Heifetz, 59, has been fact-checking his third novel, which will be published posthumously.

"When someone dies suddenly, it's like Pompeii," said Ms. Heifetz, whose artwork is helping her through her grief. "It's a moment frozen in time."

In her refrigerator, a large hunk of Latvian bread, which Mr. Jurjevic's sister brought them a few days before he died, still sits unfinished. There is also a bag of grapes, which he was halfway through eating; they're probably raisins by now, she said, but she can't bring herself to throw them out.

"It isn't as though you spend every day making grand declarations of love for one another," Ms. Heifetz said, her cheeks wet with tears. "It's that daily conversation of 'I'm going to the Key Food, what would you like me to pick up for you?'"

A. Nierenberg, "For Many Widows, the Hardest Part Is Mealtime," ([NYT](#), 10/28/19)

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I pull open my file cabinet drawer and extract several charts: patients who've died while I was treating them over the last 20 years that I've been in private practice as a psychiatrist. I am gathering material to write about how therapists feel when a patient dies. I make a couple of observations.

First, I see that the charts remain in my "active" file cabinet. I haven't moved them to the much larger and cramped "inactive" file – their rightful home.

Second, I notice that I've developed an automatic rite of remembrance. Whenever my fingers graze one of the file folder tabs of a dead patient, I stop and close my eyes for the briefest moment. I pay silent homage to the deceased.

Whatever meaning there may be in this small, private ceremony, I believe it primarily speaks to the isolation of the therapist when patients die, and the human need to create ritual when death occurs. Therapists do not typically socialize with the people in their patients' lives. There is no one for me to call about Joseph – no family or friends with whom to share memories, to laugh or to cry.

Don't misunderstand me, I'm not asking for sympathy. There is no comparing my loss to that of a patient's family and friends. Yet this is an aspect of my profession that is seldom discussed: Just as what takes place in therapy occurs behind closed doors, so too does the therapist's grieving after a patient dies.

Therapists mourn alone.

R. Weiss, "How Therapists Mourn" ([NYT](#), 7/4/15)

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She was my best friend for 12 years, and even though I'm now married to a wonderful man, I'm not sure I'll ever love someone like I loved Alison.

What happens to our inside jokes that litter the filing cabinets of my mind? Do they die with her? Do I laugh to myself? What happens to her Facebook wall? Do I keep her in my contact favorites now? Do I delete her? Do I unfriend her?

One night while I wept in bed, my husband said to me, "Grief is the price of love."

But that love was expensive, a jumbo-size mortgage on my heart that I fear I won't ever be able to repay.

At my wedding, I asked Alison to read a passage from "The Velveteen Rabbit." It's a paragraph I have hanging in my home about what it means to be "real."

The rabbit asks if becoming real hurts. The skin horse tells him yes, sometimes, it does. Sometimes your eyes will get rubbed off in the process and you'll lose some of your shine. But that's how you know you're real. Nothing real can ever remain untouched.

The whole time they're talking about love, of course.

I didn't make the connection when I asked Alison to read that passage at my wedding, but it also describes us. Alison made me real. Alison ruined me. And I am better because of it.

J. Misner, "My Best Friend Is Gone, and Nothing Feels Right" ([NYT](#), 10/9/20)

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